Theo Raeken is back in Beacon Hills. He is an outcast in a world where people show their true colors as actual colors beneath their skin, because Theo himself is a blank page. Joining the lacrosse team, he hopes for one last shot at finding a real place to belong. But things don’t start off too great, especially not between him and the team captain, Liam Dunbar.
Lacrosse games never ceased to make Liam Dunbar glow up red beneath his gear. He assumed it was his aggression shining through his weirdly itchy skin. He could practically feel the red line along his spine pulsating, its sharp edges threatening to cut his back, except he knew that was just his imagination playing tricks on him. His true colors might be lurking under his skin, but of course they couldn't break out, couldn't physically hurt Liam, who they belonged to. As usual, he decided to do his best in ignoring the red beneath and focusing on the opponent ahead, preferably without breaking any bones this time. Not that Coach Bobby Finstock ever minded the cries of pain or the complaints of other coaches. As long as his team was winning, Coach was happy, and Liam generally preferred being called Captain over "Dumbar", so he did his best not to piss the guy off.

After what must have been his fifth goal that night, Liam felt way better. The itching was gone, the red still dominating his head and torso, but his hands and feet were most certainly showing a calm blue tinge. One might say Lacrosse brought out both the worst and best in Liam Dunbar, but Liam himself would simply shake his head and laugh at them, personally not being a fan of the deep and serious. Most of all, he was sick of people analyzing other peoples' (his) colors. First of all, it was really pointless. From all he knew, blue was both the color of peace and of the cold. Yellow symbolized light and life as much as it did envy and treason. Ultimately, there was no way to tell who a person was based on what shone through their skin. You simply couldn't judge a book by its cover. Secondly, the only people who tried anyway, were mostly orange or purple ones and it seemed wrong to Liam that they should have a reason to feel superior to others. Neither of them looked especially pretty while showing, after all.

In spite of Liam being in good shape that night, the Beacon Hills High School team lost to Artontown, one of their biggest rivals in the league. It was frustrating. "Suck my orange dick, Dunbar," a tall blonde guy shouted to him, adding black shadows to Liam´s red stained face. "The sun, the moon, the truth," the young captain mumbled to himself. He´d once read about the three things that couldn’t long be hidden somewhere, and for some reason they’d become some kind of mantra to him. "The sun, the moon, the truth," he repeated quietly as to stay calm and not smash his fist into the asshole’s ugly pumpkin of a face.

What was worse than being a sore loser mocked by a bad winner was being team captain during the Coach´s speech after the game. He somehow always managed to make things sound a lot worse than they actually were, being not angry but "incredibly disappointed", which was a lot worse, because in spite of his vast experience, Liam didn’t know how to deal with being a disappointment. He felt like apologizing, but he knew Coach wouldn’t appreciate, he wanted his captain to take responsibility and do something to make sure they’d do better in the next game. "Next time, we’re going to win," he declared with forced conviction, "we’re going to work our asses off and then we’re going to kick..."

He was interrupted by Coach: "Hell yes we’re going to kick some asses next week, that’s what I brought this guy here for." Everybody turned their heads into the direction where Coach was pointing with his whistle.

A guy was casually leaning against the doorframe to the locker room, hands buried in the pockets of his hoodie and a light smile on his face. "Hey guys," he greeted his future teammates, "I´m Theo Raeken. I´m the new guy."

"Most importantly," Coach added excitedly, "you’re the guy who’s going to make this team great again. You’re going to save me from witnessing a shitshow like tonight ever again."

Theo didn’t exactly seem happy with the high expectations being held at him, but he simply smiled his discomfort away. His face was blank; not free from emotion, but from color, and this worried
Liam a little bit. As someone whose appearance betrayed every little bit of what was going on in him, he was generally suspicious of anyone who could simply put that kind of a mask on. Wasn´t Theo at least a little bit nervous to meet the team? Or excited?

"Liam Dunbar," he introduced himself, holding out a lightly glowing hand, "I´m your captain."
"Pleasure, Captain," Theo responded as he shook his hand, the contrast of white against red making Liam a little angry. Or was it the amused smirk on the dude´s face? Just when Liam had decided to leave him be for tonight, he caught a glimpse of a thin line of dark ink gracing Theo´s wrist, disappearing beneath his sleeve. Of course, a tattoo wasn´t anything to hold against a new lacrosse player among them, but it was the only bit of mark on his otherwise pale, porcelain-like skin, so it caught Liam´s attention.

"Great, ladies," Coach FInstock interrupted, "I´ll leave it to you to show him around and get him his equipment, Dumbar. Do so before practice tomorrow." With that, he left the locker room, his only form of goodbye the squeaking of his sneakers on the floor.
"Well," Liam started, trying not to show too much of his annoyance, "I´d like to get a shower now, so I suggest we leave the your introduction party for tomorrow before practice." "Alright, Captain," Theo nodded, "when do you need me to be here?"
"3:30," Liam answered, his eyes narrowing into slits.
"What?" Theo asked, confused by Liam´s depreciating behavior.
Liam thought about his reply for a second. "The way you call me Captain," he finally let out, "sounds fake."
Theo didn´t know what to do other than laugh at that. "Seriously?"
Liam didn´t feel like saying anything else, just turned around and started taking off his jersey.
"Great talk, Captain," Theo said to his back, "looking forward to continue that tomorrow." He then turned around himself and walked out, leaving Liam behind with a red chest and no way of seeing the blue, yellow and orange spots appearing on his shoulder blades.
Theo Raeken hated being the new guy. With every new place came the hope of a fresh start. With every fresh start came the hope for things to change. With every new attempt came another disappointment. Theo was, in many ways, unlike other teenagers. Some of those differences were quite obvious, like the lack of color beneath his skin or the growing number of tattoos covering his body as to make it look less like nothing. Those were the reasons for others to find him weird, to distrust him before he got the chance to introduce himself. But there was yet more awkwardness hiding underneath his blank exterior. Theo had certainly had a difficult childhood, to say the least. He was guilty and deeply traumatized and full of feelings that seemed to fight him from the inside. He carried a storm with him wherever he went and he’d gotten way too good at hiding all the little secrets it was whirling around. He had tried to be secretive and somehow become stone-cold. He displayed a handsome surface, but he scared most people away by not letting them see beneath it. Some days he wished for someone to scratch it, to violently tear down the walls he’d spent a lifetime building up, but everytime he remembered how cruel that was, to wish for someone to get sucked into his inner wake.

And this was why Theo Raeken was a loner by choice, both his own and the choice of others. However, Beacon Hills a rather special chapter in the story of his life. He hadn’t picked the small town randomly. Because if there was a place in the universe where change was possible, where maybe even redemption was a concept he dared to think about, it was Beacon Hills. The place where it all started, and broke off, and fell to the ground in millions of tiny little pieces. Theo knew it was crazy, but this would be his last attempt, so he was damn willing to go big.

One thing that proved Theo’s good will was joining the school’s lacrosse team. The season had already started, but it had started rather badly for Beacon Hills High, and Theo was a natural talent, even if he’d spent the last few years telling himself he wasn’t even that much into lacrosse. It had taken just a few weeks of practice to convince Coach Bobby Finstock he’d be a valuable asset to a struggling team. Theo wasn’t unfamiliar with the story of how the team had used to be quite good, but had lost their most precious players in the summer, when previous captain Scott McCall and a few others had graduated. He had to admit that the new captain was a brilliant player, but the whole team didn’t have the same quality anymore, and Liam clearly wasn’t used to his role as captain yet.

But Theo would help with all of that. No matter how poorly their first encounter had went, Liam would soon be much more thankful to him, that much Theo was sure of. He was so excited about meeting Liam before practice, about getting to actually play with his new team for the first time, about finally having a plan instead of smiling awkwardly and shitting his pants while silently praying for the best, Theo was found himself in front of the locker room twenty minutes early. He supposed it was a good thing he was early, because Liam would most certainly be looking for an excuse to complain about him, and punctuality was very much expected in team sports. On the other hand, Theo didn’t like waiting, so he fished out his phone from his backpack and put his headphones on. He leaned his back against the door as the first harmonic sounds flew into his head, but he didn’t get to enjoy the music.

Instead, Theo stumbled backwards as the door behind him gave way, obviously not being locked like he thought it would be. Gathering his backpack and the stuff that had just landed on the tiled floor, Theo realized there was a steady noise that didn’t come from his headphones. He took them
off and listened into the room, only to discover that water was running in the shower. Theo looked
around the locker room confusedly. It was empty. Of course it was, practice didn’t start until in 45
minutes, and nobody else but him had been assigned to come half an hour early to be shown
around. Except... Well, except the person who´d obviously just stepped out of their clothes and let
them lying on the floor and the small bench while taking a shower. The person who had a captain´s
armband stuck to one corner of his locker. Liam.

Suddenly, Theo felt like a creep. He was standing in the middle of the locker room all alone and
fully dressed while Liam was taking a shower a few steps away from him, completely naked and
not aware Theo was even there. It seemed ridiculous. Like the universe was giving him another
chance to appear like a total freak after he´d refused to be late. Theo knew he should leave, leave as
fast as he could and close the door as silently as possible. He knew better, but he still wondered.
Wondered what Liam looked like, not hiding anything beneath clothes. Nobody could read Theo´s
colors, but that didn´t mean Theo didn’t like to read others. He was incredibly fascinated by how
so few existing colors could manifest a person´s true self in endless different shades and forms. He
loved how some people looked like they had their marks drawn on themselves with watercolor
whereas other people seemed to bear a glowing light a few layers deeper beneath. How some
marks were always visible, some changed only slightly, and some came and went with the mood
swings of their owner. He didn’t know where the differences were, because he´d been colorless for
almost as long as he could remember, so he only ever saw the colors of other people, and he only
ever knew the emotions of himself. He could never put the puzzle together, but he still couldn’t
stop looking at the pieces until his head hurt.

And he was doing the same right there, on his first day as a team member, incredibly close to
fucking things up again, but unable to control his curiosity. So he sneaked a peek. A short glance.
Except it was long enough to take in dark, wet hair sticking to Liam´s neck, muscular but blank
shoulders, a thin red line along the captain´s spine, and an entire ocean of blue and green stars
creeping up his legs, forming waves that were almost touching his... Oh damn! Moving slowly, but
definitely moving, Liam turned around under the water jet. Holding his breath and not trying to
make the slightest sound, Theo turned away and tiptoed back out through the door he closed
behind him. Back outside again, he sighed heavily, relieved that his time at Beacon Hills High
School wasn´t over before it had started. He was sure he´d get another chance to screw things up
soon. He pulled his hood over his head and put his headphones back in, leaning against the wall
this time and trying to focus on the music and forget the image of Liam´s wet body. Liam´s body
that was not just incredibly muscular and well-defined but also marked with humanity, that was
alive in a way that Theo´s own would never be.

Theo had no idea how much time had passed when Liam opened the door from the inside of the
locker room and found him there, eyes closed and deep in thoughts of wonder. He pretended to be
surprised that Liam had already been there.
"Captain! What are you doing here already?"
"First of all," Liam answered, "that´s none of your business. And secondly, you´re going to have to
start calling me by my actual name or we´re going to have a serious problem. Understood?"
"Aye, Liam," Theo replied in a fake serious tone, because inappropriate sarcasm was his only
defense against awkward social situations like this one.
Liam gave him an unamused look, but didn´t lecture him any further. "I suggest we get started," he
said instead.

Liam showed Theo the locker room, the showers, the equipment room, the bleachers and the
playing field. He told him which locker he could use, which was on the far end of the bench, the
last one before the showers, situated where Liam could have an eye on him, but he couldn´t really
see the center on the room himself. He also told him about a few of their most important players,
explained some basic tactics and gave him a fair warning of Coach. They talked about positions
briefly, Liam apparently not believing Theo was good enough make starting line-up, so he didn´t really care. It turned out being underestimated bugged Theo even more than being turned into a social outcast like so many times before. Finally, Liam threw a stuffy jersey and protection gear at him, followed by a lacrosse stick with a net so busted, it was practically non-existent. But Theo had mastered the art of simply swallowing his anger, so he put on a friendly smile and thanked Liam politely.

Thankfully, Corey, who seemed to be Liam´s friend, arrived early to practice, so Theo could start stuffing things into his new locker while the two boys were talking. Corey seemed much less threatening to Theo than Liam. He greeted him vaguely, but with a discreet green glow around his neck. For some reason, Theo had always found greens sympathetic. And green wasn´t exactly common among the rest of the team. Most of the guys had red glows on them, some had blue or yellow patterns looking out from under sleeves and collars. A guy named Greenberg was (much to Theo´s disappointment) not green at all, but mostly grey, like a faint shadow thrown on his face. But as soon as everybody was busy getting dressed, they almost looked like him, like Theo, the routine of their actions soothing away most of the marks that weren´t permanent. One quick glance at Liam´s calves when they unitedly stepped onto the field told Theo the stars were gone, too, leaving behind bones and flesh and skin and hair, a combination not unlike Theo himself.

How weird, Theo thought to himself, that in this case, the color that mattered the most was the one of their jerseys and that was the same for all of them. But the weirdest thing happened a few minutes later. Nobody had bothered talking to him during their warm up, nor complimented him on his accuracy when they were doing shots on the goal, but his talent was undeniable, and the others must have noticed. Theo was still surprised when Liam, of all people, passed him the ball a few times in a row in a little practice game. So Liam might not be the warmest guy there was, but he was smart enough to play together with someone he played together with so well. When practice was over, the whole team had included him like one of their own, and Theo felt like he and Liam had been playing together forever. It was nice, because for once, he didn´t care what colors someone else was showing, and what he didn´t. He didn´t worry about coming across as a freak. He only gave his best on the field, and for as long as practice lasted, that was enough to forget about the rest.

Without even thinking about it, Theo took off his jersey and gear back in the locker room. He was used to people looking at him, searching his body for the tiniest little fleck of color. It didn´t bother him more now than it did on other days. Also, he could always tell himself they were looking at his tattoos. And he wasn´t even completely convinced Liam wasn´t when he turned to look in the captain´s direction and caught him staring. He made a step towards him, and another.

"Thanks," Theo said without calling him "Captain". No fake smile either.
"I don´t know what you´d have to thank me for," Liam replied, "we´re teammates now."

Chapter End Notes

tell me tell me tell me what do you think was up with theo and liam totally checking each other out in the locker room :D

hope you like this <3
Liam was seriously impressed with the new guy´s lacrosse skills. Not only was he fast and strong, but he also played the game with a remarkable intelligence, always choosing the best way to run and the best positioned teammate to play the ball to. Liam was the captain of many good players, like Corey and Nolan for example, but none of them could read a game, an opponent, a tackle situation as easily as Theo Raeken. That was the one and only reason Liam had decided to accept him as a team member, to call him a teammate, to demonstrate in front of the others that they were going to include him like he belonged to them. Of course, Liam was still not over the hunch he´d had that something was off with Theo. He simply had a weird aura surrounding him. And then he completely stood out with that incredibly white skin of his, not letting any sign of truth shine through it, but bearing a whole lot of tattoos instead. Theo must certainly be aware he was making himself an outsider by walking around like that, they were in high school after all, and however edgy or individual you thought you were, that was simply not the way to survive those four years of your life.

Liam himself had been somewhat lucky in that regard, at least since he´d transferred to Beacon Hills High. He´d only been a freshman back then, fifteen years old and with a face as soft as a baby´s bottom, but he´d been a hell of a lacrosse genius, ever since his stepdad had started teaching him. It had been Coach Finstock who´d practically forced Scott McCall (who´d been captain at the time) and his best friend, Stiles Stilinski (who´d also been on the team for some inexplicable reason) to take Liam under their wings. The two had been juniors, and not very enthusiastic about babysitting him, but Scott had always been a fucking decent guy, and Liam had eventually started to grow on them, he guessed. With his best friend and co-pilot, Mason, who was actually good at school and friendly with most of the other students, by his side and Scott and Stiles behind his back, nobody had ever had a reason to mess with Liam.

The only one he´d ever had to worry about was Hayden, who´d held a grudge against him because of a stupid incident that had happened years earlier, but by the time his first semester at BHHS was over, the pretty brunette had been Liam´s girlfriend and everything fine. Now Liam was a junior, Scott´s successor as captain, still Mason´s best bro and still Hayden´s boyfriend, and still a little over-aggressive when you pushed the right buttons. He believed that was why he still bore the straight red streak from his neck down to where the waistband of his pants hid its ending. It didn´t always appear the same shade of red and it varied in its width, but it had been there since he´d started throwing tantrums in elementary school, and he swore he could feel it like a living thing trying to escape the cage that was his skin when something was pissing him off.

Liam thought about all that on his way out of the locker room and to his car, barely paying attention to who was telling him goodbye, bumping fists without looking. And then it was there again, a faint itching at first, that reminded him of how utterly unfair it was that he could never get rid of it, the red. And because Liam couldn´t stop his train of thought from racing it grew into a more and more unpleasant feeling, a feeling he would have described as pain, weren´t he so familiar with it already. It wasn´t just the existence of that mark that bothered him, it was the fact that everyone knew. He could lie to people all he wanted, but he could never claim to be Liam Dunbar without the angry red sticking to his spine. And then there were guys like Theo, who could simply hide their truths somewhere on the inside. Except Theo was even worse, because on top of that, he obviously liked to paint his body after his own image, as if it was so easy to make that choice, as if to mock everyone who couldn´t.

He shouldn´t let himself get that worked up over some random guy he barely knew, Liam thought as he was starting the engine, trying to think of his stepdad´s lasagne and the warmth of his bed.
instead, but he was still too out of it to properly concentrate on backing out of the parking space. He stepped on the gas as strongly as he wished to get home and heard the crash of a collision before he felt its impact on his body. For a second, Liam didn´t dare to turn his head and look who he´d crashed. How was he supposed with that right now? But he knew, no matter how tired he was, this had been his fault and it´s not like he could escape the situation, the whole team had probably seen what had just happened. "The sun, the moon, the truth," he muttered before he opened the door and stepped out of his car.

Of course it was Theo. Liam really shouldn´t be surprised to see his shocked face through a cracked car window. "Fuck!" Liam exclaimed, wondering what an appropriate apoligize for this could possibly be. Theo´s failed attempt to open the strangely crooked door to get out of his truck didn´t help his bad conscience. Almost all of their teammated were gathering around as Theo finally gave up and climbed over the center console to get out on the passenger´s side. He stomped around the car, white as usual, but clearly furious.

"What the hell, Liam," he shouted, taking a closer look at the deformed side of his car, "look what you´ve done to my car!"
"Fuck!" Liam yelled back, highly uncapable of dealing with accusation in general. "I´m sorry man, I don´t know how that could happen. I´m sorry."
"I can´t even..." Theo ripped at the doorhandle violently, putting his right foot to the side of his truck for extra strength. "I can´t even open the damn door, you fucking idiot."
"As I said, I´m sorry," Liam tried again, not sure if Theo was even hearing him. "I´m calling my insurance company right now, alright?"
"It´s not fucking alright, asshole," Theo spit back, "I can´t believe you wrecked my fucking truck!"

"Someone clearly loves their car," one of the others mumbled beneath their breath. A few guys let out an agreeing nose-exhale, but nobody dared to laugh out loud.
"Damn, Theo," Liam tried to calm the situation, "no need to overreact. It´s my fault, I´ll call my insurance, they´ll pay for a new fucking door, okay?"
"Yeah sure, Captain Dickface," Theo snorted, still pacing around his car, eyeing every scratch in the paintwork, trying the door one more time.
"Whoa, I apologized more than once now," Liam defended himself, "it´s just a car. I mean, it´s your car, but it´s not like anything happened to you, is it?"
Everyone was looking at Theo expectantly now. Liam felt like it had taken a little too long for someone to bring up the question whether Theo was hurt, but the damage done to his car was clearly way more important to him anyway.

"No," Theo confirmed with a quick, confused glance down his own body.
"Good," Corey stepped in carefully, "so the problem here is clearly solvable, right? Why don´t we all just calm down then. I´ll drive you home if you like, Theo."
Liam didn´t know how Corey did this, coming up with a little patch of green where Liam himself seemed to be consumed by dark-red, almost purple clouds of desperation. Even Theo seemed to accept the words of peace, although he declined the offered ride. Instead, he got back into the driver´s seat through the passenger´s door and drove off without another word, just a dark, hateful look in his eyes, that were suddenly more grey than green.
Wait, when exactly had Liam noticed the color of Theo´s eyes? Something was definitely wrong with him that day. He let his head fall back and silently prayed to whatever possible power was listening, prayed that he would make it home without another catastrophe.

In his bed that night, Liam still didn´t know what to make of the day he´d had. Classes had been torturous. Liam could actually be a quite motivated and commited student if he wanted. He liked English and especially history, but when he had to sit through hours of french and chemistry, his annoyance was usually drawing black hurricanes into the palms of his hands. He´d went for a run in his free period between biology and lacrosse practice. He liked how he could make all the color
disappear from under his skin if he just pushed himself far enough, if he ran fast enough to stop thinking, stop feeling. Even then, the red line over his spine would be there, but at this point, he already felt like it belonged to him in a completely different way than the other marks, which came and went and came back, but never stayed. Relief, maybe even satisfaction would wash over him as soon as he’d hit the shower afterwards, appearing in greens and blues and a variety of patterns. He’d felt good under the hot stream of water that day, not only because he’d known they’d been there, in fact, he hadn’t even looked, he didn’t even know what they’d looked like that day. And then he’d been with Theo and yes, it had been a little awkward between the two of them, but not entirely unpleasant. It had surely gone from not unpleasant to very fucking pleasant during practice.

Liam might have been a suspicious guy with trust issues, but he wasn’t as stupid as to reject someone as talented as Theo. He’d actually been happy to have him on the team, already thinking about how they’d play together the next game, Theo certainly increasing their chances to finally win. He’d swallowed his pride and tried to be nice to him after practice in the locker room. And yes, of course, the accident in the parking lot had been his fault, but why the hell had Theo freaked out like that? Had that really been necessary? He’d actually reminded Liam of himself, getting worked up over minor (okay maybe not minor, but fixable) problems being quite a clear sign of IED. More surprising than that, had been Theo’s ability to maintain a perfectly blank facade even while practically going crazy. Liam couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Balled fists, yes, but they’d still been their natural color. Tensed jaw, definitely, but still pale like an Irish person on their first day of summer vacation. Veins bulging through perfectly white skin on his neck. Liam finally fell asleep wondering whether Theo was even showing at all. Like, ever. Could he simply suppress it until nobody was around to witness his true colors? And if so, why would he need to do that? Or was there a way to limit one’s marks to certain bodyparts? He imagined pictures of galaxies or flower fields stretching over a well-defined torso, but he couldn’t remember when he woke up the next morning.

Liam’s Mom gave him a funny look when he came down the stairs, hair standing in every possible direction.
"What?" he asked, "you know damn well you didn’t raise a morning person."
"Oh honey," she laughed sympathetically, "I know. A mother can still wonder what kept her son from getting enough sleep."
"What do you mean?" Liam was highly confused. "I slept like a baby."
"Like a baby painting in watercolors, you mean?" she teased.
Liam looked down to his bare legs. Bare wasn’t quite true. They were densely covered in tiny dots. He rushed to the mirror in the hallway. His neck looked the same, and his arms. He lifted his shirt. His belly, too, was cluttered with a mixture of all the colors, so that from a distance, it didn’t even seem like different colors anymore. Only then did he realize, the dots were actually suns and moons. The truth, he thought, without the slightest idea what it meant, but holy fucking shit.

Fortunately, his inner clown costume was gone by the time Liam arrived at school, nothing but a nervous yellow prickle behind his ears.
"Duuuuude," Mason greeted him with raised eyebrows, "I heard you crashed the hot new guy’s car?"
"You what? He’s not that hot," Liam responded, voice low so nobody else would hear them.
"Really?" Mason asked, shaking his head in disbelief, "that’s the thing that bothers you about that information?"
Mason was right, Liam didn’t know why he had just said that. "So Corey told you, huh?" Mason and Corey had been in a relationship for quite some time now and Liam was happy with that as long as it made his best friend happy, but sometimes it was simply annoying how the two boys had to tell each other every stupid little detail about everything. "And you don’t mind him calling Theo hot?" Liam wanted to know, mainly to distract from his own story with the guy.
"Corey didn’t call him hot," Mason replied with a shrug of his shoulders, a light orange glow creeping up one side of his neck that, at the second look, really were yellow and red curvy lines intertwined in each other. "I’ve seen Theo at school before," Mason added, "and I’m not blind just because I have a boyfriend. He’s hot."

"Most of all," Liam mentioned, "he’s an ass. I’ve never seen him anywhere but at lacrosse practice. You have any classes together?"

"God, Liam," Mason sighed, "Theo’s a senior, you little genius."

"Why is everybody getting on my nerves today?" Liam mumbled as they walked into the school building, trying to prepare for a possible encounter with Theo, and who knew what else that psycho dude had to say to him.

Luckily, Liam made it through the whole school day without Theo Raeken in sight. He knew there was no way to avoid him forever though, not only would they meet at the next lacrosse practice, but they would have to play together again. Liam told himself he was too much of a winner type to let his personal grudges interfere with the game, but he couldn’t tell if the same stood for Theo. He’d have to wait and see.

Liam waited and saw a frowning Theo walk into the locker room the next day, clutching his backpack to his shoulder and not taking his headphones off to greet anybody. At least he ignored the others just as he did Liam, the captain thought, but then realized that was probably even worse, considering that they were a team with a difficult task ahead, a game that had to be won, or else the season was seriously screwed. It was during moments like that one that Liam wished Scott was still there, not necessarily as captain, but as his friend, his friend who was more like an older brother to him. Scott would have known what to do. Obviously, Scott wouldn’t have gotten into trouble with a fucking brilliant new team member on his first day of practice in the first place, but what did it matter right then, when the damage had already been done.

All the time while getting changed, Liam wondered whether he should say something, but he was somehow distracted by Theo’s presence. He was secretly dying to steal a glance at the boy’s tattoos, but he was facing him the whole time, and the last thing Liam could use right then was Theo catching him stare. So he tried to unsee the blurry inked lines in the corner of his eye. Finally, he put on his helmet and took his stick outside with him, hoping the atmosphere on the field would be more competitive and less passive-aggressive.

As it turned out, his hopes were deceived, Theo clearly not being over the incident after last practice. He ran ahead of everyone during the laps they did, tackled the others harder than necessary and didn’t pass to Liam even once, no matter how beneficial his position was. Liam could barely contain his anger, him trying to look past their apparent differences, ignoring the pulsating red that by then must cover his entire backside for the sake of the game they all had come to play, and Theo simply behaving like a five-year-old whose toy had been broken. By accident, one might add. And HE was the one with anger issues, sure. He’d even apologized, twice. And that much was certain, apologizing wasn’t something that came naturally, or easily to Liam. Every time he said he was sorry, it cost him something and it was just not cool for someone to spit on that the way Theo was doing.

When Theo bumped his shoulder into Corey so harshly they could hear bones cracking, Liam’s patience finally snapped.

"What the fuck is wrong with you," he shouted, pushing Theo away forcefully.

Theo stumbled backwards, but didn’t fall. "Me?" he snorted.

Liam didn’t understand the surprise in his tone. "Yes you, you just broke a couple of Corey’s bones, you psycho!"

"You broke my truck first!" Theo yelled back.

"Oh my God," the captain exclaimed, "do you even hear yourself talking? Are you seriously
comparing a car to an actual human being?” He pointed at Corey angrily, his friend lying on the ground with a pale face and his eyes wide open, the other team members surrounding him, asking if he could breathe and where exactly it hurt the most.

"Not that you’d get it," Theo put him off and stormed towards the bleachers, throwing away pieces of his gear and swearing audibly.
Liam was actually glad he’d left, as he most likely would have punched the asshole in the face as a response.

"Are you having difficulties handling your job as captain, Dunbar?" Coach demanded to know as soon as Corey was taken care of. As it turned out, the boy wasn’t seriously hurt. He’d probably walk around with a bruised shoulder for a while, but it was nothing that wouldn’t pass on its own in a matter of days.

"What?" Liam couldn’t believe it. "Are you saying this is my fault now?"
"I don’t know," Coach replied half mockingly, half angry, "did I tell you to take care of our new player?"
"Yeah," Liam admitted, "but..."
"And are you responsible for your team, you know, since you’re captain and all that?"
"Yeah," he shrugged, "I guess."
"You better stop guessing and make this right, whatever it is," Coach commanded.
"How am I supposed to..." Liam started complaining.
"First of all," Coach answered strictly, "stop whining. You seemed to get along just fine with him last practice. You’re a damn good player, Dunbar, but if I convince another damn good player to join our team, I expect you two to play together, not against each other. He’s not your enemy. Go make sure he knows that."

Liam stood in the middle of the field, still not fully convinced.
"Go!" Coach shouted with a wild gesture of his hand.
Liam saw red, red, red and a little yellow when he looked down at his hands. He walked off. What was he supposed to do? To say? He looked back over his shoulder and saw the entire team watching him, waiting for their captain to save the situation, to bring them all back together, to give them just a little hope they could actually win the next game.
Liam knew they needed that victory badly, and he knew they would never make it if they played like in practice that day.

Theo was just leaving the locker room when Liam arrived there, a dark hood hiding his eyes, but not his tensed jaw.
"Hey," Liam said, "just in case it´s my fault, I’m sorry. Again."
Theo kept walking with big steps.
"Fuck, dude, can you stop and stay for a minute?" Liam didn’t have much to say, but he couldn’t just let Theo leave either. "Please," he begged.
And suddenly, Theo stopped. He turned around slowly, pushing his hood back and giving Liam an expecting look.
"I’m kinda sick of saying sorry, Theo," Liam started, "but I wanna win the next game, it’s as simple as that."
Theo raised his eyebrows even higher, obviously not getting Liam’s point.
"Look, you can hate me all you want for crashing your car," he elaborated, "but when we’re on the field, I’m not the dude who wrecked your truck, I’m your captain. And Corey is not the friend of the dude who wrecked your truck, he’d your teammate. On the field, we’re not enemies, got it?"

Theo looked a little surprised at Liam’s vigorous words, Liam was actually a little surprised himself, but he needed to make a point.
"Got it," Theo finally nodded, "on the field, we’re not."
"What about off the field?" Liam wanted to know, because Theo’s reaction still didn’t make sense
"Off the field," Theo growled threateningly, "you´re the absolute asshole who destroyed my car!"
"It´s just a car, Theo," Liam sighed. Man, that dude really was a rather resentful type.
"It´s MY car!" Theo whispered, the cold calm in his voice catching Liam off guard.
"I know," he replied.
"You don´t know shit," Theo huffed, clearly not expecting Liam to understand his anger.
"What shit, Theo?" he shouted, despaired of the mystery that was Theo Raeken.

"You really wanna know?" Theo offered, now shouting again, "you fucked up the only thing that I have, captain. That truck is my life, and now I sleep with a light fucking breeze freezing me at night because the door won´t fully close. You happy now?"
That was unexpected. "Wait," Liam tried to understand what he´d just been told, "you sleep in that truck?"
Theo didn´t answer, just averted his eyes and looked like he was about to run off again.
"I´m sorry," Liam said once again.
"Yeah, you´ve said that a couple of times before," Theo responded. Then why wasn´t he accepting any of those apologies, Liam wondered, hating to be the humble one, to wait for someone´s forgiveness, to be left hanging.
"Well, because I am," he repeated, "but it´s not my fault that fucking car is your home, so..."
But Theo didn´t listen to the rest.
"Fuck you, or whatever, I don´t care," he spit out as he walked away, "as long as you leave me alone."
"Come on man..." Liam tried to get him to stop once more, but it didn´t work this time.

He knew he shouldn´t have said that last thing. Liam stood there, hiding his red face behind his grey hands for a second, letting out a deep breath, admitting to himself that he had no idea how to turn this thing with Theo around. Why exactly was he captain again?
He´d just decided to give it up for that day, get dressed and home where he could shoot something on his playstation. And then he was greeted by a friendly, pretty female voice.
"There you are, Liam! I haven´t seen you in forever!" Hayden exclaimed as she slung her arms around his neck.
"Not now," was the first thing going through Liam´s mind when Hayden closed her arms around him. He hugged her back hesitantly, kissed a cheek that had a light yellow glow to it and tried not to make it sound negative when he asked her what she was doing at lacrosse practice.
"I came to pick you up, silly," she answered, as if it had been the most ridiculous question in the world, "I thought we could watch a movie tonight, maybe grab some dinner, have dessert at your place?"
"Sounds good," Liam shrugged, the red Theo had caused him slowly fading, his body becoming weirdly blank. He took an inconspicuous look at his own hands to see what he was feeling, but his skin betrayed him, leaving him hanging in uncomfortable uncertainty.
"You sure?" Hayden wanted to know, a look of concern pulling her dark eyebrows together between her eyes. "You don´t sound so convinced. Actually, you don´t look too good either, are you feeling sick or something?"
"No," Liam sighed in response, "I´m just..." Well, how the hell was he supposed to explain that?
"There´s this new guy on the team and he´s not exactly acclimating well and Coach´s pressuring me because of the next game that we really need to win and I´m just not sure how to manage that."

He´d put it into rather simple words and he didn´t know why, but for some reason Liam didn´t feel like telling his girlfriend about how he accidentally crashed Theo´s truck that apparently served the dude as an apartment, so he´d simply left that part out.
"Is there anything I can do to help you?" Hayden offered, "I mean, I could at least distract you for a little while." She touched his chest as she spoke, tracing his sternum through the fabric of his lacrosse gear. Normally, Liam would have liked that suggestion. He was a seventeen year old boy after all. But inexplicably, Hayden´s fingers on his jersey only made him think of the colors beneath, the colors that he´d never seen on Theo, not even when he´d clearly been furious, the tattoos that covered his torso instead. He was very distracted already, and unfortunately not by the pretty girl standing right in front of him.

"I´m sorry," Liam mumbled. He wondered how many more times he´d have to apologize that day. "I´m feeling a little off. You can come join dinner with my parents though," he proposed.
"Sure," Hayden smiled, making him wish he could smile like that and have it look genuine. "Great, I guess practice is over anyway," he told her, "let me just grab my stuff and check on Corey real quick before we go."
"What´s with Corey?" Hayden wondered.
Liam stopped in his movements. Another question he wasn´t really in the mood to answer.
"Nothing," he lied, "just going to say bye."
His girlfriend nodded. "Give me your keys, would you? I´ll wait in the car."
He stepped into the locker room, fumbled his car keys out of his bag and threw them in her direction without another comment. Hayden almost caught the keys out of the air, but she missed them at first and only got them with the second catch just before they could fall to the ground.
"Sorry," Liam said again, because it had been quite a bad toss.

Later that night, Liam was bighting his own fist next to Hayden´s head, his chin buried in the nape of her neck while he was trying to get them both some satisfaction, or distraction at least. They got there eventually, mainly because they were horny teenagers and their bodies were used to the routine, but Liam knew they both knew it hadn´t been as good as they were used to. He rolled on his back afterwards, hoping the faint light from outside the window wouldn´t illuminate his
physique too much, praying she wouldn´t ask him about the fireworks that didn´t graze his chest that time, praying she wouldn´t ask herself that question in silence while falling asleep next to him. Like almost everything that had been happening for the last couple of days, he wouldn´t have been able to give an explanation, not that he didn´t wish for one himself.

Theo woke up surrounded by darkness, caused partly by the late hour in the night and partly by the emotional black hole he found himself in. It was cold outside and the cold had been creeping inside his truck through the improvisedly pasted up window and the crooked door on the driver´s site. All of his three wool blankets couldn´t keep him warm, but that was not the reason he was awake. Theo Raeken had been used to sleeping in his car for quite some time by then, used to his back aching in the mornings, used to the cold and the occasional requests to park the truck elsewhere. Fortunately, he knew Beacon Hills better than any other place in the world, so he took turns parking the truck at a few different spots where he was sure nobody would mind it. It had worked so far.

What wasn´t working for him was the thing with Liam Dunbar, the captain of the lacrosse team. Theo had loved playing lacrosse since he´d first tried it. It had been the one thing he´d been genuinely happily excited about when he´d come to Beacon Hills three weeks ago. During the first practice with the team he´d felt so light, not necessarily better or worse than usual, just less complicated, less deep into the mess that was his life, freed of the weights that usually kept him down.

Theo hated conflict. He knew that when two people were fighting, it was probably too late for them anyway. That was one of the few lessons he´d learned from his parents. They´d been arguing so much, he didn´t have many memories of them doing anything else. They could never agree on what Theo was allowed or not allowed to do, his mother trying to make him free and independant, his father teaching him discipline and diligence. It had gotten worse in fourth grade, when they´d fought about moving or staying, about Theo and his future, and soon about every damn little detail of their lives. They´d been fighting when Theo´s Mom had driven the family car over a bridge, and then into the railing. They´d been screaming as the whole car fell down into the river, and then they´d been silenced, forever. Theo hated conflict, and he hated that the reason for that was it being the one thing he truly remembered his parents by.

Ever since, Theo had stayed away from situations with even the slightest potential of conflict. He´d learned to make himself invisible, which hadn´t been hard in a world where people were looking for colors, and he was nothing but a blank page. In every town that he´d lived in, at every school that he´d attended, he´d avoided both the cool kids and the outsiders, he´d been on friendly terms with most students but tried not to make himself part of any particular group. Everything had worked out fine through middle school. With high school, another chapter had begun and with it change had come to Theo. The years in social isolation had had their impact on him. He´d liked music more than people, he´d started working out as to be able to defend himself. He´d gotten tall and handsome and the girls had soon started swarming around him, fluttering their eyelashes and talking in sweet voices, but he´d never truly liked any of them. From then on, his invisibility trick had no longer been possible, so he´d approached a new strategy and built up the image of a bad boy. He´d gotten his first tattoo. And then he´d bought his truck.

He´d laid a hard, cold surface around his lonely soul and it had made an impression. It had earned him respect, sometimes fear, admiration. He´d adjusted his own behavior as well and that´s how he ´d become who he was now. He didn´t do feelings, he didn´t do complicated and most importantly, he didn´t do fighting and apologizing and making up and never truly stopping the fights. Normally, a guy like Liam Dunbar was exactly who he´d stay away from. A guy with an ego, with aggression. But then again, Theo thought about that one time they´d actually been playing together. He had to admit that Liam was the perfect match for him. Strictly lacrosse-wise, of course. And then his
brain suddenly jumped to the image of Liam under the shower, reminding him of the muscular shoulders, the lean waist, the strong legs, and the colors. The colors that could have been a beautiful painting, except they’d been alive under his skin. Theo held on to the thought for a bit, not in a gay way; he was simply an admirer of art.

As the sun was rising above Beacon Hills, Theo hadn’t gotten much sleep and he still didn’t know whether he wanted to go back to lacrosse practice. There were only two training sessions left before the first game with him on the team. He knew that game was crucial, that was why Coach had accepted him into the team so gladly after all. A part of him wanted to play to get that carefreeness back, another part was curious just how much damage he and Liam could do to an opponent’s defense together. A third part just wanted to quit. Theo went to school with feelings that were mixed to the point where it gave him headaches, but it also stung elsewhere in his body, faintly but noticeably.

Theo didn’t even get the chance to take the right books for the fist three periods out of his locker before someone tapped his shoulder lightly. He took off his headphones with a protesting exhale of air and turned around slowly, taking his time to arrive in the noisy reality that was Beacon Hills High School.

"You again," he noted with annoyance, "what do you want?"
"Will you be at practice this afternoon?" Liam didn’t like to beat around the bush.
"Did I say anything that led you to believe I won’t?" Theo was not as straightforward.
"You said a bunch of stuff that led me to believe you hate me, so yeah," Liam replied honestly.
"Dude, do you ever consider not being the center of the world?" Theo asked with an exaggerated gesture towards Liam’s body. Now that he was looking close enough, he could see red and blue sprinkles that Liam’s collar didn’t completely hide. He wondered what they meant, even more so when the red ones started climbing higher up his neck.

"Look," Liam explained, "I don’t know what to tell you. We have practice today and an important game coming up. You are an excellent lacrosse player and we need you on the team. I know we’re not exactly on clear terms, so I just wanted to say this. I’d appreciate you being there."
"I’m a what now?" Theo couldn’t help but grin.
"Like you don’t know," Liam mumbled.
"I do," Theo confirmed, "but I like the sound of you saying it."
"Well, if that’s what it takes to make you come to practice... You’re an excellent lacrosse player." Theo couldn’t explain the feeling Liam’s compliment caused him. Warm was the only word that came to his mind.
Liam´s blue sprinkles slowly caught up with the red ones, almost reaching up to his earlobes.
"Thank you, captain," Theo winked. "I actually was going to come anyway, but I appreciate your effort."

"Great," Liam whispered to himself as he turned away, then adressed Theo once more. "I talked to my car insurance, by the way. You can go have your car fixed and they’ll pay."
In his head, Theo knew those were good news. He knew he should thank Liam, and not in a mocking tone this time. But Theo was an asshole with a broken heart for his beloved truck, so he reacted as usual: poorly.
"In that case, I don’t know if I’ll make it to practice today," he declared.
"What? you just said you were coming!" Liam complained.
"Looks like I need to find someone to fix my car first," Theo shrugged, not caring if Liam understood his priorities.
"Come on man," Liam begged, "one practice is not going to keep you from getting your car fixed."
"As if you knew," Theo huffed. "As you now know, regrettably, I need that car, and I need it warm inside, so I find it kind of urgent to get my door to close properly again."
It wasn’t like Liam didn’t get what Theo was saying, but the pressure was high on him before that next game. "Seriously man, please don’t leave me hanging."
"Excuse you?" Theo couldn’t believe what he’d just heard coming out of those pink lips in front of him. "I believe it was you who crashed my car. You’re the reason I’ve been freezing to death at night, you fucking asshole. Also, you’re captain of the lacrosse team, so I’d say it’s pretty much your fucking problem what happens in that stupid game."
"How many times do I have to say I’m sorry?" Liam all but shouted now.
"You don’t. It was pretty much fine until you just went all Captain Dickface on me again. Do you ever think of anybody but yourself?"
"You know what?" The red was speaking out of Liam. "Forget it. Do whatever the hell you want. I wanted to make peace with you, but I don’t need anyone on the team who isn’t willing to make a few sacrifices for it."
"Fine," Theo shrugged, thinking how he would probably glow red like a siren if he showed colors like Liam did.
"Fine," Liam spit out and stormed off, actually not looking so unlike that siren Theo had just been thinking of.

"Hayden or Theo?" Mason asked sitting down next to his best friend in the chemistry classroom. "What?" Liam asked in confusion.
"Dude, I can read you like an illustrated children’s book," Mason answered, "the only thing I don’t know is who it was that upset you."
"Why would it be Hayden?" Liam wanted to know.
"I saw her earlier," Mason began, eventually realizing that Liam didn’t seem to know what he was talking about, "well, maybe she’s just having a bad day or something."
Liam didn’t like the suggestion that something was wrong between him and his girlfriend, but he had way too many other things on his mind to worry about it. "Theo," he simply sighed, not because he wanted to talk about it, but because there was generally no point in lying to Mason.

"What happened now?" Mason was looking at him expectantly. Why not tell him, Liam wondered, Mason was way better with people than he was anyway. "I basically waved the white flag and he stamped on it."
"What did he say?"
"That he won’t come to practice today because taking care of his car is more important to him. And he knows damn well how badly we need to win the next game."
"Liam," Mason spoke up, "I certainly don’t want to defend that guy after what he did to Corey, but you do realize that it’s normal to care about other things than lacrosse, right? Just because you don’t, doesn’t mean..."
Liam cut him off mid-sentence. "What do you mean, I don’t? I care about other things!" He felt the red line squirming uncomfortably beneath his skin like a snake.
Even Mason got a little orange around his nose now. "You know I’m on your side man, but maybe rejecting everything that’s in the slightest way different from how you do it is not the way to go with this. With Theo."
Liam pouted. What else was he supposed to do?
"Corey told me he’s a damn good player," Mason continued, his voice calming slowly, "you think you need him that badly?"
"I wish it were different." "Well, try to make peace on his terms, then."

The ring of the bell and the beginning of class were the only things that kept Liam from protesting, even if he knew that Mason was the wisest seventeen-year-old imaginable and he was most likely completely right with everything he’d proposed. It had taken him some time to learn this, that just because he didn’t want to hear it, didn’t mean Mason was wrong. On the contrary, most times the
stronger he’d refused his advice, the more he should have taken it. Not understanding a single word their chemistry teacher was saying anyway, Liam spend the lesson thinking about Theo. Not Theo as a person, he didn’t care about Theo, but about how he could make things right with someone who could most certainly save his ass as captain of the lacrosse team. He came up with nothing but a highly confusing prickle in his gut.

Theo had almost made it to his truck after last period when Corey caught up with him breathlessly. Could that day get any worse for him? Among a whole lot of other things, his bad conscience about hurting the one person at Beacon Hills High who actually seemed nice during last practice had been bothering him enough. And now that person was standing in front of him, probably angry as hell and trying to tell him to fuck off out of the team. He was sure about that, until he spotted the green lines around Corey’s collar, looking like a tuft of grass was growing on his collarbone. It looked a little funny, but definitely not unfriendly.

"Hey man," Corey smiled.
"H-hey," Theo responded hesitantly.
"The lacrosse field’s the other way, you know..." Corey hinted.
"I know," Theo shrugged. "I’m not going to practice. Figured you wouldn´t be unhappy with that."
"What?" Corey didn’t follow. "I would! You’re a fucking beast man!"
Theo couldn´t share Corey’s enthusiasm. "Yeah, a beast that..."
"Oh!" Corey knew what was up. "You mean because of what happened last practice. Dude, that’s cool."
"It’s cool?" Theo asked suspiciously.
"I mean, sure, you were a little rougher than necessary, but Coach is going to love it as soon as you learn to take it out on the opponents instead of your own teammates."
"I’m sorry," Theo apologized, a little bit embarassed because he probably should have said that earlier.
"It’s a contact sport," Corey waved him off with a smile.

"So, are you coming or what?" Corey asked after a few seconds of silence, his eyebrows raised in expectation.
"What? Why?" Corey looked shocked, the green disappearing from under his skin. "You and Liam would be the death of every single defense line in the league."
"Me and Liam didn’t exactly have a good start..." Theo replied. 
"So what?"
"Honestly, I don´t think we can play together. We would probably be the death of each other before we even leave the locker room for the game." Corey seemed unconvinc. "I’m sure you guys can figure it out."
"I’m not," Theo disagreed.

"Man, you don´t strike me as the type who gives up easily," Corey tried to convince him.
"In that case," Theo replied, "you’re wrong. No inconvenience is too small for me to give up. And frankly, your captain’s not a small inconvenience."
"Oh I know that," Corey agreed, "he used to hate me. Took us quite a while to get where we are now."
"You expect me to believe he used to hate you of all people?" Theo asked doubtfully. No sane human being could seriously hate Corey, could they?
"Yep," Corey nodded, "I’m not sure he would’ve apologized to me for crashing my car back then."
"Wow." Theo didn’t know what to make of that information. "Is that supposed to make me feel better?"
"Does it?" Corey wanted to know.
"What changed between you two?" Theo was honestly intrigued.
"I started dating his best friend," Corey answered simply. "We both wanted what’s best for Mason, so we made peace eventually."

Theo looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"Yeah I know," Corey shrugged, "sounds easier now than it really was, but it was worth it. Honestly, I don’t even think either of us remembers why exactly we couldn’t stand each other in the beginning."

"Cute story man," Theo commented, "but I’m still not sure how that’s supposed to help me."

"My point is," Corey resumed, "Liam’s a good guy. An overprotective, easily offended good guy with anger issues, but a good guy nonetheless. You can quit if you want, but if you give up on lacrosse and the chance for you two to kick asses together, don’t do it because the dude’s a little difficult."

Theo was thinking about Corey’s words.

"Besides," Corey added, "you’re a little difficult yourself, you know that, right?"

"I know," Theo mumbled in response.

"He hasn’t given up on you though."

"He hasn’t?" Theo wondered, not sure why it even mattered to him, but apparently it did.

"He won’t," Corey responded before he turned to leave. "Do me a favor and think about it," he shouted as he walked away with large steps.

Well, Theo couldn’t exactly deny Corey a favor, could he?

Theo didn’t go to practice that day. He needed time to think. Never in his life had he tried to fight for something. In situations like this, he’d simply moved on, gotten in his car and picked a new town, a new place to stay, new people not to get attached to. But Beacon Hills was supposed to be different. Beacon Hills was different. It was not just one of many stops along a journey. It was best shot he had at a home, maybe even a future. Three weeks and it already felt like it was too much, but did that mean it wasn’t worth it any longer? Sitting on the little wooden bridge in the park, Theo pushed up his sleeve and looked at the two black rings circling his forearm just beneath the elbow. It was a sign of belongingness from another time of his life, a time that now didn’t even feel like a part of his life anymore. But it was, and it was linked to him, to this place, to what he was trying to find there, and it made him wish he was strong enough not to give up.

Looking down on his own arm, telling himself those weren’t tears in his eyes, he suddenly thought of Liam, the straight bar on his back looking a little bit like Theo’s tattoo, if you opened and straightened the ring to lie it along someone’s spine. Funny what his mind was doing when he got really lonely. He should make an effort, Theo thought, because the lacrosse team most likely was the easiest way to at least belong to something, someone. He should stop being an asshole all the time, considering how that had been working out for him for the last few years. Sitting on the bridge where he’d last shown any color at all, Theo made a promise: to try.

On Friday afternoon was the last practice before the big game on Saturday. Liam had been nervous about it ever since the previous loss, he knew Coach was expecting a lot from him, his co-players willing to give their best, but looking to him to lead them. But when Friday came, he was most nervous about Theo Raeken. He knew Corey had talked to him to calm the waves. He also knew Corey was much better at talking than he was. Most of all, he knew that they were screwed without Theo on the team. Feeling the red radiating from his spine to all the rest of his body, Liam arrived at the locker room extra early, but not first. Someone was already there, showing not nearly as much color as he was, actually not showing any true color at all, just ink, but maybe that didn’t make that much of a difference after all.

"Thank god," Liam exhaled when he saw Theo, realizing immediately how desperate he was sounding, not that he wasn’t.

"Don’t thank him too soon," Theo growled. "I’m here as a favor to someone who’s actually a
pretty nice guy, and we both know that’s not you."
"Yes Theo," Liam confessed, "I know I’m not a nice guy like Corey, but I don’t care who you’re
going to be on the team for. As long as you are."
"I didn’t say I’m going to be on the team," Theo made sure.
"Are you?" Liam asked directly, his eyes as blue as the crystals falling from his cheeks.
"You think we can play together, captain?" Theo wanted to know, his voice low and careful, "In
peace?"
"Look," Liam spoke, "I know I don’t always appear very peaceful, but honestly, neither have you
since you came here. I say we can."
"Sure?" Theo checked again, although he could see Liam was sure by the look on his face, the
hand stretched out without hesitation, a silent offer to let go of their past differences.
Liam didn’t answer, he knew if he had to, it wouldn’t be worth anything.

Theo looked Liam in the eye, let out an audible breath, looked away and then back to Liam again.
He made one step towards Liam and shook the captain’s hand.
"Peace," he nodded.
"Welcome on the team, Theo."
"Thanks captain," Theo responded and Liam could have sworn he saw his lips twitch into
something close to a smile. He decided to ignore the way Theo still called him "captain", which
was a sacrifice Theo hopefully knew to appreciate.

Five minutes later, the team got dressed, Liam finally feeling optimistic about the task at hand,
Theo seemingly comfortable enough to change without hiding the tattoos on his back from Liam’s
sight, Corey with a knowing, satisfied smile on his face. Coach went pretty hard on them, letting
them two twice as many laps as usual, criticizing every little detail he found wasn’t entirely
perfect, giving a couple of his legendary speeches about manhood and the beauty of rawness and
how playing dirty was better than playing bad. He made that last comment with a wink in Theo’s
direction. After two hours, everybody was exhausted, but pumped for the game the next day and
the atmosphere in the shower suggested they would really start that game with a hope of winning.
Liam felt a little bit high with optimism and zest for action.

"You know," Liam said to Theo as they were walking to the parking lot, "you can crash at my
place if you want."
"I can fucking what now?" Theo practically yelled his question, the whole thing being too
ridiculous to be true.
"You said you were freezing to death in your truck at night," Liam explained quietly, not sure
whether that suggestion had been a smart move. "It’s my fault, so..."
"It is," Theo agreed, "but you don’t want me at your place, do you?"
"Why do you say that?" Liam wondered. "I thought we were over our rough start?"
"You barely even know me," Theo exclaimed, not able to believe that he even had to say this. "Don’t
tell me you just go around inviting random guys into your house."
"No!" Liam felt stupid now. "I just... I simply thought... you know... because it’s my fault... and it’s
going to be bad for the game tomorrow if you don’t get enough sleep."
Theo was startled. Was Liam making fun of him? "Holy shit, Liam!" Theo said as if it was the
most insane thing he’d ever heard.
"A simple no would’ve been enough," Liam surrendered, the red darkening, but hiding beneath his
shirt.
Theo had no idea why the hurt in his voice bothered him, but Liam was already getting in his car
as he tried to make sense of it.
"See you tomorrow," Liam said.
"Tomorrow."
Because I’ve been asked: the idea of people’s emotions showing as colors beneath their skin comes from one of the drunk, deep conversations me and my best friend like to have. He said it would be helpful if skin colors showed the character of a person and we went on and on and agreed that you’d need a whole lot of different colors and shades to portray people properly. So my friend doesn’t give two shits about Teen Wolf or my fanfic, but my stupid brain just went straight to Thiam when I thought about this :D

Also, by now you probably have figured out how the chapter titles of this fic work, like they describe the relationship Theo and Liam have/develop during the chapter. So if you like, comment with a possible chapter title and I’ll tell you if I plan on doing that! (I’ve already set out all the chapters and their titles.)

I hope you’re enjoying this fic and I’ll do my best to update soon! Love you guys!
Liam woke up four times the night before Saturday. His mind was too occupied playing out every possible scenario for the next day to find sleep. He imagined them winning their game or losing, Coach being proud of him or giving him yet another lecture on leadership. He imagined the team playing really bad, or really good but still not good enough to win. At about four o’clock in the morning he realized that to most outcomes it was crucial whether Theo would show up or not. He closed his eyes again and thought about them playing together, truly together, like he now knew they could and he was sure it didn´t matter who the opponent was, if only Theo would be by his side.

If they were lucky enough to win, maybe everybody would finally believe that Liam was a good captain, that he was the right choice for that post. But more importantly, the whole lacrosse team would get to celebrate again. They would sing in the showers, and someone would bring beers to the locker room. They would have a couple before even changing out of their jerseys, and Coach would give them an hour or two before reminding them that alcohol was strictly forbidden on school grounds so they would have to go to a club. Liam hadn´t been aware of how badly he needed a night out with the boys before thinking about it right then. He couldn´t wait to win that night, and weirdly enough, he couldn´t wait for Theo to be a part of the whole thing.

When it was finally time to get up for Liam, his limbs were spotted in all the colors. He knew by then that yellow usually appeared when he was nervous, or stressed, or jealous, which he never liked to admit to himself. Green was definitely a good sign, but unlike other people (Corey), it didn´t come to Liam easily, or often. Orange had most likely to do with Liam´s occasional hyperactivity. He had no idea about purple, but he almost never showed it, so he didn´t care. Neither were any shades of grey or black for him. What was kind of hard to figure out was the deal with blue and especially red.

Those were the colors he showed the most, but he couldn´t connect either of them to strictly positive or negative emotions. The blue came when he was happy, but when he was sad too. And his only permanent mark was red, so it was always there, its varying shades showing his level of anger, but maybe not only that.

In anticipation of the big game, Liam was nervous, excited, energetic, happy to play, afraid to lose, stressed out and hopeful at the same time. Until Hayden texted asking whether she should come over. Liam let out a loud sigh and let his phone fall onto his bed. His arms were getting paler. He then picked up the device again and replied with a bad excuse as to why homework and focusing on lacrosse didn´t give him the time to be with his girlfriend that day. He buried his face in the pillow, wondering when exactly he´d started making excuses to avoid Hayden. Something weird was going on there, but Liam would deal with it later. Theo came first.

The first time Theo woke up the night before his first game with the BHHS lacrosse team, he was cold and his back hurt extraordinarily. He knew that declining Liam´s offer to stay with him had been the only true option, Liam had just wanted to be polite after all, Theo was sure of it, but lying on the back seat of his damaged truck wide awake, he couldn´t help but wonder just how comfortable Liam´s bed would have been. Or like, his couch or whatever.

Theo tightened the blanket around his shoulders and closed his eyes again, trying to find sleep in spite of the moon shining brightly through the window. He was an easy sleeper, usually, but that
night, everything seemed to bother him: the cold, that wasn´t even as bad as the previous two
nights, the unhealthy position he was in, but was long used to, the moonlight that he´d never
minded before. How crazy, he thought, before the idea hit him. Was it possible that his restlessness
had something to do with the whole lacrosse thing? With the Liam thing? Somehow the thought
surprised himself for a short moment. Then he had to laugh into the silence of the night. The
situation was simply too ridiculous. Theo wasn´t used to that weird fuzzy kind of nervousness. He
´d been terrified before, haunted by the trauma of his childhood, scared for his life that now lay in
his own clumsy hands alone, threatened by actual dangers. Now he was worrying about a stupid
lacrosse game and whether the captain of the team would accept him. He couldn´t remember the
last time his problems had been that simple. Not that he didn´t have real issues now too, he
reminded himself with a look to the crooked door of the car.

At about three, Theo woke up sweating from a dream. His head was dizzy for a few seconds, and
after that short moment, the dream was gone. He was extremely curious about what it could have
been, but no matter how hard he tried, his brain wouldn´t remember a thing. Theo just knew that he
´d never had this dream before. There was a faint notion left in the night air, a hint of an
atmosphere that was new to him, entirely different from the nightmares he used to be waken by a
couple of years prior. He didn´t know what to make of it, couldn´t even grasp if the dream had
been good or bad, just hoped it would come back to him when he closed his eyes.

On the way to the meeting point for their game on Saturday morning, Theo still carried an
unfamiliar excitement with him. It made his skin itch from the complete newness of the feeling to
him as a committed cynic. He´d probably forgotten how not to dread new experiences that were not
planned into every last little detail by himself. He turned on the radio in his car, and for the first
time in years, listened to a song without his headphones on. Just when the last few words of the
lyrics were being sung, something weird in the mirror caught Theo´s eye. A smile he didn´t think
he´d seen before on a face he´d seen every day since he´d been born. It froze immediately and
faded slowly, causing him to turn the radio back off, but it wasn´t like he could pretend it hadn´t
happened. For the rest of the ride, he just stared straight ahead, not thinking (about Liam Dunbar).

He arrived at the School parking lot before most of his teammates, even before Coach, which
somehow went along with the impression he´d had of the guy so far. But the captain was already
waiting, and standing next to him, a surprise that came earlier than he´d wished for. Theo didn´t
recognize them right away, partly because the inseperable duo had become a trio, a pretty red-
haired girl in their middle. They were all talking to Liam as if they were friends. Well, they´d been
on the team together for a while, that much Theo knew.

"Hey guys," Theo waved as he approached the small group, trying his hardest not to make his
smile look like a gnarl, causing Scott McCall, Stiles Stilinski and their companion to turn towards
him.

"Hey man," Liam replied casually, the short sleeves of his t-shirt showing a fucking Monet
painting, or whatever that dude´s name was.
Theo then looked at the rest of them expectantly, especially at Scott, who still bore the mark
around his upper arm, shining in a mixture of blue and green.

"You must be new on the team," Scott noted, "at least you weren´t here when I was captain."

"Not on the team, no," Theo answered.
Stiles Stilinski squinted his eyes suspiciously at him.

"Really?" Theo complained in disbelief, leaving the others confused. "Well, I guess I look a little
different since the fourth grade."

As anticipated, Scott was the first one to get it. "Theo?" he asked.

"Wait," Stiles finally caught up with them, "Theo Raeken?"

"The one and only," Theo smirked, seeing Liam rolling his eyes next to him. "And who is this
pretty lady?" he wanted to know, because it was way easier to charm girls when you weren’t truly interested in them. Except this girl didn’t seem to fall for it. Theo had to give her credit for that. "This is my girlfriend Lydia," Stiles began talking before she cut him off. "I’m Lydia Martin," she said, obviously preferring to introduce herself. "Ouch," Theo said with a wink at Stiles, "is she not really your girlfriend?" Even though he hadn’t seen Scott and Stiles in forever, he couldn’t keep back that comment. "Actually," Lydia answered, "I am. But I’ve been a person way before that, and I can speak for myself."

Theo took a closer look at her, now realizing that she had red hair, but also an orange blush at the sides of her neck, and dozens of purple marks on her arms. Combined with the blue patterns on her temples, she appeared like nothing he’d ever seen before, but someone he felt like he should have respect for, maybe even awe.

"Nice to meet you," she said, but in a tone that made it clear there were definitely nicer things in the world.

"Theo went to school with us," Scott explained how they knew each other. "We used to play in his garden all the time back then. Did you move back to that house, man?"

"No," Theo answered shortly, throwing a pleading look at Liam, silently asking him not to discuss his living situation in front of his former friends. Liam nodded in response faster than Theo would have expected.

They made a little small talk about what brought Theo back to Beacon Hills and how cool Scott found it that he’d joined the lacrosse team, Theo trying to answer all the questions in short sentences, avoiding the truth, especially since Scott and Stiles knew about the crash and he would rather die right on the spot than talk about it. So he answered every question with another question like he knew it would work. He found out that Scott was going to college to become a vet while Lydia studied maths and Stiles was attending the FBI academy. For a brief moment, he wondered whether they told him those things to make him feel even more like a failure about still being in school (and not very successfully). He knew they weren’t, but it still bothered him that the three had such impressive dreams and were really chasing them while he was sleeping in his car trying to get back something like a home. Also, the wild roulette of blue, yellow and orange beneath Stiles’s skin still freaked him out like it used to in the fourth grade.

Theo was a little relieved when practically all the rest of the team arrived at the same time, among them Corey with a light smile on his face and his boyfriend by his side. When even Coach was finally there, the players were just getting on the bus that was supposed to bring them to their away-game.

"Hey, Liam," Theo heard Mason Hewitt shout after them. That guy must be Liam’s best friend. "Isn’t Hayden coming today?" Theo had no fucking clue who Hayden could possibly be. Liam’s reaction seemed a little weird though, his face turning red, his eyes unfocused as he replied with a "No.", but no further explanation. Clearly confused, Mason got into a car with Scott, Stiles and Lydia Martin to get to the game as well.

"Is Hayden your girlfriend?" Theo asked Liam when they were on the road. He was occupying the seat on the opposite side of the central aisle.

For some reason, Liam looked annoyed with that question. "No," he said first, then looking around the bus as if to check out who was listening, the red beaming from under his skin. He cleared his throat and whispered: "She’s... it’s complicated."

He couldn’t have explained why, but somehow, Liam’s discomfort with the topic satisfied Theo, not that he cared about his captain’s love life.

"Complicated, Hugh?"

"Don’t ask," Liam sighed, and so Theo didn’t. Instead, he put his headphones on and pressed play on his phone, completely zoning out for the rest of the ride, letting the music take him to the only
place in his life he’d ever been safe.

Everybody was strangely quiet while getting changed before the game. Even for someone as new to the team as Theo, the tension in the air was practically visible, and not only by the red and yellow marks that started showing on the exposed body parts of his teammates. Especially the line along Liam’s spine looked aggressively alive then, almost consuming his entire backside. The red was shouting danger, but Theo couldn’t bring himself to looking away, which he should have, because two seconds later, Liam had not only caught him staring, but also put his own attention to a partly undressed Theo. He didn’t look upset though, and he didn’t say anything. Not until his eyes suddenly widened and Theo could have slapped himself right there because he shouldn’t have let him see it.

"Is that...?" Liam pointed to Theo’s left arm with his chin, whispering. "Are you... I mean, is it a..." But Theo cut him off before anybody else could notice. He tried to sound casual when he shrugged. "No. It’s a bruise." He then put his jersey on quickly, covering the blue-ish cloud on his white skin that was surrounded by ink, but not covered.

It hadn’t been a lie. Theo always had a few bruises and scratches on him, and he assumed neither Liam nor any of the other guys around would understand his urge to hide them, but none of them were blank like him. Colorless. There had been a time when Theo had used to look at his little injuries and pretended that they were marks, but he’d stopped once he’d realized how pathetic that was. He knew people mistrusted him because of his whiteness, but he didn’t want them to think he was able to show just to find out later that he couldn’t. He’d rather be an outcast right away. He didn’t want to give Liam any reason to believe he was any less of a freak than he truly was. They’d only be in for quite a disappointment eventually.

"Sorry," Liam said, turning away. Theo had the strange feeling that the captain’s eyes on him hadn’t been an entirely bad thing. Probably because he liked people admiring his tattoos.

"It’s okay," he replied calmly, simply glad that the discovery of his bruise hadn’t led to the ever-dreaded conversation why he didn’t show colors. He would so hate to have that conversation with Liam. Not that he’d ever had it with anyone else. A couple of people had tried, but Theo had simply walked away, avoided them forever, or punched them in the face until they hadn’t dared to ask again. He knew he wouldn’t do any of that in case Liam ever asked, so he just prayed it would never come to that.

Theo and Liam stepped onto the field last. Looking at all the other players before him, Theo suddenly felt a wave of dynamism washing over him, but Liam held him back at his jersey before he could run to where the team was gathering on the grass.

"Hey, Theo?"

"Yeah?"

"I know you’re still pissed because I crashed your truck and you’ve made it perfectly clear that you’re not going to forgive me any time soon..."

"Man, you don’t..." Theo tried to speak, but Liam wasn’t finished yet.

"It’s not important right now. This game is fucking huge for me, and you’re fucking good on the field. We can beat them if we play together. You don’t like me? Fine, we don’t have to be friends. But can we be like, allies for tonight?"

Theo hadn’t known their fight was still bothering Liam this much. "Consider us allies, Captain," he nodded in response.

Liam smiled. "Allies who kick asses?"

"Allies who kick asses."

They then ran off both to warm up, and Theo couldn’t wait to win this damn game.

Together, Theo and Liam did kick asses that night, each scoring a couple of goals, Theo grinning like a clown when Nolan completely freaked out over one of their moves and calling him a
"fucking beast". Unfortunately, the opponent broke through their defense a couple too many times as well, so the game wasn’t decided until the very last seconds, when Liam blocked two opponents at once to make way for Theo to race up the outside lane, pass to Corey at inside left and watch him score the winning goal. It was crazy how clearly relieved everybody was to finally have won a game, even Scott and Stiles celebrating as if they were still in the team, Corey obviously having earned himself a full-on make out session with Mason right in the first row of the bleachers. Coach was actually smiling, his mouth twisted in a way that didn’t really seem right in his face, but was probably for their best.

Theo didn’t know how to handle the atmosphere in the locker room after the game, or on the bus towards Beacon Hills. He wasn’t unfamiliar with the slightly drunk singing and shouting of teenagers who were happy and carefree, but he’d never considered being one of them before. Now he found himself almost singing along, definitely having a beer too, forgetting to mistrust the feeling that he was a part of this, a part of a team.

"Guys!" Coach stood up in the front of the bus as they entered their home town. "Good job today! Good job captain. And Raeken, that’s what I call a successful debut."

"You know," Liam whispered into Theo’s ear, "coming from Coach, that’s like a knightly accolade. I’m glad you’re on the team."

"What does that mean coming from you, Captain?" Theo wanted to know with a smirk.

"Simply that it’s the truth," Liam told him just when the vehicle came to a halt. Their eye contact was just a moment too long to be normal, but the strangest thing about it was that that didn’t make it awkward or anything. Theo focused on blue tendrils on soft skin as he was stepping out of the bus behind Liam.

After saying goodbye to everyone and getting in his car, Theo realized that he couldn’t go anywhere, given that he had a little too much alcohol in his blood system to drive. He sat there in silence for a while, not being able to say if it had been five minutes or an hour afterwards. He got out of the car and looked around. He looked at his own hands and discovered a fresh cut over the knuckles of his right hand, most likely from the lacrosse game. He took in the red streak and started walking. He wandered the streets of Beacon Hills in a really atypical nostalgia, finding that most of the town hadn’t changed at all since he’d lived there with his family. And thought about how if he could, he would probably feel a dark green about it. And a little red, too, perhaps, not that he was in a position to know. And then, all of a sudden, he spotted the car that had picked up Liam from the school parking lot earlier.

Without thinking about it, Theo walked up to the house and rang the bell. Liam opened the door wearing sweatpants, his skin atypically clear.

"Theo?" he asked in obvious surprise.

"Hey, Captain," Theo greeted him.

"What are you doing here?"

"Remember how you suggested we should be allies for tonight?" Theo started explaining.

"Yeah, so?"

"Has been working out quite okay so far, right?"

"Pretty fucking okay," Liam confirmed.

"Well, if I forgive you for destroying my beloved truck, does that offer to crash at your place still stand?"

Liam looked at him in shock. Theo could understand how that much straightforwardness would seem strange from him.

"It’s fucking cold at night, you know," he mumbled as an explanation.

"Sure," Liam said. "I mean, sure, you can stay. Come in."
Sorry for letting you wait, I’m busy af. You can expect weekly updates on Sundays from now on :) 

Hope you enjoyed this :) 

Also, in case you were wondering which song Theo was listening to in his car, I’m going to keep that his secret for a little while longer, but it will definitely come up again later! 

Thanks for reading <3
"I can´t believe we won," Liam whispered into the half-dark of his room, knowing that Theo would still hear him, since he was lying right next to him in bed. He´d thought about offering Theo the couch in the living room, or bringing the spare mattress to his own room as an extra bed, or even letting Theo sleep in his bed and taking the couch himself, but it would have been weird. His bed was big enough for two people to comfortably sleep in it without getting in each other´s spaces, so there had been no reason not to do so.

"I can´t believe you lost so many games before I came along to save your asses," Theo replied with a somehow audible smirk.

"As much as I hate the narcissistic tone of that statement, you´re not wrong," Liam admitted. He thought about Theo wearing his t-shirt and a pair of his sweatpants, because he hadn´t brought any of his stuff. He knew that his own mark along his spine always shone through the thin white cotton, but when Theo had stepped out of the bathroom in it earlier, there had been no way of telling what lay beneath it. Even the tattoos could only be seen where they came out of the sleeves on his arms, drawing ranks of wild plants with few blossoms down to his wrists, the dark jungle of ink only interrupted by two thick streaks around his right forearm. In some way, Theo´s tattoos were quite similar to Liam´s marks, sitting beneath their skin and coloring it, taking away its blankness, attracting nosy glances wherever they appeared from under a piece of clothing. In another way, they were completely different, looking the way they looked by choice of their owner, never changing, but maybe that was the closest Theo could get to having colors on him.

"Looks like I came at just the right time, Captain," Theo joked, deciding that Liam would have to live with that nickname from then on.

"You mean like you came back at just the right time," Liam added, "I didn´t know you lived in Beacon Hills before."

"Because I haven´t told you," Theo stated the obvious.

"Why did you move away?" Liam wanted to know.

"My parents did," Theo shrugged, "new job, new house, new town."

"But you´re back here now. Didn´t you like it there?"

Theo didn´t know how to answer that question. He hadn´t exactly liked it anywhere since he´d left Beacon Hills, but that was hardly because of the places themselves. "You only get one true home in your life," he finally said, avoiding a real answer without having to
Liam thought about that for a moment, considering that maybe Theo wasn´t completely full of sarcastic bullshit after all. He´d had a pretty hard time feeling at home in the house his mother had bought with her new husband years ago, but Liam had only been a kid back then, so with a little bit of candy and his first lacrosse equipment, they´d made the changes way more bearable for him.

"So you came here without your parents?" Liam asked, thinking about his own sleeping two doors over.

"They couldn´t come along," Theo answered shortly, "and I´m eighteen anyway, I can manage on my own."

"No offense," Liam commented, "but you´ve been sleeping in your car ever since you arrived, right?"

"Why do people even bother saying "no offense" when they´re going to offend you anyway?" Theo complained, turning onto his side so he was facing the wall, away from Liam.

"I´m sorry man, I´m just saying..."

"Well, obviously, sleeping in my truck wasn´t part of the plan," Theo explained, the muscles in his back tensed. "I just haven´t found an apartment yet."

Liam decided to leave it at that. It was late, they were both tired from the game that day. Theo was already facing away from him and he didn´t want to somehow get into another fight with him. He had a hunch that was easier than not to. If he´d closed his eyes now and went to sleep, it would have been a good day, so he tried to focus on something other than the steady breathing to his left. Eventually, Liam drifted off into a dream.

When he woke up in the morning, Liam was confused for a brief moment before realizing where the incredible warmth in his room came from. Theo was still asleep on the right side of the bed, his head resting on his arm instead of the pillow Liam had given him. The bedsheets were tangled up in his limbs. Liam gulped when he noticed Theo had thrown away the sweatpants onto the floor beside him, now wearing nothing but a pair of striped boxer shorts with the white t-shirt that had slid up on his upper body to expose one single stave inked into the skin of his lower back. Liam couldn´t help but wonder if there was more above it, and if so, what the melody those notes formed could possibly sound like.

"Why are you staring at me?" Theo mumbled sleepily without opening his eyes. His voice was lower than usual, drowsily hoarse.

"Why the fuck are you lying in my bed half naked?" Liam demanded to know in response, his own voice too high to make it seem like he wasn´t freaking out about it.
"Sorry man, it gets fucking hot in a real bed that stands in a room with windows and doors that actually close." Theo didn’t seem to mind his exposed body parts half as much as Liam did. He finally opened his eyes and turned around into Liam´s direction, but he did nothing to cover himself with the messed up sheets.

"Morning, Captain," he grinned when he could look Liam in the eye, apparently very much enjoying the other boy´s discomfort.

Liam didn´t answer, mostly because he knew he was being made fun of and didn´t want to encourage Theo any further. Not that Theo Raeken needed encouragement.

"I take it you haven´t woken up with a partly undressed guy in your bed very often," Theo assumed, a smug smile on his face. Discomforting straight guys by suggesting literally anything that was even in the slightest way non-heterosexual was one of the few pleasures that came with being gay, and Theo loved it.

"No?!" Liam replied, maybe a little too fast, and with more irritation than certainty in his voice, not because he was lying, but what the fuck was Theo doing to him and why?

"Oh Captain," Theo was now straight out laughing, "you need to chill every once in while."

"I am chill," Liam grumbled, knowing full well that he wasn´t fooling Theo.

"Dude, more than anything, you are red," Theo stated in response.

God, that was so unfair, Liam thought. He simply couldn´t hide it if something was going on with him. And there Theo was, completely relaxed in his bed, his skin not showing the tiniest spot of color except the bruise on his arm. It looked weird on him, like a single crease in a perfectly straight bedsheets, and Liam´s hand was itching with the urge to reach out and wipe it off him, setting the otherwise flawless picture right.

"Just in case you haven´t noticed," Liam informed Theo, "I´m literally always red. It´s more like a state of mind to me." 

"I have. And I´m no expert, but I believe "chill" is not among the many emotions red is typically associated with," Theo argued.

"Don´t you think it´s a little too early in the morning to discuss my colors right now?"

"Wow," Theo responded dryly, "someone is clearly not a morning person."

"Actually, I also think we´re not at that point in our relationship where we talk about that stuff," Liam told him.
"Well, I certainly hope we’ll get there." Theo winked, causing Liam to roll his eyes.

"Do you want to use the bathroom first or should I?" Liam finally changed the subject. Theo would have been a stressful guest if he hadn’t at least been serving looks, not that Liam cared.

"You go have a cold shower to cool down your state of mind," Theo replied, already rolling himself over to settle against Liam’s pillow, "I’m going to close my eyes for another five minutes. Your bed is fucking awesome."

After Liam had finally managed to practically drag Theo out of his bed (and then out from under the hot shower and then away from the breakfast table), not physically but by nagging vehemently, they were on their way to Theo´s truck in the school parking lot to pick up his stuff and bring it to Liam´s. The way over there by foot was mostly silent, neither of them knowing what kind of conversation you were supposed to have with someone from your lacrosse team who you’d also just shared a bed with but didn’t really know personally. When his stinging mark told Liam that the awkwardness in the air between them was getting too much for him, he made an attempt to smalltalk, and Theo could see right through him, but answered calmly all the same.

"Where did you learn to play lacrosse?"

"School," Theo shrugged. "Ironically enough, it was Stiles who talked Scott and me into trying it out."

"Stiles? Are you sure you remember that correctly?"

Theo laughed. "I know, right? But I swear that it’s true. That guy was an annoyingly hyperactive kid, always suggesting new stuff for us to do and then getting bored with it as soon as the other two of us were starting to get into it. One day, he’d made his own lacrosse stick and wanted us all to play. We went to practice with the school team."

"Let me guess," Liam remarked, "You and Scott loved it because you were good at it and Stiles didn’t because he wasn’t."

"Pretty accurate. Scott was good whenever he wasn’t struggling with his asthma. It used to be quite bad when we were kids. For me, lacrosse was the first and only thing I ever did that came naturally to me. I loved being good at something without having to try too hard. Stiles mostly spent practices distracting other teammembers, but stucked with lacrosse because we did. More because of Scott than because of me, but you still got to give him credit for that."

"Sounds like you were pretty good friends," Liam noted.

"Yeah. Since kindergarten. Of course, Scott and Stiles were best friends even before that, but I didn’t care. Socializing is so easy when you’re a kid."
"I don´t think my ten year old self would have agreed," Liam objected.

"Are you saying you weren´t one of the cool kids?" Theo wanted to know.

"It´s not that," Liam explained, "I had... anger issues... I talked to most other kids with my fists. Somehow that didn´t get me many friends."

"No shit," Theo exclaimed in a fake shocked voice, "you had anger issues? No way!"

"Shut up," Liam mumbled, "It´s not my fault. It´s called Intermitted Explosive Disorder, and nobody had told me how to control it yet."

"Sorry," Theo said quickly as he realized that this was in fact not the right thing to make fun of. "But eventually someone did?" he asked.

"My parents forced me to do an awful lot of therapy," Liam spilled after a moment of hesitation. He didn´t think he´d ever openly talked about this with anyone before.

"And that helped you?"

"God no," Liam answered, "but my stepdad introducing me to lacrosse did. I learned how to let my aggression out where it was appropriate. And in middle school, I became friends with Mason."

"You started at a new school and picked out the one person you didn´t want to punch in the face to be your friend?"

"Pretty accurate," Liam now laughed. "Mason was quite unlike me in many ways, but I think we were both misunderstood by most other kids, so we teamed up. It all got easier from then on."

"And now you´re captain of the lacrosse team. Way to go..."

"And yet the new guy keeps calling me captain in a way that has me wondering how seriously I´m being taken."

"Oh, you should feel honored, captain," Theo pointed out, "I hear many people use nicknames as a way of showing appreciation."

"That´s a weird way of showing appreciation," Liam remarked.
"Weirder than crashing someone´s car?" Theo joked.

Liam was unable to let go of the thought that maybe he wasn´t entirely kidding.

"Touché," he responded, "are you ever going to like, let it go?"

"Yeah," Theo affirmed. "I´m sorry, too, you know. Moving back to Beacon Hills might have been a tiny little bit stressful and things haven´t exactly been working out as planned so far."

"I kind of understand," Liam agreed.

"Also, I´m a little sensitive when it comes to my truck and a genetically determined asshole, so there´s that. But I know it was an accident. And I´m having it fixed next week, so you won´t have to keep up with an asshole 24/7 much longer."

"You know you´re not that bad, right?" Liam asked sceptically, because the first time Theo had called himself an ass, Liam had simply put it off as a joke, but the second time he hadn´t been so sure anymore.

"Oh, you have no idea how bad I am, captain," Theo, his low and steady voice thinning the line between dirty humor and a sad sounding seriousness.

The two boys rode Theo´s truck back to Liam´s house and then picked up all his stuff that was scattered all over the trunk to carry it up the stair and into Liam´s room. Theo folded his clothes before he took a stack of them inside, hoping that Liam´s Mom wouldn´t be too shocked by the chaos he was bringing into her son´s life. Meanwhile, Liam simply grabbed as much as he could with his both arms and threw it onto his bed, adding Theo´s mess to his own, so that when they had everything, the room looked like the stuff belonged there, and you couldn´t have told which things belonged to which boy without knowing.

"I should probably clean that up a bit," Theo suggested with a light nod towards the bed.

"Or we could play video games and worry about it when we actually need to use the bed," Liam proposed instead.

"Wow, you are a fucking mess." Theo understood now why Liam´s room looked the way it did. He´d only had trouble keeping order in his truck because there hadn´t been enough room to put all his stuff in the truck tidily. Liam on the other hand simply didn´t give a shit.

"My house, my rules," Liam smiled, already holding two controllers in his hand, offering one to Theo.

Ten minutes into the first game, Liam was majorly enjoying himself. "Mason is going to be thrilled to know there´s someone even worse than him in this," he laughed out loudly when Theo died for
"Fuck you very much," Theo growled in response, starting over with a grim determination on his face. "I haven’t owned a playstation since I was like, ten or something."

"Clearly," Liam commented in mockery. It felt incredibly good to give Theo a taste of his own medicine. "Is this what you were talking about when you said I had no idea how bad you are?"

Theo knew he shouldn’t feel offended. He had far more valid reasons to loathe himself than being bad at video games, but it was still bothering him. "I’m going to kick your ass so hard in thirty-six to forty-eight hours."

Again, Liam could only laugh at that. "Was that a threat? Because it sounded more like my little cousin who then cried to his Mommy about how I didn’t let him win."

"Oh, I keep my promises," Theo said with a conviction that was completely and utterly misguided, considering his apparent lack of gaming skills.

Sunday afternoon went by like this, Theo failing at every game they tried, Liam making fun of him every single time until he eventually got bored. He was just on the way downstairs to ask his mother if they could order pizza for dinner when all of a sudden, he stopped in front of the mirror hanging in the hallway. Not once in those last hours in his room with Theo had he wasted one thought on the colors he might be showing. Now he saw them, thin lines creeping up his neck from under his shirt, the red on the back surrounded by a blue ocean with green waves, the whole picture grazed by yellow sunrays. It wasn’t the colors that irritated him, nor the shape in which they appeared, but the fact that they were there in the first place, his neck normally being reserved for stronger emotions than the calm relaxation he was feeling that afternoon.

But Liam knew better than to think he had a very good understanding of the things that were going on beneath his skin. He thought of Theo, and wondered if it even mattered at all that he’d never seen any marks on him. What difference did it make when you could never know what the colors meant anyway? If you thought about it that way, they were equally unfathomable after all. Maybe people were simply not meant to be seen through. Or maybe they were not meant to be seen through by just anybody. Maybe it took more than one look at the surface to truly see who a person was.

Right in the middle of his third piece of pizza, Liam’s phone started ringing. Theo, who was sitting closer to the nightstand where it had been lying forgotten for the entire day, handed it to him. "Oh look, it’s your complicated non-girlfriend." Liam was annoyed immediately. He didn’t feel like talking to Hayden right that moment, and he certainly didn’t feel like explaining Theo that she was his girlfriend, and that it was him who was being complicated. On the other hand, he couldn’t avoid Hayden much longer without having to explain himself to her too, so he took the call after a tiny second of hesitation.

"Hey you," he spoke into the phone as he walked into the bathroom. Talking to Hayden could get awkward enough, he didn’t need Theo to witness that conversation too. He became aware that there wouldn’t be any pizza left when he’d come back into his room, but there was no going back now that she was already asking him what he’d been doing the entire weekend.
"I thought you wanted to give me a call after the game," she complained, "I could have come over."

"I’m sorry," Liam said because she was right. "I was tired. Didn’t want you to drive over just to watch me sleep for twelve hours straight."

"You know I wouldn’t have complained about that, right Liam?" she argued. He did.

"I do."

"Well, what were you up to today?" she wanted to know.

*Oh you know, I decided to take in the new guy from lacrosse after he saved my ass in the game and we spent the day bringing his stuff in and getting him settled, nothing special.*

That would have sounded just as crazy as Liam felt about it.

"Nothing much," he told her instead. "It’s been a hard week before that game, you know. I kind of just needed some rest."

"I know," she replied, "I just didn’t expect that to completely exclude me from your weekend."

"Sorry," Liam said again, even though he wasn’t entirely sure what he was apologizing for.

"It’s alright." It would have been easier if Hayden hadn’t been so damn comprehensive. "I guess I’ll see you tomorrow at school then." She must have sensed that there was no use in trying to get him to talk.

"Yeah, see you tomorrow," Liam agreed.

"Love you," Hayden said as she always did, and that’s when Liam panicked and did something really stupid.

He hesitated. He became aware of the itching skin on his back. He thought about lying. He considered the possibility that Theo could still hear him through the bathroom door. And then he ended the call without another word.

He looked into the mirror and saw a color that was so dark red it was almost black clouding his forehead. He needed to calm down before he could go back out. Liam buried his phone in the pocket of his jeans, took a deep breath and then another one. He didn’t even know why he’d freaked out so badly. He’d told Hayden he loved her before. He’d heard her say it even more often. What the fuck had stopped him this time? And how was he supposed to pretend like it hadn’t happened when he’d see her in school the next day?

He flushed the toilet and stepped into his bedroom. "Have you at least left me some pizza?" he asked before giving Theo the chance to lead the conversation towards Hayden.

"Nope," Theo pressed out while chewing, his cheeks so full he must have shoved everything that had been left into his mouth when he’d heard Liam return.

"You are one hell of a guest, Theo Raeken," Liam stated as he rolled his eyes.

"Aww, thanks man," Theo responded, placing his hand over his heart in a mocking gesture.

"That was not a compliment," Liam remarked.
"Oh Captain," Theo informed him, "it was when I decided to take it as one." Somehow his wink at the end of the sentence didn’t help calm Liam down from his previous phone call. Liam simply chose to let it go.

That night, after they had placed all Theo´s things from the bed on the floor and wiped a few pizza crumbs out of the sheets, Liam lay awake next to Theo wondering how someone could fall asleep that easily in a bed that wasn´t his own. Liam himself was already thrown off course by the scent Theo had brought to his house, by the noise of his breathing, by the weight on the other side of the bed. Not in a bad way, of course, but it was still... doing something to him. Changing something. Liam would have really liked to know whether something was changing for Theo as well. Or was he too used to change to notice much of it, moving from one place to another, switching schools, joining a new lacrosse team, sleeping in a car and then a bed? It didn´t seem like all that was affecting him very much, but it didn´t seem like you would see it if it did either.

Just before Liam fell asleep as well, he noticed the way the moonlight shone through his windows and onto Theo. It was weird, but for this very short moment at the end of a long day with mixed feelings, it almost seemed like a yellow glow was resting beneath Theo´s skin. Liam would have taken a second look if he hadn´t been sure that the other boy didn´t bear any colors. He would see that thought confirmed in the morning, with the moon gone and Theo just as white as ever.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoy Theo and Liam being roomates and bonding because there is going to be a roommates 2.0 chapter :D

also, I´m changing the rating to explicit because there is no way this is going to go without at least one really smutty chapter...

thanks for reading <3
Theo liked staying at Liam´s. He found the bed was not only more comfortable than the back seat of his truck (what a surprise), but probably the most comfortable he´d ever slept in. He fell asleep easily, for the first time in a few years not worrying about being woken up in the middle of the night by either someone trying to steal his stuff or a police officer asking politely, then demandingly and threateningly to move his car elsewhere. He´d never stopped to consider that or the cold or anything else a serious problem, but now that he was warm and safe and completely able to relax at night, he knew that at least half of his chronic fatigue was to blame on his previous living- and sleeping conditions.

Waking up the first morning in Liam´s room, he´d needed a while to get this right, his limbs wrapped in soft sheets, his head feeling strange, his whole body feeling like it didn´t belong to him anymore. The entire time that Liam had spent in the bathroom, Theo had been wondering what had been going on with him, confused by the state he´d found himself in, both physically and mentally, not really able to even describe what this state was. It had only dawned on him when Liam´s Mom had piled pancake after pancake on a plate in front of him, a sympathetic smile on her face, asking whether he´d slept well. And that had been it. He had. For a solid nine hours. This is how fucking damaged I am, Theo had thought to himself, feeling like something is wrong as soon as I get a good night´s sleep for once in my life.

But what really seemed to have the power to revive Theo´s spirit a little more with every day at Liam´s place, was the possibility to take a shower whenever he felt like it, turning the water so hot it left the skin over his chest a little red. He was holding back staying under the water jet too long or using too much of Liam´s soap though, afraid of overstraining not so much Liam´s, but rather his parents´hospitality. Still, he enjoyed every second in the shower like it could be he last, trying to forget all the times he´d sneaked into a school´s communal shower or payed a few bucks to use the trucker´s bathroom along the highway. The fresh, soft towels Liam had given him were almost making up for all that.

There had been two times when Theo could have cried if he hadn´t been so... stubbornly Theo. The first time had been on Thursday evening, when Liam´s Mom had stopped by the living room where the two boys had been watching TV after lacrosse practice, demanding to know where Theo´s dirty laundry had been, as if she´d felt personally offended that he hadn´t put it in the laundry basket, which hadn´t even occurred to him. Theo hadn´t known what to say, whereas Liam had simply told her to look for the pile of clothes in the corner behind his bedroom door, probably thinking that it was completely normal to just throw it on the floor for his Mom to pick it up.

"I was hoping at least one of you knows how to put their dirty clothes into the laundry basket," the woman had said, but not in an unfriendly way.

"I´m sorry," Theo had apologized, "I didn´t know... I thought... I can get my own laundry done, I
didn’t think to bother you..."

"Don’t be silly," she’d replied as if that had been the most ridiculous idea she’d ever heard of, "this hotel is all inclusive for you love."

Damn. Theo had nodded dumbly, pronouncing a quiet "thanks", lacking any more good words to say to her.

"As long as you learn to use the laundry basket," she had added half-jokingly, "both of you." Then she’d been gone.

Liam hadn’t even averted his gaze from the TV screen, but to Theo, that conversation had meant something, making him feel stupid and guilty but relieved, too, ultimately grateful for Liam having a mother who knew how to be a Mom.

The second time had been on Friday morning right before school, when she’d brought the boys their neatly folded clothes back. The fresh scent in his nose, Theo had realized she’d been doing more than just laundry for him, and he hadn’t known how to thank her for that, or to even understand the dynamic that had been going on in that house since he’d come there. It had simply been too much of something he’d vaguely remembered, but not like a real memory, more like something he’d once seen in a movie, something that had been taken away from him so long ago he’d long let go of the phantom pain.

Considering their rough start, Theo and Liam were getting along really well as roommates. Of course, that was mostly thanks to Theo biting back sarcastic comments and dirty jokes as well as to Liam taking those he still couldn’t stop himself from cracking with humour, even if he kept reminding Theo how not funny he was. Theo still called Liam "Captain", but that was only fair in regards of the horror he lived through every time Liam drove them to school or back home. From an objective point of view, Liam wasn’t a terrible driver, but Theo was not fucking objective. He’d owned a car for more than two years and he loved driving. Not being in control of the steering wheel or the brake pedal, he felt like they were going to crash into every single passing vehicle, and for some reason, he was surprised every time Liam’s car came to a halt in front of a red light.

This wasn’t Theo’s fault. It was just that the one thing he trusted himself more with than he trusted others, was driving, because he was good at that, and the faster he moved the more secure he felt in his truck. Sometimes, driving without a destination in mind, going just a little bit above the speed limit, not having his seat belt on because he didn’t need to, Theo Raeken felt untouchable. To someone who’d been scarred most of the times he’d been touched in his life, that feeling was the closest to being high as it could get. Being in the passenger seat though, no matter how well Liam was driving, that almost hurt Theo physically, even when the front seat was worlds better than the back seat, where he’d never rode again since the day he’d shot over the edge of a bridge in one.

"I didn’t think you could get any more white than normal," Liam commented as they arrived at Beacon Hills High on Saturday afternoon, another lacrosse game waiting to be won.

"I’m not a very good co-driver," Theo confessed, not that it hadn’t been obvious.

"Yeah no shit," Liam replied, "you almost ripped the doorhandle out with how tight you were holding it."

"I know you have every right to get snarky with me," Theo pronounced shakily, "but could you please do so over something else."

"Are you okay?" Liam wanted to know. Theo hated the sudden change in his voice, hated how
obvious his discomfort must be, but he couldn´t bring himself to brush it off with the typical Theo kind of smile that made people forget their question over his pretty face.

"Can you give me a second? I´ll be right there with you guys," Theo tried to sound casual, hoping Liam would join Nolan and Corey who were just walking towards the locker room entrance.

"Sure," Liam nodded, walking away slowly, hesitantly, but walking away.

When Theo entered the locker room a couple of minutes later, he had his facade back on, greeting the team almost as enthusiastically as Nolan greeted him back, orange sprinkles dancing over his bare arms and shoulders, making the skinny boy look like he was moving more than he actually was. Corey was showing a bunch of different colors on his legs, but also a green pattern across his chest that Theo believed he´d seen before, so it was possible that it was a permanent mark. As usual before playing lacrosse, many of the players were sporting red, but not as strongly as the saturday before. Even the captain must be quite relaxed, the line on his back being rather thin, the edges blurred into a lighter tone. His face looked a little grey though, but Theo wasn´t sure that was an actual color showing or if maybe the light was just weird. Also, he didn´t want to stare too long.

Theo changed quickly, partly because he´d joined the rest late, and partly because he still felt strange in a locker room full of dudes who were capable of showing colors, never knowing whether he attracted more looks because of his pale skin or the tattoos covering almost his entire upper body.

"What´s that wolf all about?"

Theo didn´t realize the question was directed at him until he looked up and saw Corey standing next to him with a curious expression on his face.

"What do you mean? It´s a wolf," Theo answered in confusion, shrugging the shoulder that was bearing the image of the predator.

"What does it mean?" Corey wanted to know. "Why did you choose a wolf?"

"Honestly, the wolf is just the coolest animal there is," Theo told him, because there was probably some kind of law against being rude to Corey. "Dangerous and shit, but like, in a silent way."

"Looks cool," Corey complimented him, "somehow doesn´t really fit the rest of the picture," he gestured towards Theo´s exposed back, "but that kind of makes it even cooler."

"Thanks," Theo answered. He didn´t think he´d ever had a conversation like that. He wondered what that said about his life.

The game was hard, but not as hard as sitting through the second hand embarassment of Coach´s pep talk before it. Two minutes into the game, it started raining relentlessly, softening up the playing field so that the players would sink a little bit into the ground with every step, soaking their gear and jerseys so that they carried more weight on their shoulders than usual, obstructing their view. You could hear heavy swearing every once in a while because of a misdirected pass or someone slipping in the mud. From the outside, it must have looked like both teams just wanted to get this over with, get back and under the shower where they would complain about how they hadn ´t had a fair chance because of that damn weather.

For Theo, these were the ideal circumstances for lacrosse. He was still fast, even on the messed up ground, and with all the little tricks he and Liam had been practicing all week, it was only helpful that they couldn´t be seen clearly, at least not before it was too late anyway. In the middle of the
rain, guys shouting all around him, everyone´s jerseys more brown from dirt than anything else, Theo felt more like a warrior than a sports player. And this was how they won: the rain pushing Theo to his absolute best, Liam soon realizing that they were almost invincible like this, screaming and shouting to drag the whole team along, completely exhausting himself to get that one pass and score that one goal that they needed in the end. The lacrosse team of Beacon Hills High left the field with an atmosphere among them that could only be achieved by a win well fought for.

"Fucking hell, that was awesome," Liam exclaimed as he got undressed to unravel his own private rainstorm dancing beneath the skin of his torso, the droplets shining in so many colors it made Theo´s head a little dizzy. The wet strands of hair stuck to Liam´s forehead didn´t exactly help with that either.

"We should go celebrate tonight," Corey suggested with a huge grin plastered from one ear to the other.

"Fuck yes we should," Nolan agreed, "what do you say, Captain? The sinema?"

"Sinema sounds good," Liam replied with a smile, "but you call me Captain again, I´ll make sure you won´t even get in."

"Theo calls you Captain all the time," Nolan argued.

Theo couldn´t contain his smile. Nolan was right of course, he simply hadn´t been aware of the team noticing that so clearly.

"That´s something different," Liam stated without further explanation.

"Different how?" Nolan wanted to know.

"I have a special permit," Theo told him with a wink that made Liam roll his eyes.

"After that game you just played?" Corey intervened, "you better."

"Sinema it is," Liam tried putting an end to the discussion, "are you coming, Theo?" He asked that with a look back over his shoulder at Theo while he was walking over into the shower with nothing on except a towel thrown around his neck.

It took Theo a second to realize that Liam was talking about the club, not the shower, although he was already wildly throwing away articles of clothing so that he could join the shower quickly and not miss anything. No, wait. There were far too many other guys present to have this kind of thoughts. Still, letting the hot water comb his hair into his face, Theo couldn´t help himself and risked a hundred little glances at muscular calves, broad shoulders and chest hair. He tried to memorize every last image the colors were drawing onto Liam´s body, not stopping at his buttockmecks, which looked strange, because the skin there was way paler than the rest of his body, but the colors shone through all the same.

Looking at Liam, no matter how many times Theo forced himself to avert his gaze, was slowly but surely awaking the very own predator lurking in the darkest depths of his broken soul. For a moment, it almost physically hurt to restrain the animal from snapping and jumping at the Captain, swallowing him whole. But not for nothing was Theo the master of fake indifference, a quality that had been his only protection against the world many times before. He turned around and willed his blood to keep flowing calmly, reminding himself that any sign of physical attraction to a team member could easily mean the end of his time in said team.

Being gay was a delicate topic when you played on a sports team as Theo knew. Even when the
other players were tolerant, you never knew what ideas they could get when you showered with them four times a week. Theo assumed the guys on this team were cool, considering that Corey was out and one of the most popular guys among them, but that was different. Corey had a boyfriend outside of the team. Nobody would suspect him to check the others out or anything. Ever since he’d become clear about his sexuality, Theo had liked to announce it directly and proudly, offense being his best (and only) defense in this world. But he’d never really cared what people had thought about him anyway, so why bother feeling shame?

Back in Beacon Hills, things seemed a little different though. After only a few weeks, he felt like a part of the team, and that was a thing far too precious for him to go and risk breaking. Plus, he was currently living with Liam, who he’d had a difficult enough start with, and who on top of that, had definitely freaked out a tiny little bit when Theo had been so lightly dressed in his bed the first morning. Theo probably still wouldn’t have lied when someone had asked him, but as long as nobody did, he was in no big rush to tell either.

At around eleven pm, almost the entire lacrosse team stood in line to get into the sinema. Corey had brought Mason, and a couple of other guys their girlfriends, but most of them hadn’t, instead anticipating "a wild hunt for something bangable" as Nolan had put it. It felt weird for Theo to discover one of the few places in Beacon Hills he didn’t know from the last time he’d lived in town. It made him wonder which had changed more, the place itself or him, the kid who was now looking for things he hadn’t cared about back then in places that hadn’t occurred to him.

There was a lot to take in as he entered the club behind Liam. Dance music drumming onto his body and somehow, thorough it, the sound having the exact opposite effect on him than the music he usually listened to through his headphones, which was to make him want to move. The flickering lights throwing shadows and then spotlights on people that made them look a lot less real and therefore, a lot more peaceful. The air burning with energy and exuberance and a pleasent tension, making his skin prickle in excitement.

Before anyone could get very far into the big hall, a tall guy with dark blonde hair and a smug smile on his lips stepped in front of the group. The dude was fucking ripped, which Theo only noticed in the absence of a shirt on his body.

"Hey there, little hunter," the guy greeted Nolan at first, then nodding at Liam and the rest of them, "pleasure to finally see you guys again." His eyes landed on Theo then, wandering down his entire figure and then up to his face again. "Fresh meat, hugh?" the guy asked with a raised eyebrow.

Theo had been silent for a moment, but only because he wasn’t used to being approached like this... so shamelessly direct and hungrily. Normally, that would have been his role. He didn’t like how the words felt when he was the one hearing instead of saying them. "I’m neither fresh nor any other kind of meat," he growled warningly.

Liam stepped in between Theo and that impossible dude. "He’s not," he agreed, "this is Theo. Theo, this is Brett. Don’t worry, he’s an ass to everyone."

"Wow Liam," Brett commented, "finally dumped your girl, hugh? Told you a boyfriend would suit you much better..."

"What?" Liam all but shouted. "No! Theo’s a friend."

Theo was unable to contribute anything to the conversation, trying to make sense of the sting to his chest at the vehemence with which Liam had denied a possible relationship between them, but also kind of liking the sound of the captain calling him a friend. Also, HAD SOMEONE JUST CALLED HIM LIAM´S BOYFRIEND? (Nope, Theo wasn’t freaking out at all. Not at all. Nope.)
"Well, in that case, lucky me," Brett winked at Theo, who could only take a step back and cross his arms in front of his body. Brett was without doubt very good looking, but something about the way he talked to him was leaving a nasty taste in Theo’s mouth.

"Leave him the fuck alone, Brett," Liam snapped, "he doesn’t know your stupid games and to me it doesn’t look like he wants to."

Theo could have defended himself, but he was too busy watching the red expanding across Liam’s neck as he spoke.

"Okay guys, how about we all just calm down now," Mason intervened and Theo was genuinely grateful. The situation had gotten far too aggressive far too quickly. "Look, Brett," Mason said pointing to a group of girls so young Theo wondered how they’d gotten into the place, "looks like there´s enough fresh meat present for you to play with." Brett simply shrugged his massive shoulders and walked away as if to prove those toys were as good as any.

"And Liam," Mason added, his voice almost too quiet for Theo to understand, "I think you can turn off your daddy mode now."

Liam looked at his best friend angrily at first, but then he shook it off, relaxed his face and went for drinks, the red almost gone as he walked towards the bar.

"Wow, that was..." Theo didn’t know how to call it.

"Intense," Mason finished the sentence for him.

"Yeah," Theo nodded in agreement.

"I’m Mason by the way." He offered Theo a hand looked like it was powdered in blue and yellow, mixing into green where they collided.

"Theo," he answered as he shook it.

"I know," Mason smiled. "Corey has mentioned the incredible new guy once or twice."

The situation was just about to get awkward, because Theo had no idea what to make of the information that Corey had talked about him to his boyfriend. Also, this was Liam’s best friend and that shouldn’t have mattered, but it did. Just a little too late to pretend they’d had an effortless conversation, Liam saved Theo by bringing beers. Theo felt like it was just the right night to get absolutely smashed. Ever since his first attempt to drown the monster in his head in alcohol, Theo had loved the feeling. The burning in his throat was just a necessary inconvenience to get to the point where he forgot he was supposed to be lonely and miserable, where he cared too little to loathe himself the usual amount, where he enjoyed the things his sober self never allowed him to.

After his third drink, Theo was slowly but surely getting to that point. He could feel Brett’s eyes on him as he was dancing and that could have scared him off, but then again, he was probably looking at Liam the exact same way. His captain was half-drunk himself, his eyes closed most of the time while he was letting the music and the bodies surrounding him carry him over the dance floor, moving his hips in a way that made Theo wonder how anyone in the room was possibly able to look anywhere else but Liam’s ass. God, he looked delicious.

Theo was dancing mere feet away from Liam, continuing to swallow down burning liquor, but drinking in the sight in front of him more than anything. A small brunette girl appeared quite close to him eventually, synchronizing her movements with his, smiling at him when he looked up at her, biting her bottom lip. She was pretty, blue eyes and light brown hair, pink pouty lips and
somehow not looking like girls usually did in a club like the sinema. She wore a simple dark blue t- shirt, surprisingly not showing much of her skin, but not entirely hiding the red patterns crawling up and down her arms.

When Liam moved a little further away, Theo spontaneously gripped the girl’s hips and turned her around with him, pulling her closer so that he could hide his face in the hair falling onto her shoulders while checking him out. He shouldn’t have been surprised when she held onto his shoulders tightly, letting their temples touch every few seconds. But Theo was too distracted by Liam to think straight, so he was in fact very surprised, or rather shocked when she suddenly pressed her lips on his mouth. *Stupid*, he thought, *stupid fucking idiot*, but he still didn’t pull away. It was his fault. How was she supposed to know he wasn’t into her but instead just using her to watch a boy dance in peace?

Before his buzzed brain could catch up, Theo was kissing the girl back. It was definitely not the right thing to do, and Theo knew that, but it didn’t even feel like truly kissing her. She was a girl, after all. He’d been dancing with her without it meaning anything. He’d been touching her without it meaning anything. Now he was simply touching her with his lips. But then there was a tongue in his mouth and that was it. Theo retreated abruptly, trying his best to laugh it off in a way that said *look at us crazy teenagers, making out with a complete stranger, haha.* She laughed with him for a moment, but her sudden urge to use the bathroom and the fact that she never returned from there most likely meant that she got the hint.

Five minutes later, Theo was hit by the cold air of the night as he left the sinema to catch his breath, clear his mind. The fact that a girl had kissed him was not that bad of course, and it was certainly not like that had never happened to him before. But now everybody who knew him in Beacon Hills thought he was into girls (except said girl maybe) and that was a thing he didn’t know how to handle. This was destroying all his hopes that he wouldn’t have to say it, that the guys were just going to get it, and go with it. Now he was going to have to come out to them eventually, and he hated the feeling that gave him. Like he had something so confess, when in reality, being gay was the one thing about him he probably shouldn’t be ashamed of. If only that girl had left him alone in front of his teammates. He was so bad at reading the signs when they came from the opposite sex. Damn, heterosexuality sure had a way of making his life harder.

"Theo?" Liam asked breathlessly, "What are you doing out here?"

"Nothing," Theo replied, "just catching some air."

"You should have brought your jacket man," Liam commented on the goosebumps covering Theo’s arms.

"Back to daddy mode, hugh?" Theo shot back, secretly loving it.

Liam ignored it. "Okay so, the others are mostly gone, Mason and Corey are doing I-don’t-want-to-know-what in Mason’s car, so I was thinking about heading home," Liam suggested.

"Fine," Theo agreed, "but we have to walk."

"What? No! I’m good, I can drive," Liam claimed.

"First of all, you can’t," Theo argued, "and secondly, I’m too drunk to pretend like I’m not dying in the passenger seat right now, so I’ll walk."

"Are you kidding?" Liam wanted to know. "It’s fucking freezing and it’s going to take us at least half an hour to get to my place."
"Jesus Liam, I just can´t drive with you right now okay?" Why did this guy always have to start a discussion over everything? Theo didn´t feel like explaining himself, but he was going to have it his way this time.

"Fine," Liam finally shrugged, something green blooming behind his ear, almost invisible in the dark of the night, but not to someone who was paying attention.

They started walking, at first not talking much except for the fight about which way to take. Theo wasn´t sure how offended Liam was by his distrust in him as a driver, so he kept his mouth shut for a while, or at least as long as he could stand the silence.

"Why didn´t you bring your girlfriend tonight?" Theo then asked.

Liam threw him a look as if to say he didn´t understand the question.

"Or is that another thing we´re not at the right point in our relationship for to discuss?" Theo added.

"Oh no," Liam answered, "you can ask me anything you want as soon as you beat me at literally any video game. Remember when you promised me to kick my ass right before I killed you another hundred times? I knew you wouldn´t keep that promise."

"I fucking will, asshole," Theo growled, but there was no edge in his voice to make it sound threateningly. "Still, what about Hayden? I haven´t even met her. Oh my God, are you keeping her away from me on purpose?" Theo placed a hand over his heart in fake shock. "Liam, are you ashamed of me?" He laughed, trying to hide the little truth behind his joke.

"Yeah man, I was afraid she was going to leave me if she´d smell your dirty socks in my room," Liam played along. Now they were both laughing.

They calmed down. "It´s fine if you don´t want to talk about it," Theo said, because no matter how many jokes you made, there had still been a serious undertone to their conversation, and it was obvious that Liam wasn´t comfortable with it.

"That´s not it," Liam admitted. "Even if I wanted to discuss this with you, or anyone, I wouldn´t know what to say."

Theo fell silent. That had not really been an explanation of anything, but he still got it. There were many things about Theo Raeken, about his past and the demons it had created inside him that he´d worked so hard on burying that he didn´t know how to ever bring them up again, even if he should ever be given the miracle of someone who would understand, or at least accept them.

"What about the girl from earlier?" Liam asked.

"What about her?" Theo asked back.

"That´s what I´m asking you," Liam responded, eyebrows raised in expectation.

"Nahh," Theo put it off, "she wasn´t my type."

"Not your type?"

"No."

Theo´s heart began hammering against his ribcage. He wished that Liam would ask him what his
type was, and he prayed that he would let it go at the same time. He wanted an opportunity, not to say "You are, Liam" but to at least casually drop that boys were.

Liam didn´t ask.

Theo almost told him anyway.

*You know that I´m gay, right?*

*My type just normally doesn´t have breasts.*

*I would actually rather Brett think I´m your boyfriend than you think I want to be some girl´s boyfriend.*

He could have just said it, but then Theo remembered he was currently sleeping in Liam´s bed next to him at nights. Would he be risking that by telling him? Just because Liam had an openly gay best friend didn´t mean he was cool with sharing a bed with one.

Once again, Theo Raeken decided to keep what was about him to himself, as uncertain as ever whether he was protecting himself with that strategy or the world around him. But whatever he was doing, he thought later, at least he was doing it lying in a warm bed, the soft blanket hiding from the outside where his and Liam´s knees were touching.

But when Theo woke up the next morning, Liam was gone, the right side of the bed cold as if he hadn´t even laid there in the first place, which could only mean that Theo had gone too far.

Chapter End Notes

*ok so theo pov chapters are always kinda hard for me, idk why, but i hope this was okay :D*

*and yes i admit i only called this "friends" because that´s what liam said when he introduced theo to brett bc let´s be real theo thinks about liam 24/7 but not as a friend :)*

*most importantly, their knees were TOUCHINGGGG and who knows what else happened that night...*
On Sunday morning after the team’s night out at the cinema, Liam was sitting in his kitchen having breakfast with Mason. His best friend had appeared surprisingly, and above all surprisingly early at his door.

"Is Theo still asleep?" Mason wanted to know with his mouth half full of croissant.

"Yes, why?" Liam asked back in suspicion. He put a hand on his knee under the table, the knee he believed was still yellow, whatever that meant. "You didn’t come here because of him, did you?"

"No," Mason confirmed, "I was hoping to talk to you alone."

"Should I be worried?" Liam had a feeling he should be. Mason was showing little yellow spots all over his face, and somehow their restlessness beneath his skin made Liam nervous.

"Of course not," Mason shook his head. "I just... couldn’t help but notice you didn’t bring Hayden last night. Is everything alright between you two?"
Liam groaned. "Why does everybody think they need to ask me that?"

"Who else did ask you?" Mason wanted to know.

The red streak down Liam’s spine came alive, twitching and twining and most likely glowing through the back of his shirt. "Theo," he replied shortly.

"What did you tell him?"

Now Liam’s hands were red, too. "That there’s nothing I can say about that."

"I’m not sure I can follow," Mason admitted.

"That makes two of us," Liam pointed out in an annoyed tone. God, he hated discussing things he was unsure about. It was hard to make good points without so much as a little bit of conviction.

"Okay, let’s start here: Are you two still together?"

"Yes," Liam nodded. "At least that’s the last thing I know."

"Okay," Mason processed this information, his brain clearly working on the next step to figure out what was going on. "When was the last time you saw her?"

"Uhmmm," Liam had to think hard about that. Harder than he should have. "Probably at school some time this week."

"Not what I meant Liam," argued, "when was the last time you saw her outside of school? Like the two of you doing something together."

"I think a little more than a week ago."

Mason looked... impressed, but not in a good way. He pressed his lips into a thin line before he seperated them to speak again. "Wow," he said, "and since then? Have you talked at all?"

"She called me twice," Liam stated.

"But you didn’t invite her to movie night on wednesday?"

Liam hadn’t even thought about asking her to come. Sure, it had been the four of them the last couple of times they had had movie nights, Mason, Corey, Hayden and him, but that didn’t mean he had to invite her to the next one, too.

"Ugh, no," Liam admitted. The red on his hands was turning purple.

"So.. you´ve been avoiding her for a little more than a week and you don’t want her to come to movie night," Mason summed up, "don’t take this the wrong way man, but do you not want to see her or do you not want her to meet Theo?"

"What?" Liam didn’t follow. "What does Theo have to do with this?"

"My point exactly!" Mason stated. "Does he?"

"What? No!" Liam imagined Theo and Hayden meeting. He wondered why the thought had never crossed his mind before. The purple turned into grey. This conversation needed to end, or he was
going to explode with black dust and red blood.

"Well, it would be easier for me to believe you if your colors weren´t completely freaking out right now..."

"Mason, you know damn well I can´t control them," Liam growled.

"Okay, okay," Mason held up his hands in surrender, "calm down man."

And weirdly enough, Liam did calm down, the grey being pushed back by an army of red spots and stars.

"Look, I know I have to make my mind up about Hayden," he spoke quietly, his low voice sounding defeated.

"Why does that sound like you´re preparing for a funeral?" Mason asked skeptically.

Liam knew exactly why. He still wasn´t sure what had suddenly come between him and the girl he´d been dating for two years. But he was very aware that his next conversation with her would probably not leave them both happy. He´d thought he´d been over hurting people. He´d struggled a lot with his IED in earlier years of his youth, and one thing that had never stopped was the guilt about all the collateral damage. The broken noses, the hurt feelings, the words he´d used to stab through hearts. What he´d loved about Hayden was her faith in him to do better. But all that was faltering now. If only a couple of bruises were all he was about to do to her. She´d forgiven him for that before.

"Let me just... think about it, alright?" Liam begged.

"Don´t leave her hanging too long," Mason told him, "she knows something´s up."

"I´ll talk to her before wednesday," Liam promised. His mark was still itchy, his palms sweaty, but a tiny little part of him felt relieved about finally having this conversation, about his best friend noticing that things weren´t right between them, about getting things off his chest. It was plain wrong, because the ballast he was about to throw away would hit Hayden right in the face, but he couldn´t help the longing for it to happen anyway. He only just now realized that that was how he felt about their relationship.

"What´s on Wednesday?" Theo asked as he came down the stairs wearing nothing but a pair of boxers and the white t-shirt Liam had given him on the first night.


"Good Morning."

"We´re having a movie night on Wednesday," Liam informed his house guest in a tone that was atypically free of emotion.

"Sweet," Theo responded as he was reaching for a cup to fill it to the brim with black coffee. "Although I suspect you have a terrible taste in movies, Captain," he added with his signature smirk.

Liam blushed. Wait. What? Was that color? Or was that his blood rushing to his cheeks? If it was color, why did it feel so hot? Liam was too confused to retort anything.

"Look at that," Mason answered instead, "he knows you so well already."
"Does that mean you and Corey pick the movies?" Theo wanted to know.

"No no no," Mason made clear, "Corey can´t be trusted with such an important decision any more than Liam can. I usually bring a couple of DVDs and whatever makes those two idiots moan the loudest, that´s my choice."

"Sounds like a solid system," Theo agreed approvingly.

"I think it´s about time Corey and I rebelled against that stupid fucking system," Liam threw in. He was used to Mason talking like that, and with Mason, those kind of joked never seemed insulting, so he didn´t mind them. But somehow he felt a little uneasy with Mason and Theo both talking like that, his newly found roommate probably encouraged to tease him even more than usual, not that he was in very desperate need for any further encouragement.

"You two can drink all the beer and eat all the popcorn as usual," Mason out him off, earning a short laugh from Theo over his coffee.

Other than the jokes on his expense, Liam was actually glad that Theo and Mason seemed to get along. He´d been worried about Theo´s relationship with the other teammates at first, sensing right from the start that the guy was not necessarily easy to deal with, at least not always. But now that they were basically living together, it did in fact mean a lot what Mason thought about him.

Later that day, Liam was sitting on the thick carpet in his bedroom, in back leaned against the bed, his head propped up against a pile of pillows, at least one of them smelling much more like Theo than himself, even though they had all been on his side of the mattress. He was shooting at monters and people randomly with the controler in his hands, trying to let the digital massacre in front of his eyes take his mind off the Hayden-issue.

Theo was taking a shower, which he liked to do a lot, sometimes up to three times a day, but this time it might have had something to do with his still terrible gaming skills and his wish to avoid another crushing defeat. It wasn´t like Liam minded that, not with the way his bathroom smelled every time Theo was done in there, adding a scent to the hot, damp air that he certainly liked, one that he couldn´t describe with any other word than "Theo", wondering where it came from when the soap he used was Liam´s own.

Liam had just killed another four of his virtual enemies when Theo stepped into his sight with a light blue towel wrapped around his hips, so low that the capital V beneath his abs was very well visible, pointing like a dart into the direction where... where Liam was definitely not supposed to be looking. He looked at Theo´s bare chest instead. Was that better? Probably not by much... But at least that way, he could tell himself it was the tattoos that caught his attention.

"Have you seen my grey sweater?" Theo asked incidentally while putting on socks. What kind of psychopath did you have to be to put on your socks first, Liam wondered. He didn´t give a shit about any sweater right now. He was busy trailing the waterfall from Theo´s right shoulder across his chest, entering the roaring waves of a river right above his heart. It occurred to him that maybe, Theo´s tattoos were more alive, more of a window into his soul than any colors could have been.

"Seriously Theo, your grey sweater? I think you´re going to have to be a little more specific if you want me to be any help."

"What´s that supposed to mean?" Theo asked, looking strangely offended as he turned his eyes to Liam.

"You own like, all the grey clothing articles in America," Liam answered. It was an exaggeration,
but not entirely misguided.

"Excuse me?" Theo had a hilariously baffled look on his face. "I have exactly one grey sweater. The other ones are black, matte black, light grey, middle grey, grey-blue, dark blue, green-blue and bordeaux. And they say I know nothing about colors." He sighed dramatically in complaint about Liam’s lack of expertise.

Liam on the other hand, was still focused on the figure running up and down in front of him, digging through piles of clothes and school stuff and god knows what, trying to find the right piece of fabric to cover the big angel on his stomach with. The angel’s head with its big halo sat right at Theo’s sternum, the body reaching down to the navel, the wings so big the were folding around Theo’s torso, their tips visible on both sides of his muscled back. The heavenly creature looked frighteningly real, almost like it was stepping out of the boy who bore the tattoo, holding a baby in its arms as if to protect it, the peaceful image painfully disrupted by the fangs coming out from the angel’s mouth and the threateningly wild eyes.

Liam shuddered. He hadn’t gotten a chance to look closely enough before, but now that he had, he found that this must be the strangest tattoo he’d ever seen. Theo Raeken was a mystery in many ways, new questions coming up with every piece of information Liam was learning about him, a human snowball system of secrecy, and this might have been just another one of those snowballs, but it was one that caught Liam cold and completely by surprise.

"I apologize," Liam replied sarcastically, "clearly, I’m not qualified to assist you with your wardrobe." He might have had a weird feeling in his gut, but fuck him if he let Theo notice.

"No you’re not," Theo agreed, "also, how many times do I have to clean up your room before you learn how to keep it clean for more than half an hour?"

"I told you you were wasting your time," Liam argued. He’d given Theo a fair warning.

"Honestly, I thought that was just the usual thing people say when they invite you to their place. They’re always like ‘Sorry for the mess.’ or ‘I didn’t have time to clean up.’ or something, but normally that’s just politeness. With you it’s simply ‘Welcome to the pig stall.’" He picked up some black fabric and pulled it over his head, messing up the wet strands of hazel brown hair.

"If you think that insults me, you’re in for a disappointment," Liam informed him, returning his focus to the tv screen and his murder mission now that Theo had at least put on a tank.

"Sadly, I don’t," Theo responded, "I guess I do know you a little bit after all."

"Great, now put on some pants and get over here so I can slaughter you, or did you think you could talk your way out of that?"

"You wish, Captain," Theo declared as he finished dressing himself.

"I seriously cannot believe you," Liam exclaimed, "you are the worst ever player of this game and you still manage to sound like you just won the world championship last week."

"There’s a fucking world championship for this shit?"

"So not the point, Theo." Liam rolled his eyes and handed him the second controler.

"I don’t know if you’ve noticed that about me," Theo said as he sat down right next to Liam, "but I like to generally ignore the actual points of things."

"Believe it or not," Liam answered, "I have."
It didn’t take very long for Theo lose another round, and it didn’t take any longer for him to relax into a sitting position where his and Liam’s legs were touching again, making Liam wonder if it was just warmth that came with the connection or if the colors were there again, radiating from his knee into the rest of his body underneath his clothes. Theo was a weird dude who clearly had some issues. He’d appeared in Beacon Hills after the school year had already started, all alone and just a little too old to still be in High School. He’d lived in his truck until Liam had invited him to stay at his place. Then there were the tattoos. And the lack of color. And the way he never really answered questions about him directly, either joking his way out or changing the subject. But ultimately, by far the strangest thing about Theo Raeken was his ability to die a hundred video game deaths with nothing more than a shrug for a reaction, never getting angry, never getting better. He seemed inhuman sometimes.

Still, in spite of everything that should have distressed Liam about his new roommate, he found himself laughing at the ridiculous jokes he made, getting used to his little quirks, letting Theo into his personal space and not feeling uncomfortable about it, not seeing red like he probably was supposed to. And then one thought hit him completely out of the blue, being that this must mean he liked Theo. It was crazy, mostly because it was so random.

Liam liked Mason because he was the most down-to-earth person he knew and a hell of a supportive best friend, telling him the truth even when it was ugly, never being mad at his angry outbursts afterwards. He liked Corey (and that had been a rough journey some time ago) because he was a nice and funny guy, the best thing that you could wish for for your best friend, because he was unapologetically smart and loyal and sensitive, better than Liam in many ways, but never an ass about it. He liked Scott because he’d taken him under his wings when he’d been just a stupid freshman, helping him through the worst times of his IED, always reminding him that life was good once you turned off the blinding rage. He liked Stiles because he was fucking smart and funny, and for the longest time, Stiles had been the only person allowed to make fun of him (up to three times a week). He’d falled in love with Hayden for her strength of character, her courage, for the little things she’d done to make his days without realizing.

What exactly it was that he liked Theo for, Liam didn’t know. They were friends now, fuck, they even shared a bed, they were kind of close friends, so why was it so hard to think of a few reasons for that? Liam didn’t know, he simply couldn’t get this straight, and for some reason, that made him angry, made him red, but not enough to get him into murder mode with Theo playing against him.

On Monday morning, when Liam walked out of the door first and saw the car parked in the driveway, he remembered the little situation they’d had on saturday. I’m not a very good co-driver, Theo had told him, but that had been an obvious understatement. He had no idea what the deal was with Theo and the passenger seat, and he didn’t dare to ask, so he simply offered the older boy the car keys, earning a surprised raise of Theo’s eyebrows.

"You don’t want to drive?" Theo asked carefully.

"Mostly, I don’t want you to die while I do," Liam responded.

Theo was quiet. I shouldn’t have said that. Liam could have punched himself in the face. What if Theo had had an accident? Oh God, what if somebody actually had died in a car that he’d been in? Liam was struggling for the right words to take it back, but couldn’t find them, couldn’t bring himself to try, afraid that he’d somehow make it worse, because if someone had a talent for that, it was definitely him.

But Theo grabbed the keys from his cold fingers with a smile, mouthing a silent "thanks" that was
heard, even if not acoustically.

The week started exhaustingly boring, chemistry class and tons of homework torturing Liam, the challenge to avoid Hayden both in the hallway at school and in his woozy thoughts getting harder with every minute. By wednesday morning, he’d had enough.

"Mason," he called in relief as he saw his best friend standing at his locker before first period.

"What’s up man," Mason greeted back, "you look intense."

"You were right," Liam declared shortly.

"I know, thanks," Mason replied, "but what exactly are we talking about?"

"I don’t want Theo and Hayden to meet," he confessed. He hadn’t meant to say it this directly, it sounded way too harsh spoken out loud, but it had been out before he could stop it.

"Okay," Mason answered calmly, "why not? Don’t you think they’ll like each other?"

"On the contrary. I think they would. That’s kind of the whole thing I don’t like about the thought."

"I think you’re going to have to explain this to me, Liam."

"I don’t even know," Liam whined, "it’s just weird to think about them in one room together. In my house."

Liam knew something was going on behind Mason’s contorted forehead. He could practically see the cogwheels running.

"Liam, what exactly is going on between you and Theo?"

"What?" Liam was genuinely and deeply confused.

"What’s the deal with you two?"

"There’s no deal," Liam denied.

"Are you sure?"

"Mason, what the fuck are you talking about?"

"About you acting all weird since Theo joined the lacrosse team?" Mason suggested. "About you inviting a random dude you didn’t even know to basically live with you? Don’t take this personally, but you’re not exactly the warm and selflessly caring type. About whatever problem you seem to have with Hayden since Theo came into the picture?"

Liam stayed quiet for two reasons. Firstly, because Mason’s words had become atypically heated. Secondly, because he hadn’t realized that the one big change that had come before all the little changes was Theo Raeken.

"Looks like I’ve struck a chord," Mason mumbled.

Liam still didn’t speak. He tried gathering his thoughts. He didn’t even want to know what he looked like, standing in the hallway all still and quiet, but completely freaking the fuck out on the inside.
"Liam?" Mason asked, reaching out with one hand, his voice softer now, which made Liam mad, not at Mason, but at himself for looking like you had to go soft on him.

"What do you want me to say, Mason? That he has me all confused and freaked out and wondering if I still want what I thought I always wanted? Well, here you go, not that that brings us any farther." He covered his mouth with one hand immediately. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

"I think it does," Mason replied.

"How?"

Mason looked at him for a moment, apparently considering his next question very carefully. "Has anything... happened between you and Theo?"

"Not since our fight about me crashing his car," Liam responded.

"Liam, that’s not what I mean..."

"What?" How on earth was he able to get any more confused than he’d already been? And why was Mason making everything more complicated instead of easier?

Mason didn’t explain, he just waited for Liam to get it.

It took a minute.

And then it was there.

"Oh. OH! You mean..." Liam was literally gasping for air at this point. "No. Oh my God no. NO! Nothing like that happened. Definitely not." Red, red, red.

"Well, that was a hell of a no," Mason remarked.

Liam jumped when the bell rang, bringing him back to reality with a tangled mess of thoughts in his head that didn’t seem to fit in it.

"I have history," was all he managed to say.

"Hey Liam," Mason called one more time before he walked away. "Have you ever thought about it happening?"

"No!" he all but yelled, but couldn’t see Mason’s reaction who was already heading the other direction, leaving Liam alone with the urge to neglect, to tell someone how ridiculous the question had been, just so he could hear himself say it.

It took Liam all of history and maths class to calm down and realize that there obviously was something he had to do, had to get out of the way. The thought that the worst part of this day lay still ahead made his head hurt, but there was no way delay this any further. He had to face Hayden.

He texted her if they could meet some time that week because he was fucking scared of just walking up to her. He didn’t know where to start. All he knew was that he had to. Liam was a little relieved when Hayden didn’t text back right away, her lacking reaction allowing him to push the whole thought of their conversation away, preferably to some day in the far future, but realistically, at least not that wednesday.

Of course, the universe turned out to let down Liam Dunbar once again when during lunch break, a thin but strong hand grabbed him by the arm and pulled him around a corner and into a storage
room before he could fight it.

All of her appearance, her white skin, the long dark hair, even hair big brown eyes seemed like an image he´d almost forgotten, and he certainly felt guilty for feeling that way, but ultimately, there was nothing he could do to change it. This was inevitable. Liam had to get it over with. He swallowed hard, trying not to look her in the eye.

"What the fuck, Liam, was that text supposed to mean?" she demanded to know. She was clearly agitated, hair voice trembling beneath the harsh words. If they still had one thing in common, it was their inability to suppress their colors showing, especially red, which was running up and down her arms and her neck, painting her red like a traffic light, warning him to stop as long as he still could hit the breaks. Except he couldn´t.

"I´m sorry," he said, because it was all he could think. He wasn´t going to hit the breaks, he was going to run her over full speed and she probably knew it already. He was sorry. He didn´t want to hurt her. He didn´t want her to hate him for hurting her. He wanted an easy way out, but found himself trapped.

"What exactly are you apologizing for?" she asked.

Damn, what a good question. "Look, that´s kind of hard to explain..." he started, but was quickly cut off by her.

"Oh, is it? Try me. Explain to me why you´ve been avoiding me for the last two weeks."

Liam owed her an honest answer, no matter how bad he was at it. "Because I didn´t know what to say to you."

"Newsflash," she spit into his face, "literally everything would have been better than the silent treatment."

"I know," he nodded, "I´m sorry. I just... I don´t know... I just needed to sort this out... like, things are suddenly different and... I don´t know."

"You mean things between us?" she asked, now very calm, her voice thin, her heart hanging over a cliff by a thread he was about to cut off.

He almost couldn´t say it, but he had to. "Yeah."

She was on the verge of crying, trying to put herself together, not daring to speak out of fear of her voice breaking. All Liam could think about was how to calm her down after this was going to be over, how to get her out of the small room and out of the school building in this state. He was an asshole for thinking that and he was aware of that.

"What changed?" she finally managed to press out.

"I don´t even know myself," he answered, because he would have rather shot himself in the head than repeated to her what Mason had said that morning. "I just know that... it´s not like it used to be. And it used to be good. And I don´t think I can live with it being less good."

"Are you breaking up with me?" she wanted to know, the first tear making its way down her reddened face.

He didn´t want to say it. These were not the words he would have used. They seemed way to hard, too final. But in the end, he knew that any other answer than a no without hesitation was a clear yes
to that question. "I´m sorry," he told her again, and that was when she starting trembling all over her body, the tears streaming incessantly, her hands trying to hide her face.

Liam looked down at his hands as if he expected to find the broken pieces of her heart in them. He might not have been in love with her the way he´d used to, but her tears were still killing him, making him want to cry too, making him want to tell her he didn´t mean it, he still wanted to be with her, he would still make her happy if only she stopped crying.

He didn´t say it. He simply stood there giving her the time to be sad, to be heartbroken, occasionally mumbling another apology, waiting for her to get angry like he knew she would eventually, waiting for her to call him an asshole, maybe even slap him in the face for treating her like shit for two weeks. He knew he deserved it.

But Hayden punished Liam in the worst way she could have: by not getting angry. By crying, and crying, and not stopping, while his increasing guilt was dragging him down like a rock. He later realized they had been in that room for almost an hour, most of the time taken up by her uncontrollable sobbing and his suffering along. It had been torturous, which somehow made him feel a little less awful, because at least he wasn´t okay while she was broken.

He quickly typed in a text to Theo: Still have the car keys? Take the car. I´ll be home late.

He would find a ride, or take the bus, or walk home. He simply couldn´t see Theo right now. Breaking up with his girlfriend of two years had been bad enough for one day, and Liam didn´t have any energy left to even think about what Theo´s role in this whole mess was. It was all too much.

He didn´t want to leave Hayden and then drive home with Theo, even if it wasn´t like that. He didn´t want to be asked what was wrong with him, and he knew the question was inevitable with how bad he was at hiding his emotions, both moodwise and in regards of the colors living under his skin. He didn´t want to talk. He didn´t want to think. So Liam went to the locker room after last period and got changed. He wanted to practice shots. He wanted to hit the ball so hard it would fly right through the goalnet. He wanted to wear himself out, wanted his muscles burn the way his heart did.

He heard his phone buzzing as he was leaving for the playfield, but he didn´t bother checking it. Or maybe he didn´t want to know what it said. Maybe he´d had enough human interaction for a while.
Gonna be there for movie night, right? the text from Theo that Liam had received earlier said. Fuck, movie night. Liam had almost forgotten about it over the stressing events of the afternoon. He could have thought of better things to do that evening than hanging out with Theo, who might or might not have been the reason for all the chaos in the first place, with Mason, who was going to know something was up with him with one look at his best friend, and with Corey, who was going to want to talk it out, ever the problem solver. But Liam knew there wasn’t really a solution to his dilemma, and even if there was, he didn’t want to talk about it today, didn’t want to say it out loud again, didn’t want to be reminded of the pain he´d caused in one day.

On the other hand though, bailing on them would certainly have been the more suspicious alternative. Mason would have been worried for sure, and in the end, there was no way of avoiding Theo anyway. Liam had to go home eventually. He would see him, they would talk, they would lie in bed next to each other.

On my way, Liam texted back. He decided that he was going to get home now. He was going to prepare some drinks and make popcorn. He was going to have a fun night with his best friends. Should someone ask him, he was going to tell them it was over with Hayden. He sure as hell wasn’t going to let Theo think his mood had anything to do with him. He threw his backpack over his shoulder dynamically and got on his way.

Liam could already smell popcorn before he unlocked the front door. He entered his home silently, cautiously, almost as if he expected a burglar inside, which was ridiculous, sure, but to be fair, the sight of Theo standing in the kitchen preparing enough food for an army disturbed him almost as much.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Liam blurted out.

"Well, Mason and Corey are going to be over in twenty minutes and you weren´t home, so I thought I could get everything ready," Theo explained with an enthusiastic smile.

Liam needed a moment to recover from the image. "Theo... are you... are you wearing my mother´s apron?"

Theo looked down at his own self as if he´d forgotten what he was wearing. "Yeah," he replied as if it was the most logical thing in the world, "I didn´t want to ruin my clothes."

Liam started having... feelings about this, even if he couldn´t place them. So he did a Theo and hid behind sarcasm. "Sexy," he remarked, "you should have gotten rid of the clothes underneath for extra caution though."

"I was going to," Theo responded with a smirk, "but I didn´t know when your stepdad would be home and as much as I like the guy, I would kind of be scared if he caught me in his kitchen naked
"You should be," Liam confirmed, "he gave it to her for their wedding day."

Theo laughed at that. "In that case, for once I´m glad I´m wearing clothes."

"Me too," Liam agreed, and no, he was so not imagining Theo turning around right now to expose a perfectly shaped white ass beneath his tattooed back. He wasn´t. Why would he? He must be going crazy with all the emotions about Hayden.

"What about you?" Theo asked.

What? What about him? Liam in the kitchen naked too? "What about me?" he checked with confusion.

"What were you doing after school?" Theo wanted to know.

Yes, right, that question made far more sense than talking nudity any further. Liam shrugged his shoulders. "Just went for a little run, did some shots, had to let out some energy." Technically, he wasn´t lying. He just hoped Theo would leave it at that.

He felt grey eyes on him. It was silent for a moment. Liam prayed for Theo not to ask him why he´d had to blow off steam, or even worse, why he hadn´t invited Theo to come along.

"You´re such a role model, Captain," Theo winked instead and Liam almost let out a sigh of relief.

"Let me just put my stuff upstairs before the guys are going to be here," Liam said as he was running up the stairs already, not knowing why his back was so itchy, why his neck was glowing so aggressively, what the yellow sprinkles were doing on his damn hands. He went into his bathroom and held them under cold water. He needed to cool off, and that would have been okay if his agitation had been because of the breakup, but he had a hunch it wasn´t and how was that even possible?

How was Liam supposed to act all normal and relaxed? He didn´t even know why he wasn´t. Except...

He remembered what Mason had said about Theo. Has anything happened between you two?

In that moment, Liam hated Theo a little bit for captivating his senses like this when he was supposed to feel bad about Hayden. It wasn´t right. He shouldn´t have been thinking about anyone else while she was probably still crying her eyes out. But he couldn´t deny that he was. The colors beneath his skin were screaming it right in his face in the mirror. And apart from the guilt, it was a frustratingly pleasant feeling.

Liam heard the doorbell while washing his face one last time, wishing he could scrub off the seemingly uncontrollable marks for good, wondering if Theo would leave as soon as he would realize that something majorly weird was going on with Liam. He definitely had to pull himself together. It couldn´t be that hard, could it? He needed a beer, that much was for sure.

"Hey guys," Liam greeted as he came down the stairs, "as I can see, you´re already enjoying the chief cook´s services here." He pointed at Theo, still in his ridiculously domestic outfit, throwing Liam an annoyed look.

"I don´t hear you complaining about me taking care of the food," Theo answered with a grin.
"Oh, he shouldn´t," Mason got involved in the conversation, "not with his own lousy cooking skills."

Liam made a fake shocked face, placing a hand over his heart, pretending to be deeply offended. "You said you loved what I made you," he whispered with big, round eyes.

"Oh, Liam," Mason replied just as theatrically, "I lied. I just didn´t want to hurt your fragile little feelings."

"Wow man," Liam mumbled, dropping the act, "thanks for your support. Can anyone please be on my side? Corey?"

"Honestly," Corey noted, "I would, but I´m not going to pretend like Theo doesn´t look fucking delicious in that thing."

"Corey!" Liam and Mason exclaimed simultaneously. Meanwhile, Theo was just grinning from ear to ear, a light blush bringing some color to his otherwise pale face, a look that certainly suited him.

"What?" Corey shrugged, not even showing anything else than his characteristical green "don´t tell me you´re not thinking the same thing."

Oh God, was Liam thinking the same thing?

Liam and Mason both gasped for air at Corey´s words, Mason because he was his boyfriend his boyfriend who was now making him see yellow, Liam because of the absolute shamelessness with wich he´d admitted his thoughts.

"I like movie nights," Theo declared before he turned away to get everyone a beer from the fridge.

Ten minutes into 22 Jump Street, Liam realized how tired he was. He was sitting on the big cozy sofa next to Theo, which hadn´t been his decision, but not exactly against his will either, holding his beer in his hands, yawning.

"Why are we watching this movie again?" Liam wondered out loud. It wasn´t really doing anything to keep him awake.

"Because Channing Tatum is in it and Mason is punishing me for thinking Theo looked hot earlier," Corey answered the question without averting his gaze from the screen.

"Right," Liam said, more to himself than to Corey, sinking deeper into the cushions, his shoulder connecting with Theo´s.

"Are you alright?" Theo whispered.

"Just tired," Liam responded.

Theo didn´t buy it, but he kept quiet. He didn´t know what was going on. Something had been off the entire week, starting with the morning he´d woken up in a cold and empty bed, continuing with every new day, every following night. He hadn´t been able to grasp it, because Liam and him were still talking, joking, bonding. They were getting to know each other. They were learning how to live in each other´s space without taking up too much of it. Liam had been kind enough to let Theo drive his car to school and back home from that week on, a gesture that meant undescirably much to Theo. He was so used to fighting for the few things he truly needed to survive, it shocked him to be given something for free, out of kindness, more so if it was out of friendship.
Theo took a sip from his cold beer, hoping to wash down the ball of teary emotion forming in his throat. Why the hell was he freaking out now? Maybe Liam was just having a bad day. At least he was still there, sitting right next to him, their bodies touching, their connection leaving a warm prickle on his shoulder warm, a rather hot one on his hip. But it didn’t feel right with the face Liam was making. He tried to figure it out. What could possibly be wrong with the situation?

And then, Oh God, Oh dear God, it hit Theo. It was him. He excused himself for the bathroom. He looked into the huge mirror, seeing what others saw whenever they looked at him. Seeing what Liam had been seeing constantly for eleven days now. His face, white, blank, unshowing, not giving away anything, just taking, taking, taking. He breathed out. It was movie night. Movie night, which Liam had with his best friends every other week. Theo was an invader.

There was only one option for Theo: getting out. He could fake an important phone call, or say he had to take care of his truck getting fixed, or anything, because anything was better than this. Just because he didn’t have a home himself, didn’t mean Theo would ever worm himself into somebody else’s. He stepped out of the bathroom and tiptoed towards the front door, picking up his shoes on the way.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Liam’s voice suddenly appeared to his right. He turned his head and saw the face that belonged to the voice, blue eyes, rosy cheeks, red streaks creeping up from under the collar, a little blue mixed into them.

"I was just about to go..." Theo answered dumbly.

"Go where?" Liam wanted to know, utter confusion written all over his face.

"Just... I just have to take care of... stuff."

"Theo," Liam said, all serious, "stop being weird. It freaks me out."

Oh, is it as bad as you freaking me out by being weird?

"I’m not... being weird, I’m just... leaving," he answered. Great, this conversation was going as badly as it possibly could.

"But why?" Liam asked again.

Theo sighed audibly. "Alright, if I have to spell it out for you, I will. This is movie night, right? Movie night with your best friends? I don’t need to be here. You clearly don’t want me to. It’s cool, I get it. You let me crash here because you felt bad for me, doesn’t mean we have to hang out all the time, doesn’t mean you have to share your friends with me. Message received."

"Whoa whoa," Liam interrupted him, holding his hands out in front of Theo as to tell him to stop. "What the fuck? Are you crazy? I didn’t ask you to leave!"

Theo considered this. "Well, you didn’t ask me to be here tonight either, and I mean, why would you?"

"Can you shut up already?" Liam whisper-shouted at him, "what are you talking about. Why wouldn’t I want you here?"

Theo couldn’t believe Liam was making him say this. But he managed to press the words out between his tensed jaws. "Because they’re your friends. Your best friends. I’m just your annoying temporary roommate."
Liam looked shocked. How the hell was he not getting what Theo was saying?

"When did I ever say you were just my annoying temporary roommate?" Liam argued.

"Well, you didn’t say it. You didn’t have to," Theo explained.

"I know I’m repeating myself," Liam began, "but what the fuck are you talking about."

Theo was getting angry. Why could Liam not simply let him go? Why was he torturing him like this?

"You!" he practically screamed. "You and your bad mood and your pissed off face and your secret after-school-activities. You could have just told me you had enough of me."

"Oh my God Theo!" Liam exclaimed. And then he started laughing. Hesitantly at first, but soon, he couldn’t stop himself from shaking with uncontrollable laughter.

"I’m sorry, how is this funny?" Theo was hurt enough by the situation as it was, he didn’t need to be made fun of on top of it.

"Theo," Liam put one hand against the wall to steady himself, "you’re so damn fucking wrong."

What the hell was that supposed to tell him now?

"What do you mean?" Theo asked in irritation.

Liam wiped one tear away from his beneath his eye. He straightened himself, turning serious again. "I broke up with Hayden today," he simply stated.

"Oh," was all that Theo could contribute to that.

"Yeah," Liam continued, "so that’s where I was after school. And as for my bad mood, well, I might not be in love with her anymore, but that doesn’t mean it was fun to break her heart."

Theo felt so endlessly stupid. This wasn’t even about him at all. In fact, it had nothing to do with him.

"Oh my God, I’m so sorry," Theo whispered.

"Yeah, me too," Liam nodded, "but there was no way around it anymore."

"I’m such an asshole," Theo pointed out, "making this..." he gestured wildly between their to bodies, "...about me."

Liam looked him straight in the eye now. He hesitated. There was something he wanted to say, Theo could tell, but ultimately, he swallowed it down.

"It’s fine," he told Theo instead, "well, actually, it’s not fine. I had no idea..."

"No, Liam, stop," Theo begged, "don’t feel bad about this, too."

"I’m going to let you in on a little secret," Liam offered, "so I can stop feeling bad."

Theo looked at him. Now he was equally curious and scared. Wait, why was he scared? And good lord, what was happening in his gut?
"You´re not my annoying temporary roommate," Liam whispered, "You were right about movie night. It´s me and my best friends. Which is why I didn´t even ask you to be there, I simply assumed you would."

Theo´s heart was doing crazy things. "Are you saying..." he checked.

"Yeah, well, you´re kind of growing on me," Liam admitted, "with that weird thing you do where you annoy people into liking you."

Theo couldn´t contain his smile any longer. "In all honesty, Captain," he replied, "I wasn´t sure that strategy would work on you."

"I tried my best to resist it," Liam smiled at him, and Theo could have melted into a happy little puddle right there, "but your adorable snoring did the trick." And then Liam winked at him. HE WINKED. A little part of Theo died. And then it came back to life. And then his heart was hammering against his ribcage like crazy.

"Excuse you," he played along, "I don´t snore."

"You either do or we have a wild animal sleeping in our room," Liam shot back, laughing again.

Had Theo just heard him say "our room"?

"Did you just say ´our room´?" he teased.

"Yeah, well, " Liam responded, "how about we officially scratch the ´temporary´ from ´annoying temporary roommate´?"

"You mean like...?"

"Like you can stay," Liam nodded. "As long as you need to. As long as you want to."

"Even if I snore?" Theo asked.

"I thought you didn´t snore?" Liam countered.

"I don´t. I just don´t want you to throw out the wild animal sleeping in our room."

"I won´t," Liam promised.

"Thanks," Theo answered, looking Liam in his pretty face, hoping he would understand the endless list of things Theo was truly thanking him for.

"Should we go back in?" Liam suggested, "they´re probably already at the part where those dumb cops go to spring break."

"Right," Theo responded, "totally forgot about the movie."

"I don´t think we were missing out on that much," Liam remarked as he walked back into the living room where Mason was all snuggled up in Corey´s arm.

"How can you say that?" Theo argued sarcastically. "That movie contains a lot of Channing Tatum playing football."

Mason rolled his eyes at that comment. "Liam, Theo," he declared, "you two truly deserve each other."
Theo was aware that was supposed to be an insult, but it didn’t feel like one. It felt good. It felt like Liam was the closest thing he had to belonging somewhere.

The two boys sat down back on the couch, their bodies touching again like they somehow always did, in spite of there being more than enough space for both of them. Theo discovered a blue petal on Liam’s wrist. A yellow one was further up his forearm, green leaves appearing as some sort of background for them. Theo leaned back. The red in Liam’s neck was still there, still shining brightly. Liam was probably the only person who could bear that much red without it seeming threatening. Usually, red types always reminded Theo of dangerous animals, bright signal colors being a warning never to come too close to them. But Liam, Liam wasn’t one he would stay away from. He wasn’t dangerous or venomous. The red simply belonged to him, and it didn’t make him any less of a genuinely good guy. Theo smiled to himself as he remembered what Corey had once told him about Liam. An overprotective, easily offended good guy with anger issues. But a good guy nonetheless.

"Seriously though," Mason kept talking, "you two seem to get along pretty well considering your... rough start."

Liam shot Mason a look Theo didn’t quite understand. But they had had years of practice in silently communicating, so he didn’t give it much thought.

"Turns out you can annoy Liam into liking you by snoring," Theo remarked.

"What? I tried that for ages and it didn’t work!" Corey complained.

"Because you don’t snore," Mason informed his boyfriend. "Lucky me," he added, "I don’t think I’m as easy to impress as Liam. But I’m glad you guys are best friends now."

"We’re not best friends," Liam contradicted, and Theo’s heart missed a beat at that. What? But he’d just said that...

"We’re just annoying roommates," he then added, pressing his knee against Theo’s for a little moment. Annoying roommates. No "temporary". Theo’s world was back in color again.

Movie night was the best night Theo had had in ages, he decided, fuck all his previous self-doubts. Liam wouldn’t have said the things he’d just said if he didn’t mean them. The captain was certainly not polite enough to fake friendly feelings, not exactly a people pleaser.

In bed that night, Theo was sure this was the happiest he could possibly be without crushing an opponent in lacrosse or having wild and animalistic sex, which he would both have done with Liam if he’d offered. Wait, what? That was so inappropriate! Why was he even thinking this? Liam wasn’t even his type... or was he? The thought had never occurred to Theo before.

"I’m warning you," Liam interrupted Theo’s dreaming as he stepped out of the bathroom and towards the bed in just a pair of sweatpants, "we have a full moon tonight, so I’m not going to be able to sleep, like, at all. I hate that shit."

Theo took the chance to take in the image before him, the lean but muscular figure, the hair on Liam’s chest, the diverse colors shimmering through his skin like a calmly waving rainbow flag. Theo wondered which was better, being able to pick your marks, like he’d done with his tattoos, or
having them pick you whenever they pleased, like the things that were lingering beneath Liam´s surface. They were truly beautiful, now that he let himself watch closely.

"Really? I didn´t know it was going to be a full moon night tonight," he replied, "and that really keeps you up at night? I always thought that was more of a myth."

"Believe me, it´s not." Liam let himself fall onto the mattress, the impact of his body plumping down on it letting Theo jump slightly. "So I take it you don´t have the same issue?" Liam checked.

"Nope," Theo shook his head.

"You lucky bastard."

Theo let out a laugh. "I actually like the moon."

"Is that another wolf thing?" Liam wanted to know.

"Oh my God!" Theo exclaimed, "have you been eavesdropping on me and Corey in the locker room?"

"What? No!" Liam defended himself. "I´ve seen the wolf before," he then admitted. "Looks cool."

"The wolf is just a fucking tattoo," Theo sighed, "but, you know, compared to the moon, I guess I don´t look as white..." Theo had not meant to be this honest. He regretted sharing this insight immediately and stilled.

"Not to ruin your moment or anything," Liam responded, "but you always look kind of yellow in the moonlight."

Theo looked at the boy next to him. How did he know this? When the fuck had he looked at Theo closely enough at night to notice?

"It makes you look a little sick, actually," Liam went on when he didn´t get a reaction from Theo.

"Wow, thanks man," Theo answered sarcastically, rolling his eyes, realizing that that was usually Liam´s part.

They were quiet for a moment.
"You know," Liam finally spoke again, "the first time I saw it, I thought you were showing color."

Theo didn’t know how to respond to this. He hated talking about his lack of color. It was bad enough that everybody could see it, that it was the one thing people associated him with, his trademark. But if Liam had suspected color showing beneath his skin after he’d already moved in with him, maybe that meant Liam didn’t judge him so badly after all...

"I don’t know dude," Theo shrugged, "I think I would be pretty disappointed if I found out I had colors after almost ten years and the first one to show would be yellow."

Liam looked confused. "Why?"

Wasn’t that obvious? No cool person had ever been a yellow type. Liam barely showed yellow.

"Isn’t yellow for envy and jealousy?" Theo asked, "Cowardice? Greed? Vanity?"

Liam shrugged. "Maybe so," he replied, "but it’s also the color of light and life, you know."

Theo thought about it.

"Immortality," Liam added, "Did you know Mexicans wear yellow on día de los muertos because they believe that’s how the dead can see them?"

"I didn’t know that," Theo confessed. For some reason, this information shed a whole different light on the matter.

"My point is," Liam elaborated, "no color is as simple as good or bad. No mark makes you a good or a bad guy. I’m mostly red, for example, and I can think of a thousand negative things you could associate with red. Restlessness, anger, violence, danger, blood, death, but that doesn’t mean those things define me. I mean, don’t get me wrong, it’s probably true for some of them, but not all, and there are other things, things that I have never even considered. But it’s not like I have to know. And it’s certainly not like anybody else does."

"Wow, Captain," Theo breathed out, "such deep words coming from your mouth."

"Make fun of me and I’ll wake you every time the moon wakes me tonight," Liam threatened.

"No," Theo answered honestly, "I’m impressed."
LIAM LIKES THEO! AND HE EVEN TOLD HIM THIS TIME! HA!

Stay with me my loves, I’ve got some good shit planned for the next chapters :)

A week after his break up with Hayden, Liam still felt bad for her. She’d been at school as if nothing had happened, putting on a tough face, moving on as always, except without Liam. He knew she was still hurting, but ultimately, he also knew there had been no way to avoid it. He’d done the right thing, the only possible thing to be exact, and every minute after he’d returned home to Theo after it had proven that. Well, it wasn’t about Theo, of course, but... okay, maybe it was a little about Theo.

Maybe it had something to do with how easily Theo could take his mind off the guilt, with how aware he made him that he didn’t love Hayden, at least not any more. With Theo, it was like there was no room between them for other things sometimes. They could spend an entire weekend sitting in their bedroom, playing video games, Theo still sucking impressively bad at it, and there was no need to do anything else, no need for anyone other than Theo to talk to, no wish for the day to ever end.

Liam was amazed by how well they got along, knowing full well that he was not always easy to deal with, never having had many friends, which might have been because of his anger issues, even though those had been surprisingly non-existent for the last couple of weeks. Liam couldn’t have explained why, couldn’t have described the relationship he and Theo had developed, at least not if he really wanted to catch what it felt like from the inside, but he was okay with that. It was complicated if you thought about it, but easy, soul-calmingly easy if you didn’t, so Liam didn’t. Until Thursday night.

On Thursday night, the moon was far from full, but still shining through the window above the bed onto Theo’s relaxed face. He was most likely asleep by now, never taking much time to drift off, probably so used to sleeping in daylight, surrounded by all the noises of the town’s parking lots that there wasn’t much that could keep him awake for long. Once again, the moonlight made his skin appear yellow.
Looking at the boy next to him, profiting from the fact that his eyes were closed, that he now had all the time to discretely observe, Liam realized that he´d made a mistake. *It makes you look a little sick*, he´d told Theo when talking about it. It wasn´t true. It made him look like he was shining from within, like the light of the moon brought out the sun in Theo, as if the universe was making up for never letting them both shine from the same sky at once.

Suddenly, Liam felt really warm, which had happened a few times before with Theo lying next to him, radiating off an incredible heat at night, causing Liam to change his usual sleeping outfit from sweatpants and t-shirt to shorts and (occasionally) a t-shirt. He placed a hand on his chest that was dressed in light grey fabric that night and let his eyes wander across the tattoo´s on Theo´s bare arms again. He couldn´t help his constant need to trace them, discovering a new image, a new possible meaning in the ink every time he did. One day, Liam would find out what song it was that Theo´s back bore the notes for.

His hand glided down his upper body to his stomach. Theo was wearing a tank top, but Liam remembered the angel with the fangs carrying a baby beneath it. For some reason, that one was the image that had left the biggest impression with him. It was just so controversial, an angel, a guiding angel, a protector, but one with fangs and a terrifying expression on its pretty face. He wondered what it meant to Theo. He wondered which one Theo was: the beast, the angel, or the child that needed protection.

Without his brain allowing it, Liam´s hand had slipped under his shirt, playing with the trail of hair from his navel down while his eyes went back up to where Theo´s chest was heaving and sinking in a steady rhythm. The calming effect this image had on Liam was inexplicable to him. But what was even more inexplicable - scratch that - shocking, was the twitch inside Liam´s boxers when his gaze found the soft spot on Theo´s neck where his pulse lay beneath. The skin looked so delicate, so temptingly smooth, it started doing things to Liam.

He kept telling himself it must be his inner newly single horny teenager breaking through as he tugged at the elastic waistband, considering the risk, remembering how badly he´d freaked out about finding Theo in his bed half naked after their first night, thinking how hypocritical it was to put his hand down his shorts now, Theo sleeping peacefully beside him. He definitely shouldn´t do it.

But then Theo turned his head, baring even more of his neck than before, revealing the few digits that were tattooed behind his ear. Liam had no idea what they stood for. His hand was now trembling, hovering above his crotch, his head fighting a hopeless battle to take it away, far away, and leave it somewhere where it couldn´t ruin the innocence of Liam sharing a bed with Theo.

When Theo mumbled something in his dream, Liam jumped and his wrist accidentally brushed his hard-on. The touch was faint, almost not perceptible, but it was enough to completely wreck Liam´s good resolutions. He placed his palm over the fabric covering his dick carefully, waiting for Theo to snap his eyes open and catch him, lecture him on how inappropriate he was being, turn away and leave to sleep on the couch instead. Of course, none of that happened. Theo kept sleeping uninterrupted.
Liam wondered if that would change if he started to move his hand below the blanket. He tested the waters cautiously by rubbing it up and down only once, and in torturous slowness. No reaction. "Theo," he whispered in an attempt to test just how tightly the other boy was sleeping. Still nothing. "God, I’m such a moron," he added to himself, but was convinced that Theo was truly not hearing him when he didn’t agree.

So Liam ventured another movement of his hand, and it shouldn’t have felt that good, because now he was wetting his shorts with pre-cum, he was leaving marks. But who was he kidding? The only evidence anybody would need to prove his filthy, incongruous thoughts right now was bulging against his palm hotly, throbbing with anticipation and excitement, the fear of getting caught only adding to it. Liam noticed his hand and arm were blank, free of any kind of color, as well as all the rest of his body he could see, but he was too worked up to give it another thought. Thinking wasn’t really happening right then.

Extremely slowly, eyeing Theo attentively, Liam dipped his fingers beneath his waistband, hissing at the first contact with the hot and wet skin on his dick, biting his tongue to avoid making another sound. He knew staying quiet would be close to impossible, so he shoved the corner of his pillow between his teeth, not leaving Theo out of sight, biting down, willing himself to keep control, even if that was pretty ridiculous at this point. He focused on the warm air streaming out from Theo’s nose, synchronizing his breathing with it.

Liam gripped his cock properly then, wrapping his fingers around the shaft, squeezing it, trying to make himself feel as much as possible by moving as little as possible. He could barely keep his eyes open, but he had to, just in case Theo would wake up, so he fixated the dark ink on his glowing shoulder. No, his face would be better so he could stop in time when necessary. Liam glued his eyes to the slightly parted lips, realizing for the first time how full they were, wondering if kissing a boy would feel any different than kissing a girl.

He started pumping his dick slowly, holding up the blanket with his other hand so it wouldn’t move too much. He would have moaned quite loudly already, if only he could, and holding it in almost pained Liam physically, but the precarious aspect of the situation was definitely responsible for at least half of the pleasure he was taking from it. Liam couldn’t remember the last time he’d been this hard, his cock not only responding to the task of getting him (and Hayden) their satisfaction, but rather demanding something itself, screaming for attention, begging for touch, crying out in joyous pain and pleasure.

Liam took his glance off Theo for a second to spit in his palm, his jaws already tired from biting the pillow, the sound cutting thorough the air dangerously, but Theo still sleeping when Liam turned back towards him. His hand now properly slicked up, the real fun began for Liam. He couldn’t hold back any longer, so he gave his dick everything it was asking for, moving his fist up and down, swirling his thumb over the sensitive tip, setting a quicker pace, nearly exploding from the noises he was holding back.

It was wrong, so so wrong to be jerking off next to Theo, and it was even more wrong how every thirsty look at the guy got Liam more turned on, how at some point, he even imagined the space between them fading, imagined that it wasn’t his hand around his cock, but Theo’s. And from that
fantasy, there was no going back. He was gone, gone over the edge, and then falling endlessly, eternally, grunting into the pillow because he just couldn´t help himself, spilling his cum over his fingers, onto his stomach, smearing the damn blanket with it, the blanket that smelled so much like Theo.

He was panting heavily when it was over, not daring to lift the fabric covering his body, not prepared to see the mess he´d made, also a little afraid that Theo would smell it. "Theo?" he whispered once more, simply because he needed to know he was still asleep so he wouldn´t have to shoot himself right the second. Theo moved slightly, shifting his body into a more comfortable position, and Liam suffered a mid-level heart attack at that moment, but Theo´s eyes stayed closed, his breathing even, his face relaxed.

Liam sighed in relief and laid back against his pillow again. It wasn´t until then that he discovered the colors on him. His fingers were a dark blue, his knuckles shining red like sirens at their ends, both together sending purple waves up the backs of his hands, his arms showing a lighter tone of the same color. Out of curiosity, Liam peeked under his shirt through the collar. The purple mixed with red and yellow sprinkles, stars, flower petals all over his chest, a faint light green glow appearing beneath, almost not noticeable with the white liquids covering his stomach.

Liam had never seen this kind of image beneath his own skin, but the colors were hardly the strangest thing that had been going on that night. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep, but flashes of what he´d just done kept coming back to him, bringing shame along, and guilt, and something else, something weird, something that settled between him and Theo and stayed there, even in the next morning, when the moon was gone and the sun shone, but not the one coming from within Theo.

"By the way," Theo informed Liam as he stuffed his books in his backpack for school, "I´m getting my truck back today, so you won´t have to suffer through my driving much longer."

"Cool," Liam replied, "I mean, cool that you´re getting your own car back, but I´m not really suffering, you know."

Theo didn´t seem to get what he was saying.

"You´re not suggesting we drive to school and back home seperately from now on, are you?" Liam asked. "Because that would be fucking stupid."

"Well, I don´t know," Theo shrugged, "I´m just saying we could... if you wanted to."

Liam threw him a disapproving look. "As I said, that would be fucking stupid. So I don´t."

"Alright," Theo nodded. It was settled by now that he was the one driving them anyway, so it didn´t really matter to him, except that Liam was right. It would definitely be weird for them to show up at school seperately. Or at lacrosse. No. Stupid idea.
Before the two boys even arrived in the high school’s parking lot, Theo received a message on his phone.

"Oh, look at that," Liam smiled happily, holding his own device in his hand, "Corey says it’s boys´s night out at the sinema, you in?"

"Yeah, I got the same text," Theo replied, and that alone shouldn’t have made him so proud, but it did. "Sure I’m in, last time was fun."

"Easy for you to say," Liam laughed, "at least you got some action."

Theo remembered the weird girl who’d kissed him, a kiss that had mainly resulted in her misinterpreting his effort to get a good angle to watch Liam dancing. He sincerely hoped he wouldn’t see her again that night. "Yeah well, not exactly the action I was looking for," Theo remarked quietly.

"You’re a lot more picky than the rest of the team, apparently," Liam answered. Theo screamed in frustration, but only internally. Liam didn’t understand. He could have explained, but... No, not yet.

The school day went by as every other one, with Theo trying his best to keep his eyes open during maths, and then trying not to look creepy while wandering the hallways between classes, his eyes searching for... something, something that would make him know where to look, how to feel, what to think. Sometimes he’d come across one of the lacrosse guys, and that was a little bit like it already. They were cool guys, and none of them had ever given him shit for being blank, for being different.

On the contrary, Nolan kept telling him about all the tattoos he was planning to get as soon as he would either convince his Mom that it wouldn’t make him a criminal or turn eighteen (probably the latter). Corey had mentioned more than once now that he found Theo attractive, not in a way that implied serious interest in him, but it still made him blush every single time. A true gift from heaven was Mason, who always asked him how he was doing, but other than most people, he didn’t just use it as a greeting, he always waited a few moments to get a real answer. It was nice to move around the school without having to avoid anyone, but Theo still couldn’t get rid of his constant state of higher alert.

The weirdest person to randomly meet in the hallway was certainly Liam, because what were you supposed to say in such a brief moment when you basically spent all the time outside of classes together? They usually just nodded lightly, or smiled at each other, or Liam asked Theo to switch the sandwiches that his Mom had left on the kitchen counter in the morning. Liam had a couple of questionable eating habits, to say the least.

"Good job, Theo," Mrs Cook praised as she handed him back his essay for creative writing, "you always knew how to find good words to express yourself, but you’re getting better at structuring them with every piece you hand in."
Theo was a little baffled at her positive words. He’d always liked writing, but nobody had ever told him he was actually good at it. In truth, he’d always assumed that he was simply so bad at processing his thoughts that he needed a pen and paper to make any sense of them. He held the paper in his hands and stared at the red letter in the upper corner. A-. Good grades had never really been a thing in his life. For the first time, he thought he might understand why they mattered to other students. Yes, there was a whole school system you had to survive while growing up and yes, you were also fighting for even a chance to get into college one day, but that wasn’t all. He’d been given a task and he’d fulfilled it. The whole concept was kind of new for someone growing up without parents for most of their life. He’d created something, and it had turned out to be something good. No catch, no side effects.

"Why are you grinning like an idiot?" Liam asked in suspicion when they met at the car after last period.

"I think I learned something today," Theo replied frankly.

"No shit Theo, you know this is a school, right?" Liam snorted, gesturing at the school building behind them.

"Fuck off man, I meant something that might actually be important to know," Theo explained.

"And what is that?" Liam wanted to know.

At first, Theo didn’t know how to put it into words. Then he remembered what Mrs Cook had told him and decided to just roll with whatever words came to his mind. "I think I understand now why you read all those history books. And why you work on your spanish vocabulary so much. And why you sometimes throw your biology book against the wall."

"One time, Theo," Liam growled in response, his mark turning into a darker shade of red, "that happened one fucking time."

"That’s not the point."

"Honestly, I have no idea what your point is," Liam admitted.

"I got an A today. Like, on a very irrelevant paper in a not so important course, but it’s still an A."

"Congrats, dude," Liam responded, "but...like... is that not something that usually happens?"

"No," Theo said as he started the engine, "I’ve always sucked at school. Which was probably because I’ve never tried not to suck."
"Maybe you should try it," Liam suggested, the color in his neck having calmed down, now framed by yellow raindrops.

"Well, that´s exactly what I meant when I said I learned something today," Theo elaborated, "just because I don´t have parents who force me to do my homework doesn´t mean I have no reason to do it anyway. Just because I don´t care about college or scientific formulas or what the world looked like a million years ago, doesn´t mean there´s nothing I want to learn. Maybe it´s enough for me to like writing. Maybe it´s enough for me to just be good at like, one thing for once."

Liam looked at him with his mouth open, surprise written all over his face. "Be good at one thing for once?" he finally found his voice. "Aren´t you forgetting a few things?"

"What things?" Theo had no clue what Liam was on about.

"Dude, are you blind? Or demented?" Liam seemed a little agitated, the yellow still shining from beneath his skin, but the red getting stronger again. "You´re the best player we got on the lacrosse team, you´ve literally won us all the games since you joined, you´re the hottest guy in school, like, you´ve got all the chicks drooling after you, you can cook better than my Mom and she would most certainly throw me out if she only had enough room for one of us. Seriously Theo, I even forgive you your terrible, terrible gaming skills. "

Theo laughed at the thing about Liam´s Mom and his non-existent video gaming progress, but inside his chest, his heart was racing, threatening to tear his ribcage apart, and ultimately, he couldn´t stop himself from asking. "You think I´m hot?"

"I´m sorry, have you not been listening to Corey for the last three weeks?" Liam shot back with raised eyebrows. "Don´t tell me you haven´t noticed all the girls whispering and giggling and fluttering their fake eyelashes at you."

In all honesty, Theo hadn´t, but that was hardly what he cared about. Did Liam agree with them?

"Yes you´re fucking hot, okay?" Liam pressed out. "Tomorrow it´s going to be my ego we´re going to be stroking, you ass."

Theo couldn´t contain the grin spreading from one ear to the other on his blushed face. He would gladly be stroking whatever part of Liam he was asked to.

The same night, when Theo and Liam were on their way over to the sinema to meet up with the other guys, Liam suddenly changed the channel of the radio. For the first time ever, they were now driving in Theo´s truck together.

"What do you think you´re doing?" Theo complained, immeadiately switching back to the previous
"I don’t want to hear that crap," Liam simply stated, pressing the button again.

"You do realize we’re in my car now?" Theo provoked. He hated fighting about all those little every day things with Liam. But he also loved it a little bit. Still, he switched back again.

"So?" Liam seemed very much unimpressed, reaching out for the radio once again. "You have a shitty taste in music. I don’t see how owning a car would change that."

I knew

When you told me you don't wanna go home tonight

And you tried to just shrug it off when I asked you why

Somebody hurt you

Somebody hurt you

But you're here by my side

And I knew

'Cause I can recall when I was the one in your seat

I still got the scars and they occasionally bleed

Cause somebody hurt me

Somebody hurt me

But I'm staying alive

Theo stopped protesting when he started listening to the song Liam had put on. Somehow he didn’t feel like arguing anymore. He’d never heard the song before. The music wasn’t exactly what he would have picked, but the words the female voice was singing from the speakers went right under his skin.
And I can tell

When you get nervous

You think being yourself

Means being unworthy

And it's hard to love

With a heart that's hurting

But if you want to go out dancing

I know a place

I know a place we can go

Where everyone gonna lay down their weapon

Lay down their weapon

Just give me trust and watch what'll happen

'Cause I know

I know a place we can run

Where everyone gonna lay down their weapon

Lay down their weapon

Don't you be afraid of love and affection

Just lay down your weapon
Theo’s rebellion was broken for good when Liam started humming along quietly, his voice pitching at the little *oohs* and *yeahs*, his eyes closed as he sang, not caring that Theo was right next to him, that he could hear him, watch him. It was the strangest thing to witness, someone just... letting go of themselves. It felt like Liam was lowering a defense Theo had never realized was there, but he was proud to be allowed to see behind. He envied Liam for his capability to relax like that. Theo himself would have never dared. He clung to the pretty mask of his impressive exterior as if the person inside would fall apart instantly without it.

*Right now*

It's like you're carrying all the weight of your past

*I see all your bruises, yellow, dark blue, and black*

*But baby a bruise is, only your body*

*Tryna keep you intact*

*So right now*

*I think we should go get drunk on cheap wine*

*I think we should hop on the purple line*

'*Cause maybe our purpose*

*Is to never give up when we're on the right track*

Theo could have cried. He felt majorly called out by that stupid fucking song. It was beautiful, but it stang brutally where it crept beneath his armor. He would have turned the radio off if he’d trusted his hand to move away from steering wheel without trembling. He didn’t want Liam to notice anything.

*They will try to make you unhappy*

*Don't let them*

*They will try to tell you you're not free*

*Don't listen*
I, I know a place where you don't need protection

Even if it's only in my imagination

I, I know a place we can go

Where everyone gonna lay down their weapon

Lay down their weapon

Just give me trust and anything can happen

Focusing completely on Liam’s low voice, Theo wished the words would have been true. He realized he needed a place like that so badly, a place where he wouldn’t need protection. But he was too scared to believe in it.

’Cause I know

I know a place we can go

Where everyone gonna lay down their weapon

Lay down their weapon

Just give me trust and watch what'll happen

’Cause I know

I know a place we can stay

Where everyone gonna lay down their weapon

Lay down their weapon

Don’t you be afraid of love and affection

Just lay down your weapon
Liam didn’t open his eyes again until the last notes were slowly fading, leaving some part of Theo exposed, vulnerable, and he was afraid of how much of that Liam could see. *Just lay down your weapon*, it echoed through his head over and over again, but it wasn’t the female voice begging him, it was Liam’s. Theo could only thank the lord for his mercy when the next song that came on was some impossible to understand metal clamor. He took a deep breath in. It was surely about time to get out of the car and into the club.

As expected, the core of the lacrosse team was on board as well as Mason, but apart from that there was more, and more unwelcome company.

"Brett," Liam growled threateningly before Theo could even say anything himself, "who the fuck invited you to come along? Or do you live at this club now?"

"Hello, little Liam," Brett answered with an evil grin, "hello Theo, how very pleasant to see you again."

Theo said nothing. He was a little less pleased than Brett, but probably not as close to punching him in the face as Liam.

"Actually," Brett continued, "Nolan asked me to come."

"I’m going to fucking kill that kid," Liam mumbled under his breath, looking around for the pale, freckled face responsible for this unpleasant surprise, but not finding him.

"Chill man," Corey stepped in, "the sinema is surely big enough for all of us."

Once again, Theo was extremely grateful for his peaceful, green presence.

"What?" Brett frowned. "Are you telling me you brought an entire sports team here tonight and you expect me to stay away from them? Rude."

"They’re not here for your amusement, you asshole," Liam snapped. Theo was a little perplexed by his strong reaction to Brett, but it must have had something to do with his role as team captain. Brett was talking about the players as if they were his toys, and he was also looking at them like it. Liam was protective, he knew that.

"Yeah, well, I was actually waiting for the freckled one anyway, so I’ll see you later I guess," Brett shrugged and turned away, striding off with large and confident steps. His ass was definitely way prettier than what came out of his mouth.

"Hey, Theo!" Liam called as the rest of them was already on their way inside. Theo stopped to look
at him, suddenly nervous because of the tension on Liam´s face and the red mark now completely closing around his throat.

"What´s up?"

"Just..." Liam sighed audibly, "just be careful, alright."

"About what?" Theo wanted to know. His skin was tingling from the tone in Liam´s voice. People were usually concerned about themselves in his presence, not about him.

"Brett." Liam answered, as if it was obvious.

"Brett?" Theo asked. "Brett is what makes you glow up like a fucking lightsaber?" Theo knew those last words had been a little insensitive, but he was too confused about Liam´s concern to filter his words better.

"He´s...," Liam started, then looked to the ground, his fists clenching, "I just.. don´t like the way he stares at you. He´s been giving me shit ever since we know each other, so.. this is my fair warning to you."

"You think he´s going to give me shit?" Theo repeated Liam´s words. "I can handle it."

"No, actually... Actually I think he´s a little into you." Liam finally spilled the beans.

"God Liam, how would you even know?" Theo was pretty sure he was exaggerating.

"I know Brett, okay. He´s a dick. He´s bi. He jumps everything that has two feet and a pulse," Liam exclaimed, apparently trying to convince Theo of something.

"Whoa whoa," Theo tried to stop him. Their whole friendship would have become really awkward if Liam had said anything discriminating about non-straight people right then, which Theo wasn´t willing to let happen. "I appreciate you looking out for me, as weird as it is, because I´m a big boy, Liam, but let´s just make clear that Brett is a dick because he´s a dick. Not because he´s bi."

"I didn´t mean that," Liam countered. He wanted to say something else but thought better of it. "I´m just... God let´s just forget it and get inside."

Even though he didn´t feel completely comfortable leaving the conversation at that, Theo followed him towards the music and the sweet promise of a drink. He could certainly use one that night. Or maybe two. So he got right onto it. The first shot of jaegermeister burned in his throat, but the second one was better, opening his eyes wider, making his tensed limbs relax. Theo wanted to dance.
This time, he wasn´t being creepy. He wasn´t using anybody. He was just being himself, a nineteen-year-old, slightly drunk boy in the middle of the dance floor, smelling sweat and tasting alcohol and pressing his eyes shut because the music was enough to disappear in it, and where he went, he didn´t need to see, he just needed to feel. Soon Theo was surrounded by more and more bodies, heads swinging and hips rocking in the same rhythm, making him just one little puzzle piece in a bigger picture, and maybe that was just what he needed sometimes.

Theo wasn´t colorless when nobody cared to open their eyes properly. He wasn´t a weirdo when everyone was freaking out a little. He wasn´t wrong when the music swallowed every word he could have said. He was whole when nobody saw the cracks in the dark. He was okay, and in Theo´s world, okay was quite an achievement. So he embraced it, grabbed it by a pair of sweaty hands and whirled it around, gulped it down in form of another cocktail, screamed it out into the noisy night. It was glorious.

Theo was shocked at the time that had passed when he finally went to the bathroom and then for the next drink at the bar, but he was glad some things could still make him lose track of time. Those things were powerful.

"So, you´re still not screwing Dumbar, hugh?" a low, lulling voice appeared from behind him. It didn´t take Theo long to place the self-righteous smirk to the right name. Brett.

"We´re friends," Theo answered, taking another sip to show Brett he was busy, not interested in a chat.

"Oh, are you?" Brett was clearly mocking him, "I´m telling you, Theo, I know Liam, and he doesn´t usually go full pitbull for just a friend."

Theo strongly disagreed. He knew by know that Liam had an IED, Intermitted Explosive Disorder, which pretty much came down to going full pitbull over practically everything.

"Don´t you have a puppy to torture somewhere?" Theo asked in annoyance.

"Well, I do," Brett smiled in response, completely ignoring the insult, "I think I´m going to take the blond little puppy with the adorable freckles for a walk tonight." He nodded at Nolan, who was dancing a couple of feet away from them.

Theo wondered if he should just let it happen. He didn´t know how cool Nolan was with what Brett had just implied. On the other hand, Nolan himself had invited Brett, so he probably knew what he was doing. Or did he? Theo suddenly understood Liam´s urge to warn him, to step between him and Brett. On the one side, they were just teenagers, and who was he to tell them what they weren´t allowed to do? Opposed to that, Nolan was a really sweet guy and... Brett wasn´t.
Theo decided to keep an eye on the situation for a while, he could always intervene later.

"Enjoying yourself?" Liam asked breathlessly as he joined Theo at the bar, ordering another beer.

"Yeah, I was," Theo responded, "I’m just taking a little break making sure Nolan’s going to be alright."

Liam threw him a look like he didn’t know what Theo was talking about.

Theo nodded towards Nolan dancing, or rather grinding against Brett with a lust-drunken expression on his face.

"Oh," Liam made, "yeah, no. Nolan’s fine, believe me. No need to worry about him."

"No need to worry about him?" Theo repeated in disbelief. "Then why were you worried about me?"

"That’s different," Liam shrugged.

"I’m sorry, how exactly is that different?"

"Nolan wants it," Liam simply stated.

Theo couldn’t exactly disagree, considering the way their teammate seemed to clearly enjoy being Brett’s prey for the night.

"And you just assumed I don’t?" Theo sounded a little angry, which hadn’t been his intention. He just wanted to see how far he could take this conversation, and if somewhere along its way maybe, just maybe they’d come across the right point to come out to Liam.

"I’m sorry, you’re not saying..." Liam hesitated, "you wouldn’t... I mean, Brett? Eww."

Theo sighed. This was going to be even harder than expected. "No," he answered. Why was it so hard to talk about this? All he wanted to get off his chest was that no, he wasn’t into Brett, but yes, he was very much into boys. That second part somehow didn’t come out of his mouth though.

They changed subjects instead, talking about school and the upcoming lacrosse game. They laughed way to hard about bad jokes, ordered a few more drinks, watched Mason and Corey disappear without saying goodbye, their tongues probably too far down each other’s throats to talk. They decided to walk home when the darkness of the night was already fading, the sunrise mirroring the colors on Liam’s sweaty skin, or was it the other way round? Either way, Theo
wanted to touch it, and it took all the willpower his drunk brain could provide him with to keep his hands to himself.

By the time Theo and Liam got into bed, they were too exhausted to find sleep.

"About what I said earlier tonight...," Liam eventually spoke, "about Brett being bi...you know I have nothing against that, right?"

"Yeah, I know you’re just jealous because he gets all the girls and all the boys in Beacon Hills," Theo teased, internally freaking out, because there was this damn topic again, but he was too tired, too drunk to function properly, and it was probably not a good idea to say anything right then.

"Not all of them," Liam grinned. Theo wasn´t sure what he meant by that.

"I’m pretty sure it was just Nolan for tonight," Liam explained. Yeah, Theo was pretty sure about that, too.

"Seriously, are any of your friends straight?" he then asked. Stupid question, he thought immediately. Again, his mouth had spoken without permission from his brain.

Liam thought for a moment. "Straight friends are not important," he then declared, "I wouldn´t trade Mason for the world. Or Corey. Or Nolan. Or whoever else is going to turn out to be into dicks."

"Well, don’t get me wrong, I’m certainly not complaining," Theo laughed. A little more serious tone and he would have had to explain that statement, but Liam let it be.

"Who would be complaining?" Liam commented, shuffling a little closer, turning to his side so he was facing Theo. "Life’s amazing right now," he then whispered.

"Because we’re drunk?" Theo wanted to know.

"Yeah," Liam smiled, "that too." And then he came even closer.

Theo didn’t understand what was happening. He was deaf from his own heart beating too loudly, blinded by the endless blue that glistened in Liam’s eyes. He was paralyzed, except for his trembling lips. He didn’t move, but Liam did, slowly, so very slowly, with a lazy smile on his face. Maybe Theo didn’t have to say anything after all?

Suddenly, Liam raised his hand up and brought his fingers to Theo’s neck. Theo jumped a little bit at the first touch. Liam’s fingertips felt hotter on his skin than they were supposed to.
"Are we sure this is not real color?" Liam then whispered, his eyes focused on where he was touching Theo. "Because it sure as fuck looks like it."

"What?" Theo wondered. And then it hit him like a brick in the face. Hard. Liam wasn’t leaning in to kiss him. He wasn’t stroking his neck in an intimate gesture. He was simply curious. And Theo would have been equally excited about the mere possibility of his skin truly showing a mark, but all he felt was... disappointment.

"Fuck off man," he mumbled as he shoved Liam away harshly, "I have no colors and you know it."

"I’m sorry," Liam apologized, clearly surprised by the fierceness of Theo’s reaction. "It just... forget it, just don’t be mad, okay?"

He moved closer again, a genuine plea written in his eyes. Even if he’d wanted, Theo couldn’t have been anything but in love right then. Wait, what? In love? No, no, no, that was not what was supposed to be happening! Abort mission, abort mission, his brain screamed at him in wild desperation.

"I’m not mad," Theo somehow managed to press out from between tensed jaws.

"Dude, you sound a little mad," Liam pouted. God, he was lying so close.

"I’m just... not ready to have another color talk right now, Liam," he explained himself.

"Alright," Liam slurred, "just pretend I didn’t say it then."

Theo sighed. If only it had been that easy.

"No, seriously," Liam kept talking, "just relax." Liam put his hand back where it had been moments earlier, right where he must have been able to feel Theo’s pulse freaking absolutely the fuck out. "Just imagine this was something else."

"Like what?" Theo wanted to know, barely daring to raise his voice above a whisper. What other reason would Liam have to touch his neck like this?

"Like this," Liam whispered back, then closed his eyes and leaned forward. And just like that, just like the universe wasn’t collapsing around them, Liam’s lips were on Theo’s neck, just for a second, but fuck him if it wasn’t the best second of Theo’s entire life.

By the time Theo was ready to open his eyes again, afraid to emerge into a reality where this hadn
t just happened, Liam was lying with his head on the pillow again, a wide grin on his face. He seemed to be enjoying Theo´s mystification big time.

Theo´s brain wasn´t functioning. Reminding himself to keep breathing was all it could come up with.

"Do I owe you a neck kiss now?" he finally heard his own voice say. It sounded far, far away, but Liam´s response didn´t. It was right there, in front of him.

"Do you remember when you were a kid and your classmate would make like, a little scratch in your notebook or something, and you would take revenge by coloring the whole page in front of them?"

Theo didn´t follow. What did middle school scribbling wars have to do with anything? "Yeah, so?" he asked.

"You don´t owe me a neck kiss, you´ve got to color the sheet now," Liam breathed into his baffled face.

Chapter End Notes

this is either the best or the worst thing i´ve ever written, you decide :D
"You don´t owe me a neck kiss, you´ve got to color the sheet now," Liam breathed into his baffled face.

"Liam, are you fucking with me right now?" Theo whispered after a long moment of surprised staring.

Liam looked into the mesmerizing grey-green eyes in front of him, trying to figure out which the right answer was. A part of him was hoping Theo would stop asking questions and just do it, do something, as long as they were both drunk, just so Liam would know if that was even what he wanted. Being kissed by Theo.

But the longer he waited, the harder Theo´s expression got, and in the end, Liam chickened out. He cracked up laughing, because humor was the only way to save the situation from becoming the most awkward one of his life.

"I´m sorry," he snorted, "I don´t even know why I thought that was funny."

Theo smiled in response, but the smile didn´t reach his eyes, it was only on his lips, only for Liam, but not from Theo´s heart. In that moment, Liam wondered if he´d just made a terrible mistake. But how the hell was he supposed to go back at that point?

"Are we idiots?" Liam asked when his laugh was fading quickly. "I´m pretty sure I am."

The flinch in the corner of Theo´s mouth right then seemed far more genuine than before. "Yeah, we´re idiots," he replied, "but as for tonight, we can blame it on the alcohol."

"Wow man," Liam commented, oozing sarcasm, "you always find such encouraging words."

"Shut up," Theo shot back with a smirk, "not everybody can do pep talks the way you can, Captain."

"Are you kidding?" Liam retorted. "Because you don´t have to. I know my lacrosse pep talks are pretty much verbal piles of shit. But Coach makes me give them. And I mean, his own are even
The colors beneath Liam’s skin were slowly normalizing, the faint sprinkles fading away into pallor, leaving behind nothing but the usual red streak along his spine. Wait, and yellow fingertips.

"Actually, I wasn´t kidding," Theo interrupted his self-examination, "I think you´re pretty good at getting the team motivated."

Liam felt weird. Nobody had ever said something like that to him. He knew he made a good team captain, but he assumed that was mostly because he was a good player, because he had good vision on the field, because he started every game like a soldier going to war. All the talking he´d ever done had felt more like some sort of necessary evil. And now he was supposed to believe he was actually good at it? He would definitely have to think about that in the morning, sober, and without Theo radiating this incredible heat off right beside him.

The only problem was, waking up the next morning, or noon, didn´t exactly make things easier, or less awkward. Neither did it help that they´d just thrown away their clothes before drifting off to sleep and were now very much naked except for their underwear. Liam thought he was having a déjà-vu when he turned to Theo and stared for a moment, because there simply was no way not to, and then his already half hard cock fully awoke and started crying for his attention.

Liam took flight into the bathroom, locking the door behind him, breathing out once, twice, but not getting his dick to calm the fuck down. He felt terrible. He hadn´t exactly gotten over the guilt of jerking off next to a sleeping Theo one night prior, hadn´t had enough time to think about what it meant, and now there he was again. Why was Theo making his life so hard? Why the fuck was Theo making him hard? Again?

Of course, there was one possible explanation. Mason had asked him whether he would have wanted something to happen between him and Theo, and he´d denied everything, not only to his best friend, but also himself. *Told you a boyfriend would suit you much better*, Brett had said the first time he´d brought Theo to the sinema. Were those two seeing something he´d been missing? Was it possible?

And if it was, what did it mean? What did it make Liam? He´d been with Hayden, with a girl, for around two years. He might not be in love with her anymore, but there had definitely been a time when that had been true. He´d been very much attracted to her, physically, too. He´d never thought about wanting anything else. But he´d also never before jerked off to a guy and now he had. Now he was even hiding in his bathroom from said guy with a massive boner and no clue what to do about it. The confusion in him was perfect.

And then the memories of the previous night came back and made everything worse. He´d touched Theo. And Theo hadn´t touched him back. Really, he´d just stared at Liam in horror. So why had Liam thought it had been a good idea to fucking kiss Theo´s neck? He made a whining sound of embarassment and buried his face in his sweaty palms. He was so fucked. Brushing the whole thing off as a joke had worked when Theo had been drunk, but now? What would he say when he
´d wake up? Would he mention anything at all? Would he be mad? Oh no. Would he want to find another place to sleep? Somewhere safe from drunk idiots attacking his neck? Why was Liam so stupid?

"Liam?" he suddenly heard a sleepy, husky voice call from the other side of the bathroom door. Why was that sound so hot?

"I´ll be out in a minute!" Liam begged for patience, looking down at his crotch, wondering how he was supposed to perform the miracle to get rid of the huge bulge in his boxers. Things were bad enough already, he truly didn´t need Theo to see what exactly the effect was he was having on Liam.

"Can you just unlock the door please?" Theo asked back. "I need to pee. It´s kind of urgent."

There was only one way to pull this off, Liam thought, turning on the water in the shower, pulling down his underwear and jumping into the ice-cold water jet from where he could still unlock the door with one arm stretched out.

"Fine," he growled as he turned the key around, suddenly very much awake from both the fear of Theo getting what was up with him and the extreme coldness streaming down his entire body.

Theo stormed in, too busy pulling his own shorts down to pay much attention to Liam, standing in front of the toilet and groaning out his satisfaction when finally giving his bladder some release. The way he threw his head back with his eyes closed and his lips slightly parted only made Liam think of his wet Theo dreams again, so he forced himself to look away. The problem was, he could still hear Theo, even over the splashing water, and Theo wasn´t even trying to be quiet.

"I hope you´re not wanking over there," Liam joked, "because it sounds a little bit like it."

"Believe me Captain, if I was wanking, you´d know," Theo replied dryly.

Why did he think it was okay to just say stuff like that? Great, now Liam was imagining Theo actually touching his dick. Like, in that way. And Theo was making it so easy when the sounds he was making would easily fit the scenario in Liam´s head.

He flushed the toilet and made his way back towards the door, but not without stopping next to Liam. They would have touched without the glass between them.

"Are you...-" Theo started his question.

"No, Theo, I´m not wanking either," Liam pressed out aggressively.
"Trembling, I was going to say," Theo laughed, "Is that water cold? Why are you showering with cold water?"

"It’s supposed to be healthy, you know," Liam answered, cursing himself for the incredibility of his bad lying skills.

"Right," Theo said, very obviously unconvincing, "I’m going to let you freeze to death in peace now."

Liam let out a deep sigh as soon as Theo was out of the bathroom again, immediately locking the door behind his attractive backside and slamming both his fists against the single wall of the shower. What the fuck was he even doing? Another slam followed. His knuckles started hurting, so Liam bit his lower lip sharply to divide the pain up a little, a trick he’d taught himself years ago, probably far from a healthy coping mechanism, but it still worked. Seriously, talking about masturbation? With all that he’d done in the past two days? Was he completely insane now?

He caught the red dominating his backside in the big mirror, which was exactly what he would have expected to see, but on top of that, there were a thousand small, thin strands fading away from the big bright streak and around Liam’s torso to the front side as if they were giving him a hug. Every strand left the permanent back mark in red, but then turned into either pink or violet or orange, and from the front, Liam was more yellow and green and blue than anything else. The whole image would have looked pretty if someone had drawn it onto his body on purpose, but knowing that the hundreds of slightly different shades reflected the emotions inside him, it was simply overwhelming. Liam wondered if Theo had seen it before he’d left the bathroom. And then he wondered why he gave a shit about it.

In the end, Liam couldn’t avoid jerking off again, this time in the privacy of his bathroom. He really didn’t want to, he felt strange doing it again with Theo possibly still on the other side of the door, but he had to release the pressure. Plus, they had a lacrosse game later that Saturday, so he knew they were going to be undressing and showering together. Only that the presence of the entire rest of the team would make anything remotely inappropriate a thousand times more awkward, so better get it all out before that could happen.

"What’s up with you boys this morning?" Liam’s mother, Jenna, wanted to know when they were all sitting in the kitchen having breakfast, "Didn’t sleep well?"

Liam silently cursed his Mom for knowing him so well she could always tell when something was up with him. Except this time, he couldn’t have talked to her about it, because he didn’t even know what exactly it was himself. But Theo answered her concerned question for both of them.

"No," he shook his head, "I’ve slept fantastic as always." He gave Jenna that big smile Liam knew he’d wrapped her around his little finger with the second he’d walked through their door. "Liam’s probably breeding over today’s game already. It’s going to be a tough one."
"No need to be so grim over a tough game, Liam," David, his stepdad, remarked. "You´re going to be just fine. You guys have won all the games since Theo joined, right?"

"Yeah, all three of them," Liam replied, stressing the three sarcastically.


Liam wanted to object. He didn´t like the suggestion that Theo now playing for his team solved all their problems. Theo was not the solution to everything. It couldn´t be that simple. But he remembered all the advice David had given him about lacrosse over the years. And he knew he´d never been wrong. It was the one thing they´d started bonding over after Jenna had married David and they´d all moved in together. And Liam had tried his best to see the bad things in the strange man who claimed to be in love with his mother, but eventually, he´d given up. He trusted David, especially when it came to lacrosse.

"I´m not really worried," Liam sighed, "I´m just... focused." The irony in that statement was, when Liam looked over at Theo stuffing half a pancake into his mouth, he realized he was the exact opposite from focused. He´d never been more distracted in his life.

Liam spent the remaining couple of hours before they had to leave for the game sitting on the floor in front of his bed playing his currently preferred ego shooter. He didn´t know if he was glad to be playing without the second hand embarassment of Theo dying every ten seconds in literally every game they´d ever tried out or if he missed the light hearted banter that usually led to. Meanwhile, Theo tidied up their room, even made the bed, picked up their dirty laundry and carried it downstairs, then helped Jenna with whatever she was doing in the kitchen. Liam could only hear their muffled voices, but he didn´t want to listen closely for the same reason that he´d put on a long sleeved sweater and didn´t want to look beneath it.

Theo was too much. No, Theo was fine, but Liam´s reactions to him were getting too much. It was a completely new feeling for him, and it was confusing the living shit out of him. Liam hated not knowing what was going on around him, but more than that, he hated not knowing what was going on inside of him. With the extreme showing of color over the past few days, he felt like his body was trying to tell him, like it was giving him hint after hint, but Liam was too stupid to get them. It was frustrating.

Theo drove them to the lacrosse game as usual, this time not even trying to make small talk or anything. Liam assumed that he´d most likely scared him off with his weird behavior that morning. A part of him wanted to say something, wanted to apologize, or just find a subject they could talk about, something light and simple, just to know it was still possible between the two of them. But ultimately, he couldn´t think of anything and so they kept quiet.

The same stood for when they changed into their lacrosse gear, the whole team joining their silent treatment, which somehow made it more awkward than it had to be. During their warmup on the field, Liam sincerely hoped that the game would bring a little normalcy back to them. "Listen up,
boys,” Liam called as he clapped his sweaty hands twice, "this game is going to be a tough one. We’ve had a good last three games, but we shouldn’t take anything for granted. We have to be focused. Their attacking row is good. They’ve scored more goals this season than any other team. So I suggest we don’t let them come near ours. Got it?"

The rest of the team nodded, clapping their hands and shaking their warmed up limbs. They were ready. At least until the opponent stepped on the field. They looked dangerous from the very first moment, black jerseys and grim expressions, their sticks lingering in their hands like weapons. Liam had a hunch that his statement about the game ahead being "a tough one" had been a slight understatement. But what else was there to do than fight through it and hope for the best? Well, and maybe wish for Theo do to one or two of his magic tricks again.

In all fairness, Theo did the best he could. He kept running up and down the field like tiring was a foreign concept to his body. He tackled his opponents and stole the ball from them about a dozen times in the first half alone. He passed and miraculously found ways to break free from the defense line, cutting holes into their strong formation and making them curse more than once while watching him disappear from behind. The problem was, Theo alone couldn’t beat them. The team lacked concentration and Liam felt it during every second they were playing, but he had no idea how to change anything. "Come on now, guys," he yelled across the field, but nothing really happened. He tried moving ahead and pulling them with him, but he soon realized something was off with himself, too.

Liam tried, he really did. He ran fast with the urge to be wherever they needed him to close a hole, but it was impossible. Plus, it confused his own teammates.

"What are you doing, man?" Corey threw him an accusing look at some point, a look that somehow hurt a little more just because it was Corey, and Corey wasn’t one to get angry over nothing.

"We’re losing," Liam screamed back in frustration, even though the score was still 0-0, but he knew it was only a matter of time until the guys in black would surprise their defense and get their chance in front of the goal. And they were beasts at lacrosse, one chance would be all they’d need.

"Damn right we are," Corey replied, a little more quiet, his next comment meant for only Liam to hear, "so you better get your shit together."

Of course, it did nothing for Liam to get anything together at all. On the contrary, he just got angrier. "One last warning, number nine!" the referee called out to him after a pretty rude foul. Even Liam knew it hadn’t just been a normal tackle. He took a deep breath in. And then out. But he couldn’t swallow down his aggression. It was the helplessness. He just wasn’t good at it. Being bad was one thing. But trying your hardest and never getting anything right was beyond frustrating. Running and screaming and fighting and trying every last trick that would have worked on any other opponent, but never getting even remotely close to scoring, that was something that truly got Liam’s blood boiling, and that you could see shining through the thin line of skin between the collar of his jersey and where a few sweaty strands of brown hair peeked out from underneath his helmet.
During halftime break, nobody even dared to say anything to Liam. He knew they wanted to. He knew they thought he was playing shit. He knew it was his job as captain to say something, to do something to turn the game around while they still could. But ultimately, he was too hung up in his anger, and the team felt it. Except Theo, who either didn’t understand, or didn’t care.

"I’d let you have your moment, but we seriously don’t have time for this right now, because we’re losing," he whispered, way too calmly for Liam to accept it, "so tell me what’s up with you."

"Nothing’s up," Liam growled in response. Firstly, there wasn’t enough time before the second half would begin to discuss the hole issue. Secondly, Liam couldn’t even have put that issue into words. And at last, even if he could have, Theo would have been the last person to say them to. And the last person to solve the problem.

"Come on, Liam," Theo insisted, "don’t ‘nothing’s up’ me. We both know it’s a lie. And it was fine this morning, but we need you concentrated right now."

Liam was quiet for a moment. Then he shook his head twice as if to get rid of the twisted thoughts inside them, making room for the important stuff, namely how to win this lacrosse game. "I know," he answered in a steady voice, "I will be."

"You sure?" Theo checked, a concerned expression on his face that looked too much like his Mom’s worried face for Liam’s liking.

"Absolutely," Liam tried to sound convinced, "you’re not the only one who wants to win this game, Theo. You’re not the one who wants to win it the most."

"Alright," Theo gave in, even though doubts were still written all over his pretty face. Liam could have slapped himself. This was so not the right time to notice that Theo’s face was pretty. He had more important things to worry about.

The second half went slightly better than the first one, at least at the beginning. For a brief while it looked like Liam and Theo had found their rhythm together, like they’d started playing together instead of just side by side. They even earned themselves a chance to finally score, but the opposing goalkeeper was too good at his job to let the ball into his net. It was a start. Until all of a sudden, out of a seemingly harmless situation near the middle line, a black storm formed and whirled through the Beacon Hills High’s defense line like it was nothing. Like a force of nature. And then the ball was in the net. In the wrong one.

Liam threw his stick away forcefully, then gave it a kick so it flew a few feet further. It was only his luck to finally have a little hope to win just for it to be taken away and completely crushed a minute later. When he went to pick up his stick, Liam saw Theo staring at him. The other boy clearly wanted to say something, but Liam was sure he’d snap if he’d heard it right then. "Don’t," he warned him harshly. He couldn’t have taken something like we haven’t lost yet, or there’s still some time left. He knew the technicalities. But he also knew probability. And the look to the big
clock at the side line only made him feel like there was still enough time to receive more goals instead of even the score.

They fought bravely until the last minute, but the opponent in black was stronger and smart in using their advantage against Liam´s team. They´d also seen through the extremely fun possibility to trigger his IED and get him to lash out, so he spent the last five minutes on the bench after being given a red card. It wasn´t exactly the first time something like that had happened, but the first time since he´d become captain, and the first time since Theo had joined the team, for whatever reason that mattered.

"Holy fuck," Theo breathed out when they were undressing after the game, right into the silence that had been lying over the entire team like a heavy cloud. It took Liam a moment to realize the astonishment was directed at him, but then he turned around. Theo was staring at him with an open mouth whereas the other guys at least had the decency to avert their eyes.

"What?" Liam wanted to know.

"I´m sorry," Theo apologized and turned away after he´d managed to close his mouth again.

"About what?"

"Forget it, I didn´t say anything, it was stupid," Theo tried to get out of the conversation, which only got Liam more curious.

"Spill it," Liam demanded in a tone that didn´t really leave Theo with the option of denial.

"You´re kind of...-" Theo swallowed audibly, "-... red."

Liam looked down his bare upper body. He could only see the front side, but it was colored in such a bright and aggressive red, it couldn´t possibly be any different from the backside. He´d looked like this before, even if not very often.

He shrugged. "Well, I´m not a very good loser," he explained.

Theo said nothing.

"What?" Liam hated the way he was being stared at. "I told you I wanted to win. Why don´t I have the right to be mad we lost?"

"You do," Theo pointed out, but Liam wasn´t finished.
"Then why are you looking at me like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like you´re digusted. Congratulations, Theo, it doesn´t happen to you, but to me it does, and it´s not like I can fucking stop it, so go fucking look at something else in judgment, will you?" Liam felt hot and itchy with anger. It was getting out of hand. He didn´t want it to, but the words poured from his lips without permission.

Theo looked like he´d been punched in the face. "I´m sorry?" he said in disbelief.

"Oh, you want me to repeat that? Just to make sure everybody fucking heard it right?" Liam shouted. He was filled with blind rage and it needed to get out. "I´m fucking red, and I hate it as much as you do, but I can´t change it, okay? And just because you don´t have to deal with this shit all the time doesn´t mean you have the right to be an asshole about it. And I can´t fucking deal with that fucking look on your face so leave me the fuck alone."

Theo turned even paler than before. "Alright," he replied in a whisper that made Liam flinch like from an electric shock, "wouldn´t want to force you to deal with my fucking face." And then he left, not even caring about his clothes or his bag or anything else, just stepping out of the locker room half dressed in his lacrosse gear and half naked.

"Dude," someone commented from the very far corner of the room, "trouble in paradise?" Only one person on the team - scratch that - only one person in Beacon Hills would have been stupid enough to say something, anything in that situation. Greenberg. In that moment, Liam hated him almost as much as Coach did.

Liam was close to exploding. And then he laughed. Everybody stood around him awkwardly and watched him clutch his belly and cry tears of laughter, not sure whether it was cool to laugh with him or if he´d gone completely insane. When Liam had calmed a bit, Nolan came up to him and smiled. "So I take it you´re better?"

"Strangely enough, I actually am," Liam admitted.

"Good," Nolan responded, "because otherwise it would be a bit problematic to go home later, huh?"

Liam didn´t follow his thought.

"Because Theo´s there?" Nolan explained.

Shit, Theo. He didn´t even know where to start thinking about the shit he´d just pulled. "Yeah, I
guess I’ll have to figure something out for that," Liam agreed.

"I can’t believe I have to be the one to say this to you," Nolan started after a moment of consideration, "but things would be easier for all of us if the two of you just made up for good. Or rather made out."

Liam almost spat out the water he’d just been drinking from his bottle. "Excuse me?" he asked in a ridiculous voice that sounded not at all like himself.

"God," Nolan rolled his eyes. When exactly had the puppy started becoming this sassy? "Can’t you two just bang already. Like, for the team’s sake?"

"Excuse me?" Liam exclaimed again, unsure whether he’d just heard that right, but very much sure he was supposed to be outraged this time.

"Seriously," Nolan shrugged, as if he was making a perfectly reasonable suggestion, "there’s just a lot of sexual tension in the air whenever you two get in each other’s space. You should work that out."

Liam was going from shocked speechless to angry fast, his neck lighting up enough to make Nolan take a step back.

"Would you mind repeating that?" he growled, clenching his fists. Not Nolan too, he thought.

Nolan should have been afraid enough to keep his mouth shut. Everybody knew about Liam’s anger issues. But Nolan could be inappropriately courageous sometimes, which had probably led to his latest involvement with Brett.

"Dude, there’s clearly something up with you two. Tell me if I’m wrong, but my best guess is you two have the hots for each other and need to talk it out. Or do whatever else will resolve the tension," the blond guy explained in naive calmness.

"Dude," Liam replied, stressing the nickname strangely to make it sound as unfriendly as he meant it, "just because climbing everything that could possibly cause trouble is your preferred approach, doesn’t mean we all have to slut it up to solve our issues."

Nolan looked baffled. "Are you calling me a slut?" he demanded with raised eyebrows.

"I don’t know, Nolan," Liam shot back, "are you sleeping with Brett fucking Talbot?" He was being unfair. He was clearly clinging onto the only thing he knew to be mad about that wasn’t about Theo, but he knew he’d gone too far when he saw tears welling up in Nolan’s eyes.
"You know," Nolan pressed out in a weak voice, "you of all people should know that sometimes, assholes on the outside are not assholes on the inside." He could have slapped Liam right in the face, but apparently, he’d chosen to do it the hard way instead. And then he left without another word, leaving Liam behind in a mess of painfully familiar feelings. Guilt. Regret. Self-loathing.

"What’s wrong with Nolan?" Theo wanted to know when he stepped back into the room where Liam was still standing clueless about his next move, but Theo was probably not the person to talk to about what had just happened. Liam started to wonder who exactly he´d fucked things up with worse, Theo or Nolan?

"I´m an idiot," Liam simply stated. No matter how wrong he thought Nolan was, he hadn´t had the right to shame him for liking Brett. He´d just been so angry. Liam hated how stupid anger could make him.

"You´re not an idiot," Theo contradicted, making Liam stare in awe of his sudden peacefulness, "what happened?"

"Oh yes I am," Liam repeated, staring into the empty space where Nolan had been moments earlier, "I think I just called him a slut." Why should he have lied? Theo hated him already.

"What?" Theo asked in horrified surprise, "Why would anybody call Nolan a slut? Why would you say something like that?"

"I didn´t mean it, obviously," Liam defended himself, "I know it wasn´t right. He isn´t. He just... I don´t know, he might be in love? And I, I don´t think that makes him anything... He just got me angry, okay?"

"Wow, at Nolan too? Why on earth were you angry at him?" Theo wanted to know. Wonderful, now Liam had to explain that part too. How did he manage to always say the wrong things?

"It doesn´t matter," he tried to avoid the subject, "it was nothing. Nothing a sane human being would get so mad about. It was just my crazy head... forget it."

"Liam," Theo said calmly, stepping closer, reaching out for the captain, who instantly took two steps back. "I find it kind of hard to just forget it. You don´t look like it was nothing. You´re not even red anymore. You´re just... blank."

Liam hadn´t even realized the colors beneath his skin being absent, but he couldn´t think about what that meant right then, he hade bigger problems. Like how he would apologize to Nolan. And how he would apologize to Theo.

"Whatever, okay, Theo," Liam mumbled. Whenever he didn´t want to say something, he just talked
incredibly fast and incredibly quiet, hoping that he wasn´t being heard. "Believe me, you don´t want to hear it."

"I do," Theo insisted.

"You wouldn´t say that if you knew what it is," Liam pointed out.

"Jesus, fucking tell me already," Theo practically yelled at him, coming closer again, not leaving Liam much more room to make an escape.

"Okay okay," Liam gave in, Theo´s harsh tone taking him by surprise, "he might have said something... about you..."

"About me?" Theo repeated.

"And me," Liam added in a whisper that was supposed to disappear into the air before reaching Theo´s ears. But Theo caught it.

"What do you mean?" Theo wanted to know and Liam got mad again. Mad at Theo for making him spell it out. Wasn´t it all too obvious?

"I mean you and me, as in the two of us, you know?" Liam attempted, desperately gesturing between their two bodies. It wasn´t enough to make Theo understand, or at least not to make him react like he did. "God, Theo, he was saying we should have sex." Liam hadn´t wanted to repeat Nolan´s words so directly, but Theo wouldn´t have let him be anyways, so why not just say it as it was?

"I don´t get it," Theo replied, "would you mind explaining this to me? Because it makes zero sense. Nolan implied the two of us doing... stuff and you called him a slut for it?"

"No!" Liam knew it made zero sense. He knew there was no way to explain it logically. He just knew it wasn´t like Theo was thinking. "He just... he said what he said and I got a little angry."

"Because the thought of someone believing we could have sex is so insulting to you?" Theo wanted to know.

"NO!" Liam tried to hold something together that was currently trickling through his hands, and a little quicker with every word he said. "I was just... defending you?"

"Defending me from what, you dumbass?" Theo shouted.
"I´m sorry, but Nolan just made assumptions. About me and you. Do you not mind him going around implying that you´re gay? That you got something going on with your team captain? That´s pretty rude, don´t you think?"

Theo let out a sarcastic laugh. "I can´t believe you," he glared at Liam, "you actually think you were doing me a favor?"

Liam didn´t know how to respond. Yes, he´d thought exactly that. Or had he?

"You know what´s rude, Liam?" Theo continued his tirade. Liam had never seen him so worked up. Theo was usually calm, always in control of his emotions, always keeping up the pretty face that people liked so much. But not this time. "You, Liam. You´re making assumptions. And I do mind you walking around implying that I´m anything but gay. Which I fucking am, you idiot."

Fuck. That was not at all what Liam would have expected. He opened his mouth, but there were too many new informations his brain had to process before forming any words. Plus, the words that had come out of it so far better should have stayed unsaid. Theo was gay. And he´d just made it seem like he had a problem with it, in front of the entire lacrosse team, when in reality... no, that he would have to think about another time. And then there was Nolan. He was so used to doing exactly this to the people around him, especially those who were kind enough to believe he wouldn´t. But normally, he hurt with his fists rather than what he had to say. Words were worse, Liam now realized.

"I´m sorry," Liam whispered, too afraid to speak again when apparently, all he ever said was dumb and wrong and hurtful. He was trying to apologize, but Theo didn´t seem to want to hear it. He took off again, this time with a shirt on and his bag slung over one shoulder. Most of the team followed him, the atmosphere now way too poisoned to stay and shower together. Soon, Liam was left sitting in the locker room by himself, regretting every single one of his life choices that had led up to this exact moment.

He picked up his phone and called the number he´d had on speed dial ever since he´d owned his first phone. He sighed with a teary noise of relief when the connection came to life. "Mason," he spoke into the phone pressed to his cheek, "Can you come save my stupid ass? I´m such an idiot."

Chapter End Notes

I had a really shitty week, and so I cancelled everything I had planned for chapter 11 and produced 6k words of angst and heartbreak instead. I sincerely apologize for what I´ve done to the puppies, especially Nolan. Don´t hate me, I´m still working on the happy ending.
Chapter Notes

This is my attempt of damage control.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Where are you?" Mason wanted to know and this was exactly why Mason was the best friend anybody could ever have.

"School," Liam pressed out, "locker room."

He didn’t really know what happened after. Either Mason was with him pretty damn fast or the time just passed by him, he couldn’t have told. Liam didn’t cry, but he wanted to. There was so much emotion inside him, so many thoughts, so many regrets, and all of them swimming in a waving ocean of confusion. It would have been better to let it all out, or at least some of it, but the tears didn’t come and somehow, that was worse. Like not even that was still working for him.

"I´ve got you," Mason said as he walked in, breathing heavily, smelling like rain and gas and the outside. He just sat down next to Liam, pressing their shoulders together, not forcing Liam out of the stiff position he was in, with his hands covering his face and his body slowly rocking back and forth. Mason knew that things tended to get too much for Liam, even things like touch or talk, sometimes especially those. So he was just there, his presence giving Liam reassurance and finally, the strength to speak up.

"I had one of my dick days today," Liam mumbled, but Mason understood perfectly well.

"How bad?" he asked.

"So bad it´s not even on the scale anymore," Liam replied. Mason was the one who´d once invented the scale, and the dick days to measure how much of a hard time the IED was giving him. He´d been with him even through the tens.

"Collateral damage?" was the next question.


Mason let out a sigh. Liam had to give him credit for not trying to pretend like it wasn´t that bad. "Tell me, Liam."
"I wasn’t having a great day," Liam began hesitantly. He still didn’t want to talk about any of it, but at this point, with everything that had gone to shit because of him being off, he had no other choice. And if someone was going to get it, it was Mason. "We lost the game. It was my fault, mostly. It made me angry. Like, really angry. I watched the last few minutes from the bench because of a red card."

Mason was quiet, just breathing calmly and listening and nodding. But so far, none of the information Liam had shared had been anything new to him. Liam continued after a short pause.

"I was absolutely pissed. Code lobster, no shit." Mason tensed at that. He knew exactly that so much red at once was an exception, even beneath Liam’s skin.

"And then Theo made a comment about it. It wasn’t bad," he hurried to admit before Mason could get the impression that his anger was understandable because of what Theo had said.

"I just... I just really hate not being able to hide it sometimes. And then Theo, a guy who doesn’t even show color, who doesn’t even remotely understand my problem with it, just comes and stares and... I just snapped."

"And you told him exactly that," Mason guessed. Well, he didn’t really have to guess. "That he has no color and therefore, doesn’t know what he’s talking about."

"Basically," Liam confirmed, "but that was just the beginning. After Theo was gone, Nolan came and said... something to me."

"Something about what?"

Liam looked at his best friend, considering his answer. Mason had expressed his suspicion once before. Plus, Corey would tell him exactly what Nolan had said anyways, so there really was no point in leaving anything out.

"About me and Theo. That we should... you know... resolve the tension... in that way."

Mason didn’t laugh. He didn’t say "told you so", he just nodded understandingly. "And you responded how?" he wanted to know.

"I said I wouldn’t do it because I’m not a slut like him," Liam spilled quickly.

"Liam," Mason now winced in pain.
"I know," Liam replied, because he knew. He knew that even for Mason, it was hard to support him when he said stuff like that. That slutshaming gay guys was nothing he would let him get through with.

"You know I just said that because I knew it would hurt him," Liam kept talking, "you know that, right?"

"Yeah," Mason nodded, bumping Liam´s shoulder one more time. "That was it?"

"Sadly, no," Liam whispered, once again burying his face in his palms. The hardest part was yet to come. "Theo came back after that. I told him what happened with Nolan. He got mad. I tried to convince him I’d only wanted to defend him... you know, because Nolan had implied him being gay and into me."

"And he didn’t buy it?" Mason supposed.

"If only that was it," Liam sighed, "turns out he really is gay."

"Oh shit," Mason gasped. Obviously, not even he had seen that coming.

"Yeah, shit," Liam concluded his confession. They sat in silence for a moment.

When Mason finally spoke, he asked something Liam would have never expected.

"Do you think Nolan might have been right?"

"What?" Liam´s heart was beating faster and he had no idea why.

"You know," Mason explained, "that whatever was going on with you today had to do with you and Theo."

Liam closed his eyes. "I was kind of hoping to avoid that subject."

"Why?" Mason raised an eyebrow in expectation.

"Because it’s beyond weird," Liam responded truthfully, "and I don’t know what any of it means, and that was before I knew Theo’s gay, and now that probably makes the whole thing... different?"

"Different how?"
"Well, before, the thought of something happening between us, and I´m not saying I´ve thought about it, but the thought of it would have been just weird, okay? But now, knowing that he´s gay, even thinking about it... would that make me... you know?"

"Gay?" Mason added the word that Liam was too afraid to say out loud. "Liam, you don´t even have to think about that right now."

"Yeah but...-" and suddenly, as he was saying it, Liam knew for the first time that it was true, "-... what if I am?"

"Listen to me, Liam," Mason offered, "you know I always have your back. I always try to understand you, even if I really don´t. But that, that is actually something I know a thing or two about."

Liam realized that he was right. Mason had probably gone through something similar himself. Maybe it was time to stop whining and listen to what his best friend had to share. "Then help me, Mason, please."

"First of all, you´re not going to figure out your sexual orientation in a day or two or an intense heart to heart with your best friend. You need time for that. You have to admit to yourself that you have feelings for Theo, whatever kind of feelings those might be. And you have to be open for anything that might reveal itself. About yourself, I mean."

Liam was speechless. If only he´d been as good with words as Mason. Then he wouldn´t be in this dilemma in the first place. Or he´d at least know how to deal with it.

"What do I tell Theo?" he asked, because when he thought about it, it all came down to Theo. It was all about him.

"As much as you feel comfortable telling him," Mason replied, "don´t pressure yourself. Just don´t lie to him."

"What if I come home and he´s gone?" came Liam´s next question.

"Then you have to give him space," his best friend suggested, "but you´re going to have to talk things out eventually."

"I know. I should probably apologize to Nolan too before lacrosse practice on monday," Liam agreed.
"Yeah, you should."

Liam knew it was all said. More would have been too much for him. He knew what he had to do: go home with his tail between his legs and try his best to make up to Theo, praying for forgiveness. And then the same with Nolan. Make things right before he’d even have the chance to start the journey of self-discovery he was in for. Hopefully not lose his friend and roommate in the process.

Meanwhile, Theo was sitting behind the steering wheel of his truck, but the engine was still cold, even almost an hour after everybody else had left. Everybody except Corey, who’d snuck onto the passenger seat and refused to leave him alone as the tears had been drying on his cheeks. Theo hated crying, and he hated crying in front of others, and he hated the fact that the situation got to him enough to make him, but he couldn’t have stopped it. It had been bad enough to hear Liam say out loud he wasn’t like him because of his lack of color, but he could have blamed that on the captain’s anger issues. He would have stayed mad for a while, but he would have accepted Liam’s apology whenever he’d have gotten to hear one.

But with what Liam had said about how rude he found it to be called gay, to be thought of as anything more than just Theo’s friend and roommate, something inside of Theo had started dying a slow and painful death, and now he was mourning it. It could have been the hope to have something good in his life. Something that came as he needed it, and stayed. On top of that, Liam had taken the control away from him, the control over when and how to come out to the team. Now it was all too late. They all knew. And he knew, too. He knew that there was no point in dreaming of him and Liam ever being more than friends. Probably not even friends any longer.

"Just tell me whenever you’re ready to talk," Corey encouraged him calmly after he’d stopped swiping away a new tear every ten seconds.

"What even is there to talk about?" Theo objected, his voice almost suffocated, but still ringing through the car in a harsh tone.

"You know about Liam’s anger issues, right?" Corey checked. "So you know you can’t take anything he just said personally."

"I’m sorry," Theo gasped, "did you fucking hear any of it? How the hell am I supposed to not take that personally?"

"I get it," Corey nodded, "I really do. But I also know he didn’t mean any of it. Don’t get me wrong, it was still extremely stupid and rude to say those things. And you have every right to be mad. But you have to keep in mind that he said what he could hurt you with, not what he really thinks about you."

"Oh, he said exactly what he thinks about me," Theo countered, "exactly what everybody fucking thinks about me. Don’t you think I know that? That I’m a freak because I don’t have colors? That - no offense, but - being gay on top of it doesn’t exactly make you any less of a freak? That a stupid crush on your straight-as-a-lacrosse-stick captain is the most naive and hopeless thing to even
come up with? I would change all those things about myself too, thank you very much."

Corey stared at him in bafflement. And then a faint shadow, looking like green smoke crept up his neck. And then he smiled. "You have a crush on Liam?"

"Fuck you," Theo yelled, "that was not the part you were supposed to get stuck on."

"Maybe so," Corey replied, "but it explains so much."

"How does that explain anything?" Theo wondered out loud. He was completely certain Corey was focusing on all the wrong things.

"Come on, Theo," Corey rolled his eyes, "don´t tell me you´re as clueless as Liam."

Theo sighed. "Just tell me what the hell you´re talking about."

"Have you ever considered the possibility that Liam got so mad at what Nolan said because Nolan hit a nerve?"

"The possibility that fucking what now?" Theo wasn´t sure if Corey really was suggesting what he was understanding.

Corey looked like he was about to explain the evolution theory to a kindergartener. "That the thing going on between you and Liam might be sexual tension?"

Theo just gaped.

"I´m sorry," Corey sighed, "but I really can´t put it into simpler words."

"I get what you´re saying," Theo admitted, "I´m just... no."

"No what?" Corey wanted to know.

"Just no," Theo replied, shaking his head vehemently, remembering the hateful expression on Liam´s face earlier, the force with which he´d shot insults at him.

"You might not be right about that," Corey commented his denial, "although you should probably ask Liam."
"Ask Liam?" Theo snorted, "You mean like, hey Liam, do you think we should try out that thing Nolan suggested? Yeah, pretty sure he´s just going to punch me in the face for that."

"Of course not like that," Corey responded, "but, you know, I mean, you guys share a bed, right? So it´s probably going to come up eventually."

"Fuck," Theo whispered, "I haven´t even thought about going back to Liam´s. I should probably just crash in the truck again."

"Completely out of the question!" Corey exclaimed. "Don´t be ridiculous. You go home. You talk it out. You let him apologize. And then you figure out what´s up with the two of you."

Theo knew Corey had a point. Even if he still didn´t believe, didn´t dare to let himself believe that Liam was interested in him that way, they still had to find a way to get the issue out of the way. If nothing else, they were still teammates, so they had to work together.

"Thanks, Corey," Theo whispered into the silence between them.

"Are you saying that because you want me to leave you alone?" Corey asked, but not in an unfriendly way. He had a sympathetic smile drawn onto his peaceful face.

"Yeah," Theo confessed, "but also because I owe you."

"For this?" Corey said in confusion, "No, this was nothing."

"No," Theo replied. "I mean yes, but mostly for reminding me that some people are just really genuinely good guys. People who sit through embarassing sobbing and awkward silence to make sure their friend´s okay." He pronounced the word friend carefully, almost as if he wasn´t sure if he was allowed to say it to Corey, whose smile widened at the mention of it.

"I know you mean that as a compliment, Theo...-" Corey looked into his eyes like it was really important what he had to say next. "-... but I hope you remember that all the other guys out there, all the freaks and the assholes and the guys with anger issues, they´re not automatically bad guys. I know for a fact that you two aren´t. Not Liam. And not you."

Theo didn´t know how to respond, a ball of very much mixed feelings forming in his stomach and making it heavy. He´d been called many things, but a good guy had never been among them. But anyhow, the more important question was what to do next. Would he go home? Home to Liam´s? And what would he say to him? How mad was he supposed to be? He was pretty upset and he definitely wanted Liam to know that, but on the other hand, he was certainly not willing to risk their friendship. Not even over this.
When Theo finally drove, he didn’t take the direct way. He kept roaming the streets of Beacon Hills for a while, listening to the radio in very low volume. He stared ahead at the houses and corners he’d known his entire life, realizing that they hadn’t looked the same to him ever since he’d come back. That back when his parents had packed all their possessions up into a car and left for good, they’d taken with them not only his home, or his family, but a part of his very soul, a part he hadn’t even been missing consciously, not until he now felt like being back where it lay buried.

Theo pulled into the driveway when it was long dark outside, but somehow that gave him strength, or maybe the illusion of something similar. He’d always liked the dark, even as a kid. He’d appreciated the silence, the peacefullness of a world that was asleep, resting, the few things that were happening seemingly in slow motion. Later, Theo had become a cheater, tricking his way through life with lies and manipulation, feeling safe when the lights were out, feeling like he could get away with anything, whether it was sneaking into abandoned houses to crash, or appearing into a new city with a new identity, or stealing, or whatever else he’d used to do to keep his life moving.

A part of Theo wondered why it had all stopped in Beacon Hills, even if the image was nice, as it had begun there as well. The irony... Another part of him knew, had known for a while now, that it had to have something to do with Liam Dunbar and his new found home with Liam’s family. The family he now didn’t know how to even look into the eyes of. Until Jenna opened the front door and pulled him into a tight hug.

Theo didn’t understand what was happening to him. He stood on the front porch paralyzed, his arms spread from his body but not daring to wrap them around the woman who had him in her arms. He wanted to ask, but... what exactly?

"I was so worried," Jenna said when she finally pulled back, still holding Theo by the shoulders. "I know you’re not a little kid anymore, and I know you’re not my kid, but when you just don’t come home and we can’t reach you, I still get worried sick."

"I... I’m sorry," Theo stuttered, the thought of Jenna sitting at home wondering where he is and why he isn’t home yet simply being too much for him to process.

She looked into his reddened eyes for a moment, probably considering how mad she should be at him. "It’s fine," she finally reassured him, "as long as you promise me to answer your phone the next time you’re going to be several hours late."

"I promise," Theo nodded quickly. He would have promised her to give her one of his kidneys, too. He wondered if Liam knew how lucky he was, to have a mother like her.

"Come in, sweety," she smiled, "you must be starving. I’ve kept some lasagna for you."

"I’d love to," Theo answered as he entered the hallway. He really would have loved to, his stomach was growling at him in grim accusation for not being fed. "But at first... I have to... is Liam home?"
Jenna’s expression turned a little more serious, a concerned dark red blushing beneath the skin of her neck and jaws, leaving no doubt that she really was Liam’s mother. "He was here earlier," she responded, "looking for you. But then he left again. Would you... would you be okay with telling me what happened?"

Theo couldn’t hide the disappointment about Liam’s absence from his face, but he took it as a good sign that Liam had been searching for him. How he was supposed to explain any of it to Jenna, he had not the slightest idea though.

"We got into a fight," he made a very brief attempt, suspecting that she wouldn´t leave it at that.

"About what?" she asked as she piled spoonful after spoonful of pasta and bolognese sauce and melted cheese onto a plate and put it in the microwave.

"I don’t think that matters," Theo replied, reminding himself of what Corey had told him. "I think he had a bad day, you know. He was angry. Like, angrier than I’ve ever seen him."

"Oh," she made a hurtful face at him, "I was afraid of something like that from the very first moment I saw him this morning. But it´s not like I can do much about it."

"I think I said something stupid," Theo reflected, "I might have triggered him. And then he went off and said some stuff himself. To me, and Nolan."

"Theo,..." Jenna sighed deeply.

"I know, I know," Theo interrupted her, "I know he didn’t mean those things. But they still... got to me. And I’m not used to dealing with his IED like you or Mason or Corey. So I just took off for a while."

The microwave beeped in an ugly tone that Theo was still grateful for as it disturbed their conversation. He was really not in the mood to start crying again. It was incredible how a warm meal alone seemed to be able to make Theo feel much better after the hell of a day he’d had. Or maybe it was the warm and secure house he was sitting in. Or maybe the loving smile on Jenna’s face that looked so much like Liam’s, the blue eyes glistening in the same way when she spoke with excitement or happiness in her voice.

Before Theo disappeared up the stairs and into the empty bedroom, he let his eyes linger on her for an extra moment, hoping she could see in them all the things he failed to say. That even if he was feeling pretty damn miserable, she made him feel like maybe it wasn’t the end of the world. He tried his best to keep that in mind as he entered the dark, cold room. He didn’t switch the lights on. There was no point in seeing the room when Liam wasn’t in it. Theo just walked into the bathroom, thinking that he’d be safe there, safe from all the memories, considering that he’d usually been alone in there. Except that morning. No, the bathroom was no better.
He peeled off his clothes and let them fall right where he was standing. He stepped into the shower and turned on the water, which was cold. Liam had taken a cold shower earlier that day. It didn’t help, so he changed to hot water, hoping for something other than sadness to come raining down on him. He washed himself in grim efficiency and gave the whole thing up. It was hopeless. When he stepped back into the dark bedroom, Theo suddenly had a thought he couldn’t let go of, so he rummaged through the closet, pulling out dozens of shirts and sweaters before he found the light white t-shirt Liam had given him his very first night at his place and pulled it over his head. He threw the towel away in some corner and picked striped boxer shorts and a pair of sweatpants that could have been his own, or Liam’s, he couldn’t tell in the dark.

While Theo curled himself up on the carpet in front of the bed that was too empty to be bearable, Liam was sitting in the kitchen over at Nolan’s, waiting for Mrs Holloway to get her son to come down and talk to him.

"Didn’t expect you so soon,” Nolan commented as he walked in, a light red glow shining from his sharp cheekbones, almost like a simple blush, "figured you’d hurl after Theo first."

"Honestly?” Liam started, "I tried, but I couldn’t find him." He was definitely redder than Nolan, but it was no wonder with all the nervosity, and the guilt, and the fear, and the hame. And the sadness; the desperate, heartbreaking, soul-consuming sadness.

Nolan nodded understandingly. The fact that he stayed leaned against the doorframe made Liam a little anxious, but he knew it was his turn to prove he´d come in peace this time.

"I don’t know what to say other than I´m sorry," he started off. Nolan looked at him, obviously waiting for more.

"I truly am sorry, Nolan. I shouldn’t have said anything about you and Brett. Mostly because that wasn´t even what I really think about it."

Nolan thought for a moment. Then he pulled out a chair and sat down. "You know, I thought exactly that at the beginning. That only a stupid slut would sleep with Brett Talbot. That I had to be insane to believe that he could like me...—"

"No! Nolan? What the hell are you talking about?" Liam didn’t like the direction the conversation was going. He’d said those things but hadn´t meant them. But apparently, Nolan had and he only just then realized how stupid he´d been to spell them out. "I didn´t... I didn’t know you thought that. Because... I might have said those things... but I knew they weren’t true. Give me one good reason for Brett not to like you."

Nolan shrugged his shoulders. "Because he´s Brett. And I´m just me."

"You’re not just anything," Liam declared passionately. Not for one second had he thought he’d
have to tell Nolan that. "Look, I´m going to tell you a secret."

"Yeah," Nolan looked up curiously, "what is it?" The red was fading from his face already.

"I´m a dick...-" Liam began.

"No secret, but continue," Nolan remarked.

"No, it´s not," Liam agreed, "I´m a dick, and that´s why I lash out when I don´t know how to deal with stuff. If I´m being completely honest with you, I was just jealous."

"Jealous?" Nolan repeated in irritation. "Jealous of what?"

"Jealous of you going for what you want. And getting it. Even if it´s a guy. Even if it´s Brett."

"Yeah, but... you don´t give a shit about Brett," Nolan said.

"No, but I give a very serious shit about Theo," Liam replied. And as simple as that, it was out, and it hadn´t even hurt saying it.

“Oh my god,” Nolan whispered in astonishment, "I can´t believe you just said that out loud in front of me." Something that almost looked like a mix of blue and green crept up from beneath his collar.

"If you tell anybody, I´ll fucking kill you," Liam growled, but he couldn´t hold back a smile to go along with the threat.

"No, I´ll leave that to you," Nolan smiled and Liam felt like the earth had continued spinning again, as if it had only waited for the hurt to disappear from Nolan´s face.

"I´m really glad you´re not an idiot like me," Liam told him, because he knew that the world would never work if everybody in it was as impulsive and insensitive as him.

"You should be," Nolan responded, "the question now is, how much of an idiot is Theo?"

"Well," the tone on Liam´s voice turned all sad and hopeless again, "let´s hope I´ll get the chance to find out."

"I mean, not that I´m an expert in how to get a guy you don´t think you have a chance with to sleep with you," Nolan joked, "but I believe you will."
Liam couldn´t help but laugh a little. "Oh Noley, man," he shook his head in amused disbelief, "I might have been underestimating you for the longest time."

"A commonly made mistake," Nolan took it with humor, "it´s the freckles I suppose."

"Probably," Liam smiled, looking down on his hands and seeing a surprisingly calm blue. "Seriously though, thank you. I owe you."

"Nahh," Nolan made a neglecting sound, "you just go and fix the Theo thing and we´re good."

Liam stood up and tried to look more hopeful than scared, but probably failed. He was still grateful for the light green positivity shining from Nolan´s cheeks as he opened the front door for him. "See you on monday," Nolan waved.

"If I don´t show up at school the shame has killed me," Liam murmured over his shoulder. Nolan laughed in spite of the serious undertone of it. Liam got into his car and on the way home. He took a deep breath out.

Chapter End Notes

Lucky us that Nolan is such an angel, huh? :)

I hope you can all live with the end of this chapter, because I'll have to go on a writing break for a week. I'll try to update next week sunday though, but I'd rather not make any promises.

Thank you for your love ❤

You wanna know what Nolan did after Liam left? Here ya go. https://archiveofourown.org/works/14254884
Liam sighed with relief as the driveway with Theo´s truck parked in it came into sight. A heavy kind of pressure tumbled from his chest slowly, a pressure he hadn´t been noticing until he was finally able to properly breathe again. "Thank god," he mumbled to himself, even if he should have thanked Theo instead, because no matter how sweaty his palms were, no matter how much the thought of the conversation he was about to have terrified him, the most important thing was that he still had the chance. That Theo was still around. Liam couldn´t have complained if he had left, and he wouldn´t have been surprised either, but once again, Theo was taking things into an unexpected direction.

Liam got out of the car with wobbly knees, the guilt cooling his body down into a shivering freeze that didn´t match the burning red in the back of his neck. It felt as if he´d been sick, tortured simultaneously by incredible cold and unbearable heat, leaving his head dizzy until he found the yellow marks on his knuckles to use as a fixed point to focus on.

Liam could only hope that the dick day he´d been having was over now that the world had gone dark. Any tiny little bit worse, and the situation would have been too bad to bear even the remote chance of redemption, Liam was sure of it, so whatever he was going to say had to be good, had to be good enough. It had worked with Nolan better than anticipated, but Nolan wasn´t making his heart beat faster with every look at him, Nolan wasn´t a living mystery with secrets over secrets encrypted beneath his skin, Nolan wasn´t the only source of all the recent change in Liam´s inner self. He wasn´t Theo.

Liam took a deep breath in as he fumbled his key into the lock and a deep breath out as he opened the door attached to it. He stepped inside the scarily silent house and basically right into the warm figure of his awaiting mother. When the two of them had their arms slung around each other, Liam wondered when exactly he´d last hugged his mom, and why he´d ever stopped, because her scent alone, and the shoulder holding his chin up, were enough to open all his floodgates.

For the first time that day, and not even a word had been spoken between them, Liam closed his eyes and let the tears come and go, streaming down his face and disappearing into the fabric of Jenna´s sweater. It felt good and bad at the same time, like he was falling apart piece by piece, but with the unshakable trust that someone was taking care of the shreds, picking them up and sticking them back together in a way that created a more stable result than the one breaking now.

Crying and wailing and clinging to his mom for dear life, Liam realized how much he´d needed exactly that. Mason was a hero for supporting him, for giving him strength, but Jenna was an angel for allowing him weakness, for protecting him during it like the child he was being.

"Dick day, huh?" she asked softly when the sobbing had faded, still stroking Liam´s back, writing love all over the itchy red. "Is it over?"

"Maybe," Liam pressed out hoarsely, "if he forgives me."

"He´s here," Jenna said, and Liam was glad she hadn´t gone farther than the simple statement, that she hadn´t told him that everything would be alright when neither of them could know for sure. He´s here was good, was enough for the moment, because it meant something was holding Theo there, or someone. If that someone was Liam, there was hope.
Liam’s heart sank when he found his room dark and the bed empty in the moon’s spotlight. Maybe Theo wasn’t there after all, maybe he’d snuck out of the window when he’d heard Liam return. Maybe even the little hope he’d allowed himself had been in vain. But then he caught a glimpse of a yellow shimmer in the corner of his eye. Walking around the bed, Liam realized the room was too warm to be empty, the atmosphere too full of emotion. On the other side of the bed, on the floor, looking out of the low window with an absent stare, lay Theo, his knees pulled up against his chest and held close by his arms.

Liam didn’t dare to speak, or move. He would have stopped breathing, too, if choking to death hadn’t disturbed Theo in his silence. He’d always looked so elegantly confident, so effortlessly pulled together, so cool and brave and strong. Now, the only word that came to Liam’s mind as he was observing Theo’s ragged breathing was vulnerable.

It was almost impossible for Liam to look at, the whole scene, as it only reminded him that he’d been the cause of this pain, that he still was, but he kept his eyes focused. It would have been unfair, to close his own eyes from the ugly truth of what he’d done, when others were the ones to truly suffer.

Suddenly, Theo tilted his head and looked up to him. He’d always called Theo blank, Liam realized bitterly, but the absence of color hadn’t made him blank. The absolute absence of emotion from his face, though, did.

"I’m sorry," Liam whispered, in full awareness that words like those lost a little bit of meaning with every time they were used, and he’d used them an awful lot in the seventeen years of his life.

Theo didn’t respond in any other way than turning his gaze back out onto the dimly lit street they’d both lived in together for three weeks.

"Please," Liam begged, the helplessness weighing heavy on his tired limbs.

Theo breathed out in a dramatic sigh, but still remained silent.

When Liam found the faint yellow glow again, this time creeping down the backsind of Theo’s upper arms, shining through the thin white fabric he was wearing, a sudden rush of energy flooded his body. Just words wouldn’t be enough, certainly not if Theo refused to even look at him, so Liam made two large steps onto the thick carpet, kicked off his shoes and lay himself down, facing Theo, blocking his view outside and stealing his attention.

"I’m sorry," he repeated, his eyes wide open, holding Theo’s gaze, letting him see that he’d been crying, letting him know that Liam was hurting too.

"I know," Theo finally gave in, his lids fluttering closed.

Liam nodded. It was a start. An apology that had been heard, even if not yet accepted.

"I have so many things to say to you," he continued carefully, "but I’m scared. I haven’t exactly proven myself good with words today."

"I guess not," Theo responded monotoneously. Not exactly an encouragement to keep talking, but Liam wasn’t willing to give up just yet.

"I have these days," he started explaining, his voice barely above a whisper, "we’ve been calling them dick days. I’m not good with emotions, you know. They confuse me. Some days, they get too much for me. Those days, I take them all and turn them into anger, the only emotion I’ve been familiar with my entire life."
"So, today was a dick day, huh?" Theo asked, their gazes connecting.

"A pretty bad one," Liam said.

"I guess," Theo shrugged.

"Look," Liam continued, "whatever you decide to do next, however mad you choose to be - and you have every right to - let me just make one thing absolutely clear."

In spite of Theo’s half-hearted responses so far, he had his undivided attention, which Liam knew was crucial to the outcome of this talk.

"Every single word I said earlier today," he spoke with an insistent tone in his voice, "every single word, to you and to Nolan, was meant to hurt and nothing else. None of it was true. None of it was what I really think. None of it."

Theo bit his lower lip and despite of all his other worries, there was a short moment where Liam regretted nothing more than not having kissed him when he´d had the chance.

"I know that too," Theo replied, "but trying not to let it get to me turns out to be a little more difficult than expected."

"I understand," Liam nodded, "but you´re trying?"

"I had a talk with Corey," Theo explained, "and your mom. Most of the things that happened today make sense to me now, but they still hurt."

Hearing Theo spell it out gave Liam´s heart another sharp sting, even if he´d been seeing it written all over his pretty face the entire time.

"I was really afraid you weren´t going to be here," Liam said.

"I thought about leaving," Theo admitted.

"Why didn´t you?" Liam wanted to know.

Theo was queit for a moment, looking like he´d never before considered that question. "I didn´t want to," he finally stated.

Liam´s heart skipped a beat. Theo might have been mad, but he hadn´t wanted to leave him. That was something. Frankly, it was more than Liam had dared to hope for.

"Life´s been pretty good during the last three weeks," Theo added when he saw the surprise on Liam´s face.

"Yeah, mine too," Liam breathed out.

Theo almost smiled when hearing that, one corner of his mouth staying exactly where it had been the whole time, but one twitching up for a millisecond before he could bring it under control again.

"Do you think we can get past what happened today?" Liam asked directly. It didn´t matter how, or when, it only mattered that Theo was willing.

"I don´t know," he answered, his eyes drifting away into the empty space above Liam´s body. "I guess I need you to promise me a few things first."
Liam was genuinely confused. "What things?"

Theo took a deep breath. He didn´t look at Liam when he spoke. "You have to stop talking about me not having colors."

Liam´s skin itched with the urge to mention the yellow he´d now seen several times, and certainly not by coincidence, but he swallowed the comment down, not risking to upset Theo any further. Instead, he nodded, trying to make Theo look him in the face when his answer was purely mimical, not verbal. It didn´t work.

"Also, can we pretend like I didn´t just come out to the lacrosse team?" Theo added.

Now Liam´s irritation was perfect. "Why?"

"Why? Are you serious?" For the first time since Liam had entered the room, a voice rose above fearful whispering. "Because it makes everything weird! For you more than anybody else, I thought."

"Wait, what?" Liam wasn´t following. He´d said something like that to Mason, but he´d meant it differently. He´d meant he was the one making things weird. He´d meant he was too fucked up and unsure of himself to deal with this appropriately. He didn´t want Theo to think he had to pretend like anything just for him.

Theo sighed. "You know... after three weeks of sharing a bed with me."

Liam simply made a stupid face and rolled his eyes so Theo would see how ridiculous he was being.

"After... after friday night?" Theo tried again.

Friday night. The neck kiss. Yes, that was a weird thing to even think about, but that was hardly Theo´s fault.

"You don´t seriously think I have a problem with sleeping next to you because you´re gay," Liam said when his grimaces apparently didn´t work. "Please tell me you don´t think that."

"I don´t know," Theo shrugged, "do you?"

"No." Liam was offended a little bit by the question, but he didn´t want to freak out. He wanted to sound controlled and secure when answering, wanted Theo to know it was the truth.

"I´m sorry I didn´t tell you sooner," Theo suddenly muttered.

Liam wanted to tell him that it was okay. And then he thought that no, it was not okay for him to accept Theo´s apology. Because it wasn´t okay for him to let Theo believe he had anything to apologize for. Liam had never told anybody he was straight. And he didn´t know if he truly was. He hadn´t told Theo he´d been questioning his sexuality ever since they´d been living together. And now Theo felt bad, but Theo wasn´t the one who´d jerked off to him.

"No." Liam repeated his previous reply, his expression a little more grim this time.

"What do you mean, no?" Theo asked confusedly.

"You had your reasons for not telling me," Liam explained, "but above all, you don´t need a reason to do so. You don´t owe that to me."
Theo raised an eyebrow in a silent question. Liam understood. Theo couldn’t possibly have known why he was reacting so passionately to the topic.

"The whole concept of coming out is stupid anyway," Liam shrugged, trying not to sound too invested. "First of all, why are non-straight people the ones that have to come out? Apart from that, it’s not like putting a label on your sexuality puts you under any sort of obligation to only choose one specific kind of partner for the rest of your life. I could say I’m straight today, and then I could go and get me a boyfriend tomorrow, and then what?"

"I’m not sure I’m following you," Theo remarked, a curious look on his face.

"Forget it," Liam sighed, "it’s not important. If you know you’re gay, I’m happy for you. And I don’t want you to apologize, and I don’t have a problem with it. You can still sleep in my bed. It really doesn’t change anything."

That in fact, it did change something, Liam kept to himself. It changed the way he thought about his own feelings, and the kiss he hadn’t had, and the importance of keeping Theo in his life. It changed the light in which Theo’s skin appeared, and the image his muscles drew beneath the light t-shirt, and the appeal of the tattoos standing out from the pallor. It changed the rate of Liam’s heartbeat, and what his arousal whenever he was around Theo meant. It changed what he wanted their relationship to be.

All of a sudden, Liam knew one thing. Straight, gay, or something, anything in between, he would take Theo’s friendship if he’d be lucky enough to get it, but he’d also take anything else from the guy. Anything.

"What are you thinking about?" Theo wanted to know. He’d taken a different position, his legs stretched out, his hands serving as some kind of pillow beneath his cheek.

"What an idiot I am," Liam replied truthfully.

"Technically, you’re just a boy with intermitted explosive disorder," Theo said calmly and Liam knew things were good between them. As good as it was going to get that night.

"Technically, you’re just a boy whose truck I crashed a while ago," he answered.

"Sounds like there’s going to be a but," Theo noted.

"But really, you’re not," Liam finished the sentence.

"What am I?" Theo wanted to know.

"If only I knew," Liam smiled, "I’ve been trying to figure that out ever since you walked through the front door."

"What do you have so far?"

"A lot," Liam confessed, his cheeks heating up remarkably, "but I don’t know what it means."

"Is there anything that could help you with that?" Theo asked with a mild smile on his full lips.

"Maybe," Liam mumbled in insecurity. It was hard to tell whether they were on the same page when neither of them called things by their names.

"Well, you just tell me when something comes to your mind," Theo offered.
Liam nodded. They looked into each other’s eyes, but neither of them said anything. Liam felt like the moment was good, but he knew they’d both had a long and eventful day. Now it looked like Theo was staying, like they were going to be alright, and that was enough of a miracle already. Better not push his luck, he thought. When Theo shifted, he wasn’t so sure anymore.

"Should we go to bed?" Theo suggested, dragging Liam back to reality.

"Yeah," he croaked, realizing just how tired he was, glad that he could sleep in peace that night. Or something pretty close to peace.

They both got up, moving slowly and quietly. Liam simply took off his pants and got into bed, not caring about anything else than sleep and Theo. When the other boy’s shirt slid up a little, Liam was reminded of the question that had been burning on his mind for weeks.

"What song is it?" he asked.

Theo turned around and looked at him, seemingly not very enthusiastic about the topic. Liam was sure he shouldn’t have asked. It would have been different with every other person. Asking about the meanings behind their tattoos would have felt like genuine interest in them, nothing more and nothing less. For some reason, because it was Theo, Liam felt like he was invading his privacy. Probably because Theo guarded his inner self so fiercely, whether it was to protect himself or protect his surroundings, only Theo knew.

Liam had already accepted not getting an answer when Theo spoke. It was barely a whisper, but Liam heard him perfectly well.

"It’s the first song I remember somebody singing to me."

"What’s it called?" Liam wanted to know.

Theo was obviously considering his answer. "You know, Captain, one day, I might even tell you."

It was no real response, as it didn’t contain any information, but the sound of it was positive, and Liam knew to appreciate that.

"Can you promise me you’re still going to be here in the morning?" Liam begged when they were covered by the sheets, the mattress beneath them way more comfortable than the carpeted floor.

"I promise," Theo said.

The quiet that followed pained Liam. He wanted to say so many more things. It simply didn’t feel like he’d explained himself properly. And not all their issues had been solved. Liam wanted Theo to know how he felt about him. Of course, he didn’t dare to tell him, but it still bothered him. So Liam lay in the dark with his eyes wide open, a thousand thoughts running through his head. He looked at his alarm at one a.m. and then tried to focus on something other than Theo’s white t-shirt.

Liam wondered what exactly it was that had led both Mason and Nolan to believe there was something, at least a tension, between him and Theo. He did have certain feelings about his roommate, sure, but it wasn’t like anybody could see them from the outside, was it? Or was it something that he’d said? Or was he behaving differently?

The next time Liam checked the time, it was half past two. He exhaled heavily and turned onto his side, but he knew he would never be able to find sleep with Theo in his back, so he changed onto the other side. Even if it was dark, or maybe because of it, Liam let his gaze wander. Not across
Theo´s body, which he knew pretty well at that point, but over the face he was usually too afraid to look into for too long.

A few strands of Theo´s atypically messy light brown hair hung over his forehead. It looked good, betraying the perfect facade Theo´s flawless hairstyles belonged to. Liam wondered if his obsession with Theo was real attraction to him as a person, or just a natural curiosity about all the things beneath the surface that didn´t show. Maybe it was a little bit of both.

Theo´s eyebrows were dark, and for once not furrowed strictly, his lashes lighter and long enough to be called pretty. Trying to remember the color of the closed eyes, Liam failed to find one specific color to describe them with. Sometimes they looked more green, sometimes more grey, and most of the time there lay a hundred slightly different shades in them. One day, Liam would get the chance to look at them as closely and for as long as he wanted to.

At three, Liam got to the light stubble covering Theo´s cheeks and the sharp line of his jaw. His fingertips started itching with the urge to touch it, and he would have, if he´d known for sure that it hadn´t woken Theo up. All of a sudden, Liam was dying to know how it would feel not only beneath his fingers, but on his face. How it would feel during a kiss. And that thought led his gaze to Theo´s slightly parted lips, warm air streaming out between them in a steady rhythm. They looked fuller than usual, like they were swollen, and a little chapped. When Liam imagined Theo biting them, he knew he was being inappropriate again.

When the alarm clock turned to three-fifteen, that one song he´d heard on the radio came to Liam´s mind.

*You´re my discretional sin*

*I feel you on me when I touch my skin*

*You got me hooked and you´re reelin´me in*

*When I look in your eyes, I´m on the edge*

*You´re on my mind like a song that I can´t escape*

*I don´t know how many da-da-dums I can take*

*I need to know if you´re feeling, feeling the same*

*Is it too late?*

Was it too late? Had Liam destroyed a hypothetical chance to discover himself with Theo with his lashout? Had the things he´d said been too big, too offensive to convince Theo there really had been no truth in them at all? And how was he even supposed to try? While Theo was inhaling and exahling calmly next to him, Liam was freaking out a little.

*But now it´s hard to breathe*

*I´m not in love, it´s just a game we do*

*I tell myself I´m not that into you*

*But I don´t wanna sleep, it´s quarter after three*

It was getting too much, so Liam turned onto his back and stared to the ceiling instead of Theo. He
felt hot, so he pushed the thick blanket down and let the air graze his bare arms, but five minutes
later, he decided that it was too cold, so he covered himself up again.

"The fuck are you doing?" Theo growled huskily and Liam jumped a little.

"Can´t sleep," Liam mumbled in response.

"Can you, like, hold still while not sleeping?" Theo suggested, his eyes never opening.

"Yeah, sorry." Liam tucked his arms to his sides and closed his eyes, not wanting to keep Theo up,
but now there was a weird tension in the air, and Liam knew the chances to fall asleep hadn´t
gotten better.

"Okay, fuck it," Theo sighed, "I can practically hear your thoughts running."

"Sorry," Liam repeated.

"Tell me," Theo said after he´d turned to face Liam, his eyes now open and focused.

"Tell me what?" Liam asked.

"Tell me what´s keeping you awake, you idiot." Even in the dark, Liam could see Theo rolling his
eyes.

"Regret," Liam answered quietly, which was true, but too unspecific to be of any use for Theo.

"What is it you´re regretting?" Theo wanted to know.

Liam shifted so that they were facing each other. "Many things," he whispered with a deep look
into Theo´s eyes, but there was one thing he regretted more than the others, as he realized when his
eyes dropped to Theo´s lips.

"Which is the worst?" It was like Theo could read his mind.

Was this the moment to admit it? Liam was terrified of the idea, but he was equally terrified of
adding another missed opportunity to the list of things to regret.

"Some time this week," Liam started, fixating the spot on Theo´s neck where his pulse lay beneath
instead of the distracting face, "I did something I hadn´t planned."

"Do you wish you hadn´t done it?" Theo asked.

"Not exactly," Liam replied hesitantly.

"Then what´s the problem?"

"The problem is-" Liam took a deep breath out "-that I started something I didn´t go through with."

"And you wish you had." Theo wasn´t guessing.

"A little more" with every passing minute," Liam added.

"Why didn´t you?" came Theo´s next question, and a good one.

Liam shrugged. "Because I was scared."

"Of what?"
"Rejection," Liam answered truthfully. It was warm beneath the blanket, but he was shaking all over.

"Are you still scared?" Theo wanted to know.

"A little," Liam breathed out.

"A little?" Theo repeated, his voice soft and low and utterly seductive.

"No. A lot, actually," Liam confessed, feeling Theo´s stare on him.

"Is there still a way to do the thing you regret not having done before?" Theo asked, repositioning his cheek on his pillow and somehow being a lot closer after it.

Liam considered it. Looking into Theo´s eyes in the dark, he couldn´t make out how much of them was green and how much was grey, but a dark shimmer lingered in them like an invitation. "I guess so," Liam finally managed to say.

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"Courage," Liam whispered as he shuffled closer to the middle of the bed until their breaths were mixing.

"You´re the bravest person I know," Theo said, and Liam had never in his life gotten a bigger compliment.

The tension was almost killing him. Theo was so close the colors in his eyes were one single breathtaking blur he was losing himself in. And then the lids fluttered down, but not shut. Theo was staring at his mouth, Liam realized.

Yes, he was still scared, but he was the bravest person Theo knew, Liam reminded himself as he closed his eyes. And then he leaned in. And when he felt Theo´s lips on his own, there was no more room for fear, or worry, or guilt. Tasting the sweetness of Theo´s mouth, Liam was no longer the guy with anger issues, he was nobody´s captain. He was just a boy kissing another boy for the first time in his life.

The most beautiful thing was, Theo was even kissing him back. He parted his lips for Liam and returned the soft pressure, put his hand behind Liam´s neck, the weight of it grounding him. Liam reached out for Theo´s arm and held onto it, trying to tell him how badly he needed the contact, silently begging him not to let go.

Just when Liam thought the moment couldn´t get any better, he felt the wet tip of Theo´s tongue sliding across his lower lip, so he opened up and let the sensation of their tongues interacting flood his senses. Liam could barely remind himself to keep breathing.

When Theo pulled back, Liam was panting and absolutely clueless whether they´d just spent a minute or an hour kissing. All he knew was that he wanted to do it again.

"Feeling better?" Theo asked with a smirk, his hand still holding Liam, the fingertips drawing smooth circles into his skin.

"You wouldn´t believe how much better," Liam told him.

Theo gave him the most beautiful smile in the universe, then leaned in again and pressed a kiss on Liam´s forehead. Somehow, that kiss felt even more intimate than the one before.
"Night, Captain," Theo whispered, staying just as close as he’d been for the last minutes, his breath tickling the skin on Liam’s face.

"Night, Theo," Liam answered. Not much later, he finally fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I DID IT!!!! this chapter was a little hard on me, mostly because I couldn't decide whether I should let them kiss or not.

Also, I've realized that in this and the previous 3 chapters, I've been talking about a few things that I might have given a lot of thought, but ultimately don't know has much about as others do. Things like the boys' sexuality, coming out and Liam's IED. Everything I had them say was meant to fit their characters, but if anybody has any objections about how I handled those topics, feel free to point them out to me.

The song I used is Breathe by Jax Jones.

At last, I know we've all been missing Theo's POV, but I'll write chapter 14 from his perspective. It's gonna be a special one :)}
The Sunday after the night Theo and Liam had shared their first kiss marked the beginning of a new part of Theo’s life. He didn’t just think that because he was a hopeless romantic desperately trying to give one single kiss more meaning than it had truly had. No, the night had quite literally brought a few crucial changes with it.

The most obvious one was the thing happening between him and Liam. Their first kiss had been magical, but the real miracle had been waking up the next morning with a slumbering Liam snuggled up in his arm, breathing against his collarbone, one leg slung over his lower body. The heavy warmth covering him had taken away Theo’s initial fear of the magic fading with the first rays of sunlight.

Nothing like that had happened. Theo had wrapped his arms around Liam a little tighter and waited for him to wake up while listening to his even breathing. It had been therapeutic. And even when Liam had woken up, they’d stayed in bed, limbs intertwined, hands rubbing circles in each other’s skin, sleepy kisses happening here and there. The world outside of their bedroom hadn’t even existed. No words had been spoken, at least not out loud. They’d dragged the togetherness out until Jenna had made them get up and help clean the house.

Theo had waited for Liam to let him know how he was supposed to behave around others, like Liam’s parents, or Mason and Corey, or the lacrosse team, not wanting to pressure him. He would have gone along if Liam had told any of those people that something had happened between them, but Liam had moved on as usual, at least whenever they hadn’t been alone.

In bed at night, though, or sometimes even in Theo’s truck, Liam had made a habit of attacking him with sweet touches and hungry kisses. Nothing more than heavy making out had happened so far, but they’d both started taking cold showers several times a day to calm themselves down, so realistically, it was only a matter of time.

Basically, they had a secret relationship going on, and Theo was absolutely okay with it as long as he could hold Liam in his arms while falling asleep. The only person he thought might have known something was Mason, who’d started looking at him differently somehow, and not even in a bad way, but it was still freaking him out a little. Being around Corey was easier for Theo, since he had this calm, peaceful aura surrounding him that Theo had started getting used to. Compared to his boyfriend, Corey was less curious, or at least less obvious about it, and Theo liked that, liked the certainty of a friend having his back, being there for him, but without pressure, without expectation.

Theo had spent a lot of time thinking about why Corey seemed to like him, and why the friendship he was offering was so much easier for Theo to take than that of others. Friendship meant commitment, and if there was one thing Theo Raeken was afraid of, it was that. One day, when he was sitting in class, Theo remembered something, and from then on, he thought he understood at
least a part of the whole mystery. It was the only quote from a book he’d ever known by heart, probably because he hadn’t read any books that hadn’t been assigned to him in class, but this particular sentence had apparently stuck with him.

To truly trust somebody means never expecting them to confess to you.

Theo trusted Corey because Corey trusted him. It was as simple as that, and still, it was the first time in his life that it was working out that way. Liam was still asking about his tattoos, especially the one on his back, and it was cool because it was Liam, a young boy full of life and energy and the will to learn new things all the time. Theo considered that one of Liam’s strongest character traits. Jenna and David had started asking about his family, about how school was going, about his plans for the future, and it was cool, because he knew they only did that because they cared about him. Mason, Nolan, the rest of the team, everybody kept asking him questions, and it was cool, because they meant well and Theo knew that.

The problem with questions was, too many of them had no answers. Others, Theo could have answered, but was too afraid to. That last kind was mostly the kind coming from Liam. Theo put a hand between his back and the driver’s seat he was sitting in while waiting for Liam to come home with him after last period had ended. He laid his palm on his own lower back, aware that there wasn’t really anything to feel there, but the thought alone mattered enough to bring a soft melody to his mind. It was day twenty-six after the kiss.

Theo was glad Liam finally arrived for their ride home before he could start imagining the singing voice as well. He really didn’t need that kind of emotionality. Not on that day of all days.

"Sorry I’m late," Liam said breathlessly as he climbed into the passenger’s seat, "had to run to the office after last period to get my phone back again."

Theo couldn’t help but let out a laugh. "When are you going to learn to use your phone more discreetly in class?"

"I am!" Liam complained. "At this point, I’m pretty sure Mrs Finch just calls me out randomly because she simply assumes I’m on my phone."

"You say that as if she wasn’t right every damn single time," Theo argued.

"So what?" Liam pouted. "Still rude."

"Yeah, she probably thinks the same about you," Theo replied. He could barely hide his amusement over the fact this had not only happened for the fourth time on the fifth school day that week, but that Liam actually thought he was a victim in the situation.

"Fuck her," Liam brushed the topic aside, "I wonder what Mom’s making for dinner tonight."
That boy was the most ridiculous person in the world, Theo thought with endless admiration for the ease with which Liam walked through life, seemingly happy and carefree, at least whenever the IED wasn’t fucking with him. It was not an easy thing to live with, Theo knew, but it was different from his own traumas that were less visible from the outside, but more permanently weighing him down, perhaps even more likely to drown him one day.

But what was the weight of the past on his shoulders when Liam was right beside him? It was nothing, nothing that mattered, nothing important enough to make him unhappy, and that was a first on this particular day of the year. Another first was Theo being the one to turn up the radio for their ride home, not because he was in the mood for mainstream music, or because he needed something to fill the silence between them - it was never silent in a car with Liam - but because he knew Liam would start singing along at some point, and Liam singing from the top of his lungs was a whole other level of magic.

Of course, one part of said magic was how Liam didn’t even look up from his phone as the song started, how his lips started moving while his eyes were still occupied with something entirely different. Theo thought that maybe, probably, singing was more of a natural reflex of Liam’s body, and that was the beauty of it, the absolute normalcy of the scene: a boy in a car, a phone in his hand, eyes focused. Still, it was tearing Theo apart in the only way anybody could want to be torn apart.

What if all the chips were down

And you feel you hit the ground

And the truth is to be found

There’s a place where we can go

When the time has come we know

It’s engraved inside our soul

Theo wondered whether there was a place where he could go. If so, that place must have been Beacon Hills. Or if perhaps, Theo’s place was, in fact, a person. A person with a voice as thick and sweet as honey. A person who could get lost in a song so deeply that their body forgot to spill their secrets in color. Liam was blank when he was singing, blank except for the red streak on his back.

Here’s to being braver

Here’s to better days
We are standing stronger

We are who we wanna be

Running wild and free

Had Theo been wrong all those years, thinking that running wild and free meant running alone and on the brink of crime? Ever since he’d moved in with Liam’s family, he’d started to feel like he’d been living by the wrong principles before. Not that anybody had given a shit about teaching him the right ones after he’d run away from Beacon Hills as a ten-year-old orphan.

All the horses shake the dirt

Throw the dust back to the earth

And change is coming soon

And the new day’s gonna raise

And the sun will kiss the sky

Then the stars shine with the moon

Change had been coming for Theo, and now his entire life was different. He had a roof above his head when he was sleeping. He ate at least one warm meal per day. He went to school every single day he was supposed to, and he even did most of his homework. He was part of a team, a team that respected him, a team that had accepted him as one of their own. He had friends in his life. He saw the world through an ever so thin yellow curtain, and it was beautiful. Theo didn’t need drugs nor danger to get that rush of adrenaline anymore. All he needed to do was letting his hand rest on the gearshift, waiting for whether Liam would put his own hand on top again, the excitement enough to make his heart beat like crazy.

We are the lionhearted

We are not afraid

We can be a burning light

And we will never fade
When the song was over, Liam still had both his hands on his phone, typing onto the touch screen almost aggressively.

"Having important business to discuss, are you?" Theo remarked. Liam was usually not the type to get lost in his phone that much, at least not outside of class.

"Nahh," Liam shook his head without looking up, "it’s just Mason with gossip. He thinks Mrs Baker is pregnant and no matter how many times I tell him she doesn’t have an affair with Mr Pullman, he insists he must be the father. Not that Mrs Baker is married or anything."

"Really?" Theo laughed.

"Yeah," Liam shrugged, "she wears a wedding ring."

"What I meant was really, that’s what you two discuss in your private chat?" Theo told him. Liam could be so adorably oblivious sometimes.

"You’ve known Mason for weeks now, how does that still surprise you?" Liam asked back.

"Yeah, I guess you have a point there," Theo admitted. "What does gossip girl say we’re doing tonight?"

"Tonight?" Liam repeated dumbly. "Nothing."

"Nothing? It’s friday!" Theo complained. "You’re not telling me we don’t have plans on a friday night without lacrosse practice!"

Liam shrugged. "We can invite Mason and Corey over later if you want."

Theo was a little shocked at those words. Even if Liam wasn’t necessarily the biggest party animal there was, you could usually count on Mason to drag him out of the house on weekends.

"Liam, be straight with me," Theo demanded, "is something going on?"


For a brief moment of suspicion, a thought came to Theo’s mind, but he told himself it wasn’t possible. Liam couldn’t know.
"You’re so weird sometimes," he simply stated, leaving it at that, thinking that a night spent at home with Liam was surely not the worst option.

Then, finally, Liam looked up and into Theo´s eyes for as long as Theo dared to face away from the road, and he knew exactly what the big smile on Liam´s face was supposed to say. You love how weird I am. And Theo did.

When the two boys arrived at home and walked up to the front door, something strange happened. Following behind Liam, Theo detected his permanent mark glowing up brightly, a sign that was neither generally good nor bad, but definitely proved that something was going on. And then he saw a flash of yellow, and he couldn´t make sense of it at first, because it had appeared on his own hand first, and then on Liam´s neck in the exact same shape, but color beneath his own skin wasn´t possible as Theo knew. And still, it was there. He froze immediately.

Theo stared at his own hand in deep, breathtaking, the-march-of-time-stopping shock, and the outlines of the yellow pattern on its back were blurring, but the mark was there, its edges moving lazily. He covered it with his other hand, the one that was still as blank as it had been for a decade, waited ten seconds that felt like an eternity, then lifted it again, shakily, and what came to sight was still the same: a round yellow form, one half shaped in an even curve like the moon, the other one ending in strands like sunrays.

"Theo?" Liam called from inside the house and Theo didn´t know what to answer, or whether to go inside as well, a part of him scared that the mark would vanish if he didn´t keep perfectly still.

"Theo?" Liam repeated as he stepped back out onto the front porch, raising his eyebrows in a silent question about what he´s still doing outside.

"Tell me you can see it too," Theo whispered, not daring to take his eyes off his hand.

"I can," Liam replied. "I´ve actually been seeing it on you for a while now."

"You what?" Theo wasn´t sure he´d heard correctly.

Liam shrugged and came a little closer. "I´ve seen it a few times before."

Theo gaped at him for a moment before he found his speech. "And you didn´t say anything?"

"I told you you looked yellow at night," Liam reasoned, "I asked you about that spot on your neck, remember?" As if Theo would ever forget the night he´d touched his skin there. "You were the one who wanted me to promise not to talk colors with you again," Liam added more calmly.

"Because I didn´t think I had them!" Theo exclaimed. Didn´t Liam understand what this meant? It
meant that something was still alive in him, something he´d believed dead for half of his life.

"Looks like you do," Liam noted, taking Theo´s sweaty palm in his own. Finding a mark on him after so long was one thing, but seeing his and Liam´s joined hands both shine in the same shade almost made Theo faint in the middle of the driveway.

"What if there´s more?" Theo hadn´t even been aware of what he was thinking until he heard his own voice spell it out.

"Only one way to find out," Liam smiled and squeezed his hand, then dragged him inside and up the stairs. The struggle of not falling while watching both his own hand still in Liam´s and Liam´s bouncing ass was real, but they made it to the bedroom without any accidents.

Liam didn´t let go of Theo´s hand until the door was closed behind them. "And now strip," he prompted, his gaze lingering on Theo, eyes bearing a dark blue shimmer.

"What?" Theo had understood, but the way he was being looked at was so obscene it was doing crazy things inside him.

"You wanted to know if there´s more, right?" Liam elaborated. "Take your clothes off and I´ll tell you."

Of course, they both knew this was not solely a matter of finding more color beneath Theo´s skin. But in the end, that didn´t stop Theo from pulling his shirt over his head.

"God, can you stop looking at me like that," Theo told Liam as he stood in the middle of the room shirtless.

"Like what?" Liam asked, the grin on his face spreading wider, the red on the back of his neck and the yellow covering his throat mixing into a thousand shades of orange at the sides.

"Like I´m doing this for your amusement," Theo explained.

"We´re doing this for the peace of your soul, Theo," Liam argued, "but I mean, that doesn´t mean there can´t be anything in it for me, right?" He stepped close enough to be able to reach out and touch Theo, but he kept his hands to himself.

"I feel like there´s plenty in it for you, Liam," Theo countered. Ultimately, if Liam was enjoying this, that meant something was in it for Theo as well.

"Oh yes, there is," Liam sighed, and he was definitely not looking Theo in the eyes.  

The whole situation made Theo incredibly self-conscious. It was ridiculous, really, and he knew that very well. He had had a good body ever since puberty had blessed him with its wonders, and now that he was back into lacrosse, Theo was in an exceptional shape that not even Jenna’s amazing food could ruin. People had told him how handsome he was a thousand times. The thing was, it had never really mattered what any of them had thought about him. With Liam being the one so close, and so closely watching, everything was different.

"So, did you see anything yellow during those last three minutes that you’ve spent looking at my chest?" Theo asked sarcastically, trying to remind Liam of what they were doing, even if they were probably not quite on the same page about that.

"Not so sure," Liam mumbled, "give me two more minutes."

"Nope," Theo shook his head. His cheeks were burning so hot he could barely stand it. "What about my back?" He turned around, but that was no better, since he could still feel Liam´s eyes on him. Actually, it was worse, because he didn’t see what Liam looked like while he looked.

"Looks pretty nice to me," Liam replied, and the undertone in his voice sounded like he was about to touch Theo, but there came to contact, and somehow that hurt a little.

"Yeah but does it look yellow to you?" Theo wanted to know.

"No," Liam answered.

Theo sat down on the bed and exhaled dramatically. "No more color, then."

"Hey," Liam said calmly, sinking into the mattress next to him, "don´t sound so disappointed. You just found out you can show colors. And it sounded to me like that was a pretty big thing to you."

"Of course it is," Theo nodded, "do you even know how long I´ve been without color now?"

Liam made a confused face. "Wait." He was clearly thinking the information through. "What do you mean how long you´ve been without color? Are you saying it hasn´t always been like that?"

It was only then that Theo realized that Liam hadn´t known this, that he couldn´t have, since he´d never told him. "It hasn´t," Theo confirmed.

Liam took a sharp breath in. "Let me get this straight," he continued, "you´re telling me that there was a time when you were able to show?"
"Yes," Theo replied. The look in Liam´s wide open eyes was full of excitement and curiosity, as well as something else, something new, something that sent a shiver down Theo´s spine. He was a little afraid of where the conversation was about to go, but he knew Liam would keep asking all the questions that would come to his mind anyway. He wasn´t nearly as good at holding things in and swallowing them down as Theo. Or maybe Theo wasn´t nearly as good at processing things in a healthy way as Liam. Either way, the first question that was spoken into the warm air of the afternoon surprised him.

Liam´s voice was low and quiet. "What did they look like?"

When Liam said "they" Theo didn´t think of the colors. He thought of people, people Liam couldn´t possibly know of.

"What?" he asked in irritation and a little fear.

"The colors you used to show. What did they look like?" Liam explained. Of course, the question made way more sense that sense.

Theo thought for a moment. It wasn´t like he didn´t remember well enough to give a very detailed description, it was just that, until that very moment, he hadn´t given the colors themselves much thought. He´d spent years and years obsessing over the absence of the marks and never once considered what they were when they were still there beneath his skin.

"Believe it or not," Theo said, and suddenly, he could feel the corners of his mouth quirking up, "I was a green kid, almost like Corey."

"No fucking way!" Liam exclaimed, but with a happy smile on his lips.

"Yeah," Theo shrugged, "I mean, I had pretty much all the colors, depending on my current mood, but the green was the strongest. It was almost always there." It hit Theo how ridiculous the whole thing sounded, especially now that he knew Corey so well, a dude he could only wish to be like.

Liam laid himself back down onto his back, using his hands as a pillow beneath his head, the motion of raising his arms pulling his shirt up just a little, just enough for Theo to get a look at the smooth line of hair leading down from his stomach into his pants. He´d been dying to touch it for weeks now. "Tell me more," Liam breathed out. It was the weirdest thing, really, but also the sweetest for Liam to want to know more about it, for him to want to listen to Theo talking about his past. And for once in his life, Theo wasn´t annoyed by the idea of sharing something from his past. On the contrary, he wanted to.

And for once in his life, Theo had someone to truly listen when he did, someone worth his trust, someone he was maybe even going to share all of his other secrets with when they day would come.
"I was a kid," Theo began, "so naturally, my moods changed all the time, and so did the colors. They came and went in all shades and forms. There was always a lot of blue on the top of my shoulders. It looked like waves or something. And then there was this thing with the yellow. That was really weird, actually."

"Why? What was it?" Liam was clearly intrigued.

"I honestly have no idea what triggered it," Theo kept talking, "but it would just appear somewhere either on my back or my stomach, and then it would move up and around my entire body like a helix, and then the top swing would cross my shoulder and end just above my heart."

"And that thing happened frequently?" Liam wanted to know.

"Yeah," Theo said, "way more often than most other marks."

"What about the green?" Was it Liam who was so excited about the topic or was it Theo himself? At that point, Theo really couldn´t tell anymore.

"It was always there, I think." Theo began.

"Like a permanent mark?" Liam asked.

Theo thought about the red streak on Liam´s back. "Not quite," he responded, "it wasn´t really one single mark. Sometimes there was this patch behind my ear-" he pointed to the spot that now bore nothing but the geographic coordinates of Beacon Hills inked beneath the skin- "sometimes it was nothing but a light shadow on my arms. Sometimes it was the entire south american rain forests drawn onto my legs. Sometimes just a single dot hidden somewhere."

Thinking about the green made Theo think about his flight from Beacon Hills ten years earlier, and he wondered whether the green had abandoned him like he´d always thought, or if maybe, he´d been the one to abandon the green by giving up the part of himself that had been worthy of it.

"What´s your story with red?" Liam wanted to know next. Theo tried to give him a smile, hoping that it had even half the effect on him than it had on Theo the other way around.

"You know, the funny thing is, I´d say my story with red is you."

"Me?" Liam repeated. Theo was aware that wasn´t what he´d expected to hear, but it was the truth.

"You," he nodded. "I don´t really remember much red on myself. The only thing red makes me
think of is you." Theo was devoutly hoping for Liam not to take it the wrong way, for it not to sound too much like a confession of any kind, but Liam only smiled. And then he had another question.

"When did it stop?" Theo could hear the caution in his voice, which told him Liam knew about the sensitivity of the topic. He didn´t want Liam to think he didn´t trust him, so he answered truthfully.

"About ten years ago."

"Do you know why?" Liam asked on.

"Maybe," Theo whispered, his voice suddenly suffocated. He was only grateful for Liam being in his back so he couldn´t see his face as he started blinking quickly in an attempt to will the tears back.

"Why maybe?" Liam wanted to know in a soft tone.

"I know when it stopped," Theo explained, his voice on the verge of breaking, and he knew Liam could hear it, "so I know what it has to do with. But I can´t tell you why exactly it made my colors disappear."

Liam was silent. Just when Theo started feeling alone in the middle of the silence, a painfully familiar feeling, just when he started regretting his honesty, he felt a warm hand in the middle of his back. And then an arm around his shoulder. And then Liam was right beside him, their legs pressed together, and even if Theo didn´t dare to face him, he still leaned into Liam like the helpless child he´d just become.

"You can tell me," Liam whispered, "if you want to." His fingers were drawing circles into the skin of Theo´s arm.

Theo did want to. He wanted to say it out loud for the first time in his life. He wanted Liam to be the one listening when he did. He wanted somebody to know. He wanted somebody to know him well enough to know. But when the tears came, Theo knew he couldn´t bring himself to form words. He simply shook his head.

"It´s okay," Liam said, holding him tight against his side, "I´m sorry."

It really wasn´t okay, because Theo wanted to talk things out instead of crying like a baby, and Liam didn´t have anything to apologize for, so part of Theo´s vehement shaking of his head was to tell Liam he didn´t understand, it wasn´t like he thought, Theo didn´t want to have secrets. It was just that the secrets had grown with him for so long, it was hard to let them go.
After a few moments, Liam pulled Theo back onto the mattress with him, lying down with his arms slung around Theo’s bare torso. And then there was a blanket on top of his trembling body. And in the crook of Liam’s neck, everything seemed warm and quiet.

"It stopped after my parents died," Theo whispered, not even sure whether Liam had heard him.

A kiss was pressed on the top of his head. The strong arms tightened around him, pulling him closer. Liam said nothing, because nothing needed to be said. No words in the world would have stopped Theo’s heart from bleeding, or the tears from streaming down his face. Still, as the pain washed over him, so did some sort of relief. Relief that he wasn’t in it all by himself anymore. Relief that something was finally let out that had been eating him up from the inside for too long to not leave any permanent damage.

Time and space blurred into a fuzzy red as Theo breathed into Liam’s neck, and eventually, his body stopped shaking, and his mind settled down to rest, knowing that it was safe in Liam’s cradling arms. He told himself a short nap couldn’t hurt, that he would only close his tired eyes for a few minutes, but when a warm hand softly nudged him awake, it had gone dark outside. Theo remembered dreaming, but he couldn’t quite grasp what the dream had been, there was nothing left but a nicely excited feeling.

"I would have let you sleep," Liam began to speak, and Theo was thankful for the calmness in his voice, "but Mason and Corey are on their way over, and we kind of want you to join us."

"Does that mean it’s boys’ night out?" Theo asked in return. He’d grown to love the nights they went to the cinema, drinking and dancing and losing all focus on the world and its endless set of problems. But then again, he’d also started hating it, because he and Liam weren’t happening officially, and he felt like he wasn’t allowed to lose control enough to enjoy himself the only way he truly wanted. If he had been, he would have just grabbed Liam’s face in the middle of the dance floor and made out with him like it was the last night he had on earth. He would have touched him the way all those love drunk or simply horny people always touched each other. The way that caused others to avert their gazes in shame, the way that made your hands burn with desire along with your gut.

"Not really," Liam replied, sitting up stiffly, circling the shoulder Theo had slept on. It seemed like Liam had laid still the entire time, sacrificing his own comfort for Theo’s sleep.

"Not really?" Theo repeated. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You’ll see," Liam winked.

Theo gasped. "How dare you wink at me like that."

"What, you mean like this?" Liam asked in fake innocence and did it again, but this time with a smug smile on his face.
Theo sucked a sharp breath in and clutched his hand over his heart dramatically, playing along, even though the effect Liam’s winking had on him was pretty much real and serious.

Liam laughed as he climbed out of the bed, pulling his shirt over his head on his way to the bathroom door.

"Get up, we have to take a shower before Mason and Corey are going to be here," he called back over his shoulder.

"Since when do we take showers together?" Theo wanted to know. He wasn’t even entirely sure that was what Liam had meant, but it was already out.

"Since I’ve upgraded us to roommates 2.0," Liam explained. That little shit really did have an excuse for everything, and he hadn’t even had to think about it. Theo was on his feet and in the bathroom in no time, losing his pants somewhere on the way across the room.

"And when did that happen?" Theo asked.

Liam turned around where he was standing in front of the sink. He looked at Theo with open eyes, and just like that, Theo knew this wasn’t sarcastic bickering anymore. "I think it was twenty-six days ago," Liam whispered, causing Theo’s heart to skip a beat. Or maybe two.

Theo was trying to find the right words to respond to this, but it was hopeless, and the smile Liam gave him said he didn’t have to. Instead, he turned on the water in the shower.

For some reason, Theo and Liam both hesitated before stripping down fully, not that they hadn’t done the exact same thing a hundred times before after lacrosse. But after lacrosse, there was a whole team in the school’s wet room, making it a whole other situation, one that had nothing sexual about it. This right here, Theo realized with a look at Liam in his boxer shorts, surely did.

Of course, Liam was once again the brave one, pulling down his underwear at last and stepping under the steaming water jet. Theo wanted to follow, but at first, he had to take a moment to enjoy the sight of Liam’s hair being soaked wet and sticking to the back of his neck, looking like it was cutting narrow spikes out of the red.

The red. Theo snapped and lifted his hand, inspecting its back. Nothing. "It’s gone," he said. Admittedly, he was more than a little disappointed.

Liam stuck his head out of the shower cabin. "No it’s not."

Theo showed him the back of his hand to prove him wrong. "It is."
"Turn around," Liam demanded.

Baffled, Theo did.

"It´s not gone," Liam insisted, "well, it´s not very well visible beneath all that ink, but it´s not gone."

Theo twisted his back in an attempt to watch his own back in the mirror. And he found that Liam was right. It was nothing but a faint glow, hidden beneath the melody written on his lower back, but it was still there, the yellow.

"So," Liam continued, "before you can think of another excuse for not getting naked and in here, how about you hurry up a little."

Liam wasn´t completely wrong. Even if the color thing had genuinely distraught him, Theo was extremely insecure about exposing himself to Liam. Then again, it certainly wasn´t like he wasn´t getting anything in return. And what he´d seen of that so far was enough of a reason to stop wasting time, so Theo pulled down his briefs, kicked the fabric away with one foot and joined Liam in the shower, grateful for the lack of space forcing them to stand so close together that they couldn´t really look aynwhere but in each other´s faces.

They were just figuring out how to share the water between the two of them when they heard the doorbell ringing.

"Fuck," Liam muttered, "that must be Mason and Corey. I need to find me a best friend who knows when to be late."

It was hard for Theo not to think too much about what that meant, and what would have been happening right then if their friends hadn´t been waiting downstairs. Really, painfully, physically hard. In the end, they washed themselves quickly, arms and shoulders brushing against each other´s soapy body. Theo regretted every second he´d waited before getting in the shower, now that he had to get out again and felt it was way too soon, but raising Corey´s and especially Mason´s suspicions about the two of them really wouldn´t have helped anybody, so he got ready as fast as he could.

When Theo was walking down the stairs behind Liam, both of them smelling equally fresh and clean, he realized that the house was atypically silent.

"Where are your parents?" he asked, but only earned a shrug from Liam. It was definitely weird for them not to be home this late without Liam knowing.

"So does that mean Mason and Corey have been waiting outside the door this whole time?" It
seemed highly unlikely to Theo, who was sure they would have rung the bell more than once in that case.

"Theo," Liam said insistently, looking back at him from the lowest step, "you need to shut up now."

Theo didn’t understand. Something majorly strange was going on with Liam and it was starting to freak him the fuck out.

"Liam?" Theo asked nervously, trailing towards the living room behind the other boy, his hands shaking a little bit. "What’s going on?" Sometimes, no answer was the worst possible answer.

Suddenly, Theo heard a shuffle and a whisper from the living room he was about to enter. So there was somebody home after all. Maybe Mason had a key for the Geyers´ house, he thought, since that was the least unsettling explanation.

Theo held his breath before walking through the door into the room Liam had just disappeared in, his eyes wide open. The scene he found as he entered, he needed a couple of seconds to process.

Liam was standing in the middle of the room, next to him Jenna and David. Mason and Corey were sitting on the big couch, the wide grin on Corey´s face the first thing to calm Theo´s nerves a little. But there were so many more people present. Theo found Nolan in the corner, Brett standing right beside him, and then practically all the other players from the lacrosse team. Even Greenberg was there, and with that discovery, Theo´s confusion was perfect. Until he spotted two faces he’d known for longer than any other living person. Scott and Stiles had come as well, Stiles holding Lydia´s hand.

"What the fuck," Theo whispered, his mind jumping right to the conclusion that this must be an intervention of some kind, the latently omniexistent fear kicking in that one of his secrets had been discovered, that he was being thrown out and chased away from Beacon Hills at last, and this time for good.

The room was quiet, all eyes on Theo, which made it hard to think. Liam was eyeing him attentively, the excited expression on his face causing Theo to rethink his first impression of the situation.

Something snapped into place in Theo´s brain when he spotted a colorful garland hanging above everybody´s heads. And then the airballoons. And then a huge cake occupying almost the entire coffee table.

"Happy birthday," Liam whispered, and Theo´s jaw dropped.

"You can´t even know when my birthday is," was the first thing Theo could manage to press out
after he´d gathered himself a little.

"No you idiot," Liam laughed sarcastically, "I just picked a random day and invited everybody for a surprise party."

Theo was speechless. Not the kind of speechless where you didn´t know which words to use, but the kind where there were no words strong enough to express what you were feeling.

"Dude, you´re very obviously underestimating my stalking skills," Liam added.

"I´m sorry," Mason interrupted, "don´t you mean my stalking skills?"

Liam sighed. "Alright, Mason was the one to find out when your birthday was," he admitted.

"And you all came here for that?" Theo asked in disbelief, looking around the room, his eyes getting caught on the face of his former best friend. "Scott?"

"Happy birthday, Theo," Scott smiled as he stepped closer, spreading his arms. Theo tried to remember when he´d ever been in a situation like this one. When had somebody wanted to hug him? When had somebody even remembered his birthday? He could only hope that nobody saw the tears welling in his eyes when he was wrapped up in Scott´s arms.

All the others came up to congratulate him, and the whole scenario felt absolutely surreal, all the "happy birthday"s and the smiles and the hugs and the "thank you"s, so Theo kept connecting his gaze with Liam´s, making sure he wasn´t dreaming, because as long as Liam´s eyes were shining in baby blue, life was good.

"Hey sweety," Jenna finally said, taking Theo´s face in her hands, making him look at her. "I hope this isn´t too much for you." It was a little too much, but Theo would manage as long as Liam was smiling. "This is not really about your birthday," she continued, "but I hope you know we´re really glad we get to have you here with us." In her eyes, Theo could see the same tears glistening as he felt in his own. So many tears, and not one of them was coming from sadness. "I can´t even tell you all the things I wish for you," she whispered, "just know that you deserve the world, okay?"

Automatically, Theo´s gaze drifted to Liam.

Theo nodded dumbly. He didn´t believe her, but he wanted to. He also wanted to thank her, but his voice failed him. Jenna nodded back. She understood. And then she wrapped her loving arms around him. This time, Theo hugged her back tightly. When she pulled back, she left a light kiss on his cheek, and Theo realized that what Liam had called an upgrade to roommates 2.0 was, in fact, a home.

"Happy birthday," David grinned, holding a colorful package out to Theo, who didn´t dare to touch it. It couldn´t seriously be for him, could it? But Liam´s stepdad raised his eyebrows expectantly,
holding the present right under his nose, everybody waiting for Theo to do something other than gape.

"Open it," Jenna encouraged him, and maybe she was the only person in the world who he would have listened to. "We’re going to leave you kids alone then," she added.

Theo needed to sit down for this, his legs about to fail him. It was incredibly nice what they were all doing for him, and it was an undescrribable feeling to have people care enough to be this nice to him, but it was a lot to get through his head on a day that had been quite eventful even before they’d come downstairs.

Theo recognised the soft, dark blue fabric appearing inside the wrapping paper instantly. There were red and white letters printed to the front of the hoodie. "But..." he looked at Liam, "... this is yours."

Liam let out a little laugh. "Don’t be ridiculous," he replied, "mine’s going to be mine again, now that you have your own."

It slowly dawned on Theo that Jenna had seen him wearing Liam’s clothes, and that particular hoodie all the time. She’d probably thought he liked it because of how soft and warm it was, so she and David had gotten him his own. Of course, they couldn’t have known that the only reason Theo ever wore the hoodie was to engulf himself in Liam’s scent.

He thanked Jenna and David quietly, pressing the gift against his chest like the treasure that it was if you thought about what it meant.

"Have fun, boys," David called before they left the living room, and a minute later, the house.

Theo was glad everybody else was pouring themselves drinks by now, deep in conversation, so they didn’t pay much attention to him freaking out over being given a present for his birthday like the concept was completely foreign to him. To be fair, it sort of was, or at least it had been since his own parents had died and nobody had been left to remember the day he’d been born.

Liam, sitting down beside Theo eyed him with a curious expression on his face. Of course, his reaction must have seem utterly strange to a normal human being. Just when Liam was trying to say something, Theo decided to drag him out of the room first.

"What the..." Liam muttered in surprise, but was shut up by Theo’s lips pressed on his mouth as soon as they were safe from other people’s eyes. It was a kiss unlike all the other kisses they’d shared before, Theo holding Liam’s face in his hands, just pressing their lips firmly together, just trying to make clear how urgent the words were that failed to come out of his mouth. How much he meant them. How badly he wished he’d be able to say them.
"Thank you," he finally breathed out, knowing that it wasn’t enough, but trusting that Liam could read the rest of it in his eyes.

"Honestly," Liam replied, "it’s my absolute fucking pleasure, Theo."

Sadly enough, the two of them couldn’t stay away from the living room for too long, even if a part of Theo wanted to do nothing else than hold Liam in his arms for the night, steal as many kisses as he could get, and maybe see what else was possible. Then again, a lot of people, people he had never dared to call friends, simply because friendships tended to fade and die from his life, had come to celebrate him that night, and that meant a lot more than Theo could possibly process, so he had to at least appear half as thankful as he truly was.

Taking the beer he was offered by Nolan, Theo decided to join the corner where Scott, Stiles and Lydia were talking to a few of their former school- and teammates.

"Hey guys," he said, "thanks for coming. I would have thought you’d be busy with college and stuff, not that I would have thought about inviting anybody at all."

"Yeah well," Scott responded, the chocolate brown in his eyes melting in the soft light of the living room, "Liam can be a persistant little shit. But I guess you know that better than anyone."

"Me?" Theo asked. What exactly did Scott know?

"Since you’ve been living with him?" Scott explained. Yes, right, that.

"Yeah," Theo nodded, turning to Stiles. "How’s it going man, you still trying to become a cop?"

They spent a couple of beers talking, hearing stories about the FBI academy that might or might not have been true, some of them true perhaps, but surely exaggerated, like the one where Stiles annoyed the FBI into letting him participate in a murder investigation that ended with him saving Derek Hale’s life somehow. Theo hadn’t really been following the details. Scott was working his ass off at college to become a veterinarian, not a firefighter like he’d always said when they’d been kids, but still a hero of some kind, a life saver, Theo thought bemusedly. It fitted the dark-haired boy so well.

One of the most pleasant surprises of the evening - and there had been a few - was getting to know Stiles’ girlfriend Lydia, a girl that was pretty, sure, but apart from that impressively smart, with a sharp sense of humor that Theo knew to appreciate. He could see exactly why Stiles was in love with her. They didn’t display their relationship very openly, not like all those gross couples licking each other’s faces in the middle of the day in the goddamn park of Beacon Hills, no, it was all silent conversations and faint touches, handholding hidden beneath the table, except they weren’t really holding hands, they just had their pinkies intertwined, like a permanent swear to be there for each other. Theo wondered what it felt like, to be so certain of something good, something absolutely beautiful in one’s life. He searched the room for Liam’s face, and when he found it, his
heart settled and started beating faster at the same time.

It was absolutely ridiculous what Liam was doing to Theo, even from across the room, even when there were about thirty other people present, even when there were so many things to focus on other than his roommate 2.0. But the truth was, Theo couldn´t stop his mind from going back to the kiss outside in the hallway earlier, and then to the image of Liam´s wet skin in the shower, the way his muscles had moved beneath the red streak covering his back, and then there was the way they´d slept in the afternoon, all cuddled up in warmth and intimacy. Theo´s brain replayed all their kisses, leaving him craving for more, and by the time he´d gotten to the last one, or rather, the very first one, the kiss after the day of Liam´s worst lashout, by that time, Theo was starving from hunger, hunger for a boy who was torturously close to him all the time, and all the others present were just making it worse, all the people who probably weren´t supposed to know.

But it couldn´t wait. It simply couldn´t. Theo couldn´t. He pulled out his phone underneath the table he was still sitting at while Nolan was gesturing wildly, his style of story telling resembling Stiles´ an awful lot. *Upstairs*, he typed in and hit send, then excused himself for the bathroom.

Theo should have used the upstairs bathroom instead of the one right next to the kitchen entrance, he realized as he stepped out of it and Mason held a fresh drink out to him from the kitchen with a smile. "Theo, care to join me for a moment?" Mason asked.

"Sure," Theo replied, although he was a little scared by the fact that nobody else was around. Once again, he wished for Corey, not to do anything, but just to be there.

"You do realize I´m the smart friend, right?" Mason cocked an eyebrow.

"Yeah, so?" It was a highly strange way to start a conversation, he thought.

"As in the friend who notices things. As in the friend you can´t hide stuff from," Mason elaborated.

"What exactly are you trying to tell me?" Theo wanted to know.

"When the two of you came downstairs earlier, you both had wet hair," Mason explained.

"Yeah," Theo shrugged, "we took a shower before."

"See, that´s exactly what Liam told me as well," Mason remarked. Theo still didn´t follow, but he had a hunch Mason was about to enlighten him. He threw Liam´s best friend a confused look.

"*We* took a shower," Mason quoted both Liam´s and Theo´s words. "Since when do the two of you take showers together?"
Theo almost spit out his drink. "Nobody said anything about together," he tried to deny, but even as he was talking, he knew exactly Mason wasn´t buying any of it.

"Oh no," Mason broke him off, wagging a finger on front of Theo´s face, "do not think you can lie to me."

Theo sighed. "What do you want me to say, Mason?"

"The truth," Mason begged calmly. "Since when is something going on between you and Liam?" The thought of telling him felt a little bit like betrayal towards Liam, but Theo knew he wouldn´t be getting out of this anyway.

"Twenty-six days," he answered.

At that, Mason´s jaw dropped. "Okay, I´m not even going to comment on the fact that you´re obviously counting the days," he replied as soon as he´d processed the information, "but how could you keep this from me for so long?"

"Mason, you should probably talk to Liam about this," Theo tried to brush him off.

"No, I´m serious," Mason objected, "how did you manage to hide this from me? Like, how did I not see it?"

"I don´t know, man," Theo shrugged helplessly, "there´s not exactly much to see, I guess."

"What do you mean?" Mason checked. "Are you two together or not?"

"I wish I knew," Theo confessed, a little embarassed that he didn´t know.

"So what?" Mason wanted to know. "You´ve just been making out in secret for four weeks?"

"Pretty accurate," Theo confirmed.

"Making out as in making out? Or do you mean making out?" Mason poked further.

"What the fuck of a question is that?" Theo complained, the alcohol in his blood making it hard to tell the difference. "And even if I knew how, I probably still wouldn´t answer it."

"Alright," Mason surrendered, "it´s easier to get it out of Liam anyway."
"Oh my god," Theo suddenly whispered, "have you talked to Liam about this?"

"Of course," Mason shrugged, "but apparently, he´s not been telling me everything."

"What did he tell you?" Theo hadn´t been aware of how badly he needed to know this. What did Liam think their relationship was? And what did he want it to be?

"Not the things that acutally have been happening," Mason said.

In spite of this information being exactly what Theo had been assuming the whole time, he still managed to be a little disappointed.

"Theo?" Mason asked.

"Yeah?"

"What do you want from Liam?" It was a simple question. It sounded a little threatening, but Theo knew he had to be thankful for the protectiveness in Mason´s words.

Answering the question was difficult, though, because Theo didn´t want to lie, didn´t think he would get through with it, but also didn´t want to confess to Mason how he´d lost his entire heart and soul to the boy he still called Captain. In the end, he didn´t have to say anything at all.

"Holy shit," Mason breathed out. "Corey told me you had a crush on Liam, but I guess that was a slight understatement, huh?"

Theo shrugged. He was in love with Liam, and it was not a secret any longer. It was a first step, and of course, the only person who really needed to know about his feelings was Liam, but Theo hoped he would have time to get there eventually.

"Listen," Mason added, "you two should talk. Probably not tonight though." Just at that moment, a fairly drunk Corey came stumbling into the kitchen, smothering his boyfriend with sloppy kisses.

"Aaaaaand, I´m out," Theo said as he turned away, not willing to watch his friends making out while not getting any himself.

"Can you believe that Theo is in love with Liam?" he heard Mason say as he walked away.

"Told you so," came Corey´s slurred reply.
"Oh no," Theo was almost out of the hearing range as Mason responded, "you did not tell me that."

Theo would have stopped and listened, simply out of curiosity, but there was no time. He had a very urgent need, so he climbed the stairs, heart racing, the sounds of talk and laughter staying behind downstairs. He was ready to let go, to forget everybody else and what they didn´t know, to just be with Liam and at least show him what he felt if he couldn´t bring himself to say it. But Liam wasn´t in their room. And he was nowhere else to be found on the upper level, so Theo went back downstairs, running around frantically, looking over everything so fast he almost didn´t see anything at all.

Luckily, he bumped into Liam just when he´d already thought the guy had somehow vanished from earth.

"There you are," they both exclaimed in unison.

"I´ve been waiting upstairs forever!" Liam complained.

"Your best friend was holding me captive in the kitchen," Theo explained. "I think he might know something." I´m sure he knows exactly what´s been happening would have been more accurate, but Theo wasn´t trying to make a confession, he just wanted to soften the blow of Mason eventually confronting Liam about it.

"Fuck him," Liam muttered, walking backwards into the guest room next to the living room and pulling Theo with him by the collar, "it´s about time I get to have you all for myself for a while."

It was crazy hearing those words from Liam´s mouth, since they were precisely what Theo was thinking as well, but it got even better.

Once the door was shut behind them, Liam pressed Theo against in, leaned forward and whispered in his ear. "I haven´t had a chance to give you your birthday present yet."

Theo was pretty sure he was only holding himself upright with the help of Liam pressing against him. "Fuck, Liam," he mumbled, earning a devilish grin from Liam, who could most definitely feel his erection pressing against his hip.

It was a painfully long moment, filled with tension sizzling between their two bodies, until they finally kissed, the taste of Liam´s lips by now soothingly familiar to Theo, a welcome connection to his favorite part of reality on a day full of surprises, full of new discoveries and spilled secrets.

Kissing Liam was once again absolutely breathtaking, grounding him and making his head float at the same time, the soft pressure of his tongue making him dizzy, making desire burn up inside him.
Theo grabbed Liam’s neck with one hand, his thumb stroking the light stubble covering his cheek, the other hand snaked around Liam’s hip, pulling him even closer. It was too late to pretend like the situation wasn’t making him hard anyway, so why not go with it and hope for Liam to like it? After all, Liam’s body definitely did, judging by the huge bulge in his middle.

Theo gasped audibly when Liam started kissing along his jaw and down his throat, then nibbled on his collarbone, one finger pulling the grey t-shirt down to get better access. Theo was shaking in anticipation as he held onto Liam’s shoulders, his fingers groping the muscles beneath his clothes. He didn’t know what Liam had meant when he’d talked about giving him a present, he had no idea how far Liam was willing to go, but he knew he would go along with anything, would gratefully take every last bit of Liam he would get.

Allowing Liam to pull off his shirt, Theo raised his arms, and when he lowered them again, wrapping them around Liam’s back, he left just enough space between them for Liam’s hands to roam over his chest and stomach, enjoying the gentle brushes of his fingertips, no matter how hard it was getting to keep his patience. Reconnecting their lips in an attempt to show Liam how greedy he was, Theo began moving his hips in slow circles, rubbing their clothed dicks together, causing them both to moan at the sensation.

It seemed like Liam got the hint, or maybe he’d had the idea on his own, but either way, he let his right hand trail down and cupped Theo’s arching boner with his palm. Theo had to press his eyes shut to keep his composure. It certainly wasn’t like Theo didn’t have experience in the area, but in that moment, he felt like he was being touched for the very first time in his life. It was the very first time in his life he was being touched like this. And by Liam.

When Liam started to move his hand, stroking Theo through his pants, he couldn’t contain a loud groan, and Liam seemed even more determined by that, circling his wrist in a steady rhythm, sending pleasure like electric jolts through Theo’s body. Theo almost whined out loud when the hand on his crotch was taken away, but he knew there wouldn’t be much time for regret as he was pulled towards the couch on the other side of the room by two firm hands around his waist, Liam nibbling at his jaw while moving them.

"Sit down," Liam commanded, turning them around, pressing Theo back until the couch was pressing into the hollows of his knees, and then he simply gave in, falling down, looking up when the soft lips removed from his face, only to watch Liam getting down on his knees in front of him. It was the single greatest sight of his life, Theo decided, and his dick twitched at it, but then Liam threw his shirt away carelessly, and with the bemuscled, hairy chest right in front of his eyes, Theo was incapable of keeping his hands to himself. He leaned in and laid his palm over Liam’s racing heart.

They kissed again, their tongues having a little dance between them. Theo sucked on Liam’s lower lip and Liam took revenge by biting him carefully. The world would be a better place if everybody could kiss like Liam Dunbar, Theo thought as he was losing all control over his body, his hips bucking into the air, desperately burning with starving need.

"Touch me," Theo pressed out, "if you want me." He didn’t want Liam to do anything against his
will, but hell yes, he did want Liam to do something, anything to him.

As if to prove a point, Liam put his hands back on Theo as they continued kissing, one of them stroking up and down his bare torso, the other one gripping his cock through his pants. Theo was close to exploding even before Liam started kissing his way down his chest, and then further down, and then fumbled with the button of his pants. Liam looked up, catching Theo´s gaze with those seductively blue eyes of his, keeping them open as Theo´s dick sprang free beneath his fingers, Liam´s chin so low the wet tip plopped against it, making Theo hiss out a low "fuck".

"Tell me if I´m doing this right," Liam said before he glanced down, and Theo only then realized that Liam most likely didn´t have any experience with guys. He´d had a girlfriend for two years before things had started to develop between them, and nothing more than kisses and innocent touches had happened so far, so whatever Liam was planning to do, it was probably the first time he was doing it. It was easy to forget that, though, with how good Liam was making him feel.

"Fuck, Liam, you´re doing everything so fucking right," Theo tried to reassure him. It was Liam´s free choice to stop whenever he wanted to, but if so, then certainly not because he thought he wasn´t good at it.

"Can I..." Liam was looking at Theo´s cock, which only made it jerk more uncontrollably. Yes, Theo screamed internally. Yes, yes, yes.

On the outside, though, Theo didn´t want to appear so desperate, wanted to make sure there was no pressure in the situation, so he leaned forward to press a tender kiss onto Liam´s mouth before answering. "You don´t have to-"

"I want to!" Liam interrupted him eagerly, eyes wide open and shimmering with lust. Theo couldn´t believe his luck. Liam on his knees before him, telling him he wanted him. It was like a déjà-vu from a dream he´d had many times, but better, a thousand times better.

"You can have me, Liam," Theo spoke, trying to calm his racing heartbeat, but failing. "If you really want me, I´m yours to take."

Liam obviously thought about something to say back, but in the end, he didn´t. Instead, he bowed his head, the hot breath escaping his mouth hitting Theo´s throbbing dick, his fingers closing around the shaft at the base, directing the tip towards his tongue poking out from his mouth. Theo had to bite down on his own fist at the first contact. He´d waited so long for this, had denied himself to even dream about it too often, and then it was finally happening, and the reality of it was better than any fantasy he could have made up in his head.

Liam began licking the tip cautiously, and it was hard for Theo to keep still. Liam´s tongue felt so good on him, and his pretty lips would look so amazingly hot around his cock, but he willed himself to give Liam time to get used to the whole thing, simply whimpering the tension away.
"You taste..." Liam looked right in his face as he thought about which word to use to describe the taste of Theo, "...surprisingly good."

Theo let out a small laugh, glad that Liam seemed to like what he was doing. "Yeah?" he checked.

"Yeah," Liam nodded, "kind of makes me want more."

"Fuck Liam," Theo breathed out, "you´re killing me here."

"Nahh," Liam made, "not yet." And with that, he sucked Theo´s cock into his mouth, earning an obscene groan before Theo could shove his fist back between his teeth in order to not make anybody hear them from the room next door.

Liam let his tongue swirl over the slit a few times, then bobbed his head down, carefully trying out just how far he could go. Considering that this was his first blowjob, he could go pretty far. Theo put his free hand into Liam´s hair, offering a little reassurance that he was doing really fucking great and amazing things to him. "So good," he muttered, tongue against his own fingers, "feels so good."

Hearing the praise, Liam moved his head up again, and then further down than he had been before, far enough for Theo to expect him to gag, but it didn´t happen. Suddenly, maybe not even on purpose, with the tip of Theo´s dick against the back of his throat, Liam swallowed, and nothing in the world or beyond could ever make anybody lose their shit as badly as Theo did in that moment, bucking his hips wildly, letting out a whine, panting heavily, even moments later.

"I´m warning you, Liam," Theo growled lowly, "if you do that again, this is going to be a quick birthday present." He realized that he probably should be worried about shooting his load down Liam´s throat without permission rather than being concerned for the his own fun to be over too soon, but he couldn´t even be sorry. He was only human, after all, and Liam was simply too good at giving him pleasure.

But Theo wasn´t going to last very long anyway, getting closer and closer to the edge with ever inch that Liam´s lips moved around his cock, with every stroke of his fingers wrapped around it, with every delicious smacking sound and every vibrating moan.

Theo was so close to his orgasm that he was just about to give Liam a warning when suddenly, just in the worst possible moment, the door behind Liam´s back swung open.

There was a moment of silence, a moment where nothing happened except Theo recognizing the same kind of panic in Liam´s eyes that was washing over him like a cold, hard wave.

"Holy shit!" Somebody finally exclaimed. Holy shit indeed, Theo agreed silently, staring at Scott and Stiles and the entire Beacon Hills High lacrosse team behind them while covering his wet lap.
"Sorry," Scott blinked slowly, "we were just looking for you... I didn´t know you two were..."

"Busy," Nolan suggested, apparently the only one who found the scenario funny.

"We´re going to leave you alone now," Scott mumbled as he pulled the door shut.

The room was dead silent for a second.

"Fuck," Theo whispered, covering his mouth with one hand.

"Fuck," Liam agreed.

Chapter End Notes

I CAN ABSOLUTELY NOT BELIEVE I GET TO POST THIS CHAPTER ON CODY´S BIRTHDAY!!!!!! I had a Theo birthday chapter planned almost from the very beginning and like, it was completely random that it happened this week, life is so amazing sometimes!!!

The song I used is Lena - Wild and Free :)

Because I´ve been bullied for not letting Theo cum, here´s the alternate ending to this chapter with what would have happened if they hadn´t been caught.
https://archiveofourown.org/works/14477658
Heartbreakers

Chapter Notes

Forgive me the long wait, I’ve been busy counting orgasms.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Theo looked at Liam, panic rising from deep down in his gut to his chest, his heart hammering against his ribcage like crazy, his body painfully tense, waiting for Liam to give him a sign, to let him know just how badly he was supposed to be freaking out about being caught during a blowjob by all of their friends. It was completely surreal, Liam still on his knees in front of him, his fingers still wrapped around Theo’s still hard dick, the torturous weight of Theo’s almost-orgasm hanging above them, their breathing ragged, their eyes wide open, their mouths gaping.

Theo could practically feel the silence getting a hold of them both, paralyzing them, drowning their young and confused minds in even more uncertainty, leaving them helpless, praying for the other one to break the distressing rigidity. He could hear a clock ticking in the back of his mind, a clock that didn’t really exist, but made him aware of how many awful seconds passed before Liam’s lips flinched lightly. Theo let out a tiny breath, a sigh so faint it was almost not there, a reaction as minimal as possible, its purpose being to encourage another sign from Liam without pushing him into one or another direction.

The situation was highly precarious, both boys aware that the next few seconds would determine what they wanted their relationship to be like, their secret out in the open, the time for being low-key over, the only question left being whether they’d take this night off as something that once happened at a party involving alcohol, or the start of something serious, something officially exclusive. Theo didn’t even dare to think of the word boyfriends.

And just as Theo wasn’t thinking of the word, Liam’s jaw moved, his lips parting to speak, but no words came. Instead, Liam burst out laughing like an absolute lunatic, clutching his stomach with both hands, barely holding himself upright, his cheeks bright and red, his eyes squeezed into ridiculously looking slits, tears of laughter escaping them.

Out of all the possibilities, Theo had considered this the least likely one, so as much as he wanted to, as contagious as Liam’s laughter normally was, he couldn’t bring his confused and still scared mind to move along. It was too unreal.

"I’m getting the feeling this whole day is one entire big prank," Theo muttered, because what the hell was even going on? And how on earth could Liam find it funny?

"No," Liam pressed out, "I’m sorry." He still couldn’t stop laughing though. "It’s just-" his whole body was shaking uncontrollably. Liam wiped away the tears from his flushed cheeks with the back of his hand. "this is just my luck, Theo. This wouldn’t be my life if I didn’t manage to
somehow make a complete fool out of myself."

A sharp sting crippled Theo´s poor heart. "Because you were caught with me?"

All of a sudden, the laughter had stopped. "What?"

"Are you embarassed about being caught with me?" It hurt Theo to spell it out, but he had to know the answer, so there was no way of avoiding the question.

"No," Liam said decidedly. "That´s not what I meant." He shuffled a little closer again, still on his knees in front of Theo, who decided that this was probably the right moment to pull his pants back up. He avoided Liam´s gaze while fumbling with the denim. Liam had denied his question, but Theo´s heart was already breaking. Again.

"Hey, Theo." Liam´s voice was low and soft, careful, as if he somehow knew how close to breaking Theo was.

Theo was already planning his escape from the guest room and the Geyer´s house when two warm hands settled on his knees. "Look at me," Liam begged, and as much as he wished he could resist, he was physically unable to.

The genuine concern in Liam´s eyes resembled the loving looks of his mother an awful lot, as Theo realized, except that it hurt more, since Liam was just a young boy, so brightly and unapologetically full of life that this expression of worry seemed utterly wrong on him. If Theo were to die right at the spot, and he could wish for one thing to take with him into eternity, it would be the memory of that exact pair of baby blue eyes. Eyes that never failed to make Theo lose himself in them entirely, either drowning in the crashing waves of an ocean or floating up into the endless sky.

"Listen carefully," Liam insisted, his fingers squeezing around Theo´s knees, "because I´m going to tell you a secret."

Theo´s crestfallen misery mixed with a hopeful excitement. He nodded lightly.

"I´m actually relieved," Liam said, one corner of his mouth quirking up into a very faint smile, one that wasn´t meant to look pretty, or make someone else smile along, but one that was real and shone back from his eyes just as much.

"Why?" Theo asked. He didn´t understand any of this. Liam was reacting so strangely the whole situation.

"Why?" Liam repeated in disbelief. "Is that a serious question? Because they all know now!"
"I didn´t think you´d want them to," Theo replied quietly, his eyes glued to the ground.

Liam stiffened. "I... well, I..." he stuttered, then sighed deeply. "I´ve been confused, okay?" Liam reached out for Theo´s face with one hand. Theo was unsure whether he was supposed to trust the gesture, but he kept still and let Liam´s thumb rub soothing circles over his jaw.

"The IED used to be my biggest problem, you know," Liam elaborated further, "I had my friends, and lacrosse, and a girlfriend, and even on the really bad days, at least I always knew who I was and what I wanted." He swallowed thickly. "Until you came along." Liam pulled Theo a little closer by his neck. "You´ve been turning my whole world upside down, Theo, don´t you get that?"

Didn´t Liam get it? Didn´t Liam get that he was in fact the one turning Theo´s life upside down? Did Liam seriously think the sudden appearance of color beneath Theo´s skin had nothing to do with him?

"I´ve been trying to figure out so many things lately," Liam continued. "And I didn´t know what to tell anybody because I didn´t know what to make of any of those things myself. But that doesn´t mean I didn´t want them to know. And it doesn´t mean I don´t want you."

A million thoughts were running wild on Theo´s mind in that very moment, but there was one that absolutely couldn´t be held in.

"You want me?" Theo breathed out, almost no voice in his words, since he was too afraid to say something Liam didn´t want him to. But he had no other choice than to say it anyway. Why on earth Liam looked so baffled by the question, Theo had no idea.

"Yes," Liam answered. "I can´t believe I still have to spell this out for you, but if so, I gladly will. Yes, I want you, Theo Raeken."

"Oh my god," Theo gasped. His heart was beating too loudly for him to follow his own thoughts.

Liam gave him a big smile, obviously quite satisfied with how much his confession was affecting Theo. Theo couldn´t help himself. It was too beautiful. And Liam was so temptingly close. He was still hyperexcited, scared and happy at the same time, dreading what would happen once they´d leave the guest room they were hiding in from all the people who now knew about them, a thin voice in the back of his head reminding him of his doubts, reminding him that no matter what Liam was saying right now, Theo would still never be good enough for him. It was much, so much that it was almost deafening, but it stopped all at once as soon as his lips were pressed against Liam´s again.

Because while Theo and Liam were kissing, there was no room for doubts and fears and insecurities. There was only room for two boys and four hands, and for one single sensation washing over the both of them at the same time: desire.
Never in his life had Theo been kissed the way Liam was kissing him. One second, there was a soft peck on his lips and a tender brush over his cheek, the gentleness grounding Theo, giving him the reassurance life usually didn´t have in store for him. The next moment, Liam´s tongue was plunging into his mouth hungrily, fingernails digging into the back of his neck, heat rising up between them, Liam´s body pressed close in between Theo´s spread legs.

"Liam," Theo breathed out when he finally managed to break free from their greedy connection, craving the touch immediately.

Liam opened his eyes lazily, the sight of his swollen lips a thing of beauty beyond comparison. Theo almost laughed at the protesting pout in his expression.

"Not that I´m not enjoying this," he said, his voice hoarse, "but they´re all still out there, right?" Theo nodded his head towards the door in indication of what he was talking about.

"Oh, yeah, right," Liam agreed, "almost forgot about them." Theo understood. It was so easy to forget the rest of the world when he and Liam were together.

Liam got up on his feet and shook his legs out, one hand sliding into the front of his pants to get everything back in order. Theo swallowed hard at the sight.

"What are we going to do about them," Theo wanted to know.

"We´re going to throw them out, obviously," Liam replied as he took Theo´s hand in his own, intertwining their fingers and squeezing them tight.

"Yeah, but..." Theo didn´t know how to say it, so he just darted his eyes to their joined hands.

"Theo, nobody´s forcing us to explain this, if you don´t want to," Liam told him calmly.

"How would you explain it?" Theo wanted to know. "Us?" he added more quietly.

Liam stopped dead in his tracks shortly before he´d reached the door. "Oh god," he whispered as he slowly turned around, "you don´t want this to be an us, do you?"

"What?" Theo wasn´t sure if he´d heard correctly. "Liam, fuck, don´t be ridiculous. I´ve been waiting for you and me to be an us ever since the first time I came to this place."

"Are you sure about this?" Liam asked, holding their intertwined fingers up between them as if to emphasize what this he was referring to. Theo could only see yellow, but was unable to tell on
"Yes," Theo answered without hesitation. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes," Liam nodded eagerly.

Neither of them said any more about this, and it was bugging Theo a little that he still couldn´t be certain if they were boyfriends. He would never be certain unless Liam would tell him, using that exact word. But Theo was too relieved, too thankful for what he was getting, too distracted by Liam´s hand in his own to focus on irrelevant details like that, their label not really important when the feelings were strong and present and undeniable.

"Hey guys," Liam raised his voice as they were standing in the entrance of the living room, and all heads turned into their direction at once. The attention was tickling on Theo´s skin unpleasantly, leaving a bitter taste on his tongue. He liked the guys, but he didn´t know them well enough to be sure just how badly they were judging him. He almost expected someone to speak up and say it out loud: Let him be, he´s too good for you.

Nobody did, they all just listened to Liam informing them that they should get going, since he´d promised his parents they´d keep it down, and it was already one-thirty in the morning, which was all just a pretty obvious lie, but nobody was stupid enough to argue with him, not even Greenberg, which surprised Theo a little bit.

"Holy shit," Theo whispered when the front door closed behind Mason and Corey after a quite extensive drunkenly slurred goodbye from Corey, leaving Liam and Theo all alone in the now silent house, "this day was..." He didn´t even know how to put it into words.

"Intense?" Liam suggested.

"Yeah," Theo agreed. They were still holding hands, but rather than igniting sparks and fireworks between them, the connection only seemed to make him realize how tired he was.

"I could use some sleep as well," Liam said, apparently capable of reading Theo´s mind.

Everything felt unreal as they were climbing the stairs, Theo dragging his tired limbs to their bedroom, the events of the day racing through his mind, making him dizzy, the only thing grounding him to the earth being the warm and gentle hand he was holding onto. They changed into sleeping shirts and brushed their teeth in silence. Liam positioned the pillows on the bed just the way they liked to sleep on them while Theo turned the lights out. With an unfamiliar happiness in his heart, Theo realized how used they´d gotten to this routine.

The thought of their unfinished business from the guest room earlier crossed his mind, of course, he was only human after all, but when Liam pulled him close into his chest, wrapping his arms and
legs around him, settling them both into a comfortable position as if he´d always known how, in
that moment Theo decided that he had more than he could have ever wished for, and he wasn´t
stupid enough to ask the universe for more. Liam was right in his arms, and because he genuinely
wanted to. Theo´s life was perfect.

Liam´s life was a little less perfect, but still pretty amazing when the sound of his alarm woke him
up on Saturday morning. He was usually more the type to hit the snooze button just as many times
as it took his Mom to storm in and take his blanket away, but firstly, she had stopped doing that
since Theo had moved in, and secondly, on this particular morning, Liam´s motivation was a little
different, so he turned off the alarm without moving too much.

The only person in the world who loved Liam´s bed more than Liam, and the the only person who
could sleep in it longer in the mornings was lying half on top of him, breathing against Liam´s
cheek, one hand wrapped around his arm. Liam knew they had to get to the meeting point for their
home game that day, but he couldn´t help himself. He had to admire the peaceful look on Theo´s
sleeping face, the way he appeared to differently when he was completely relaxed. Liam wondered
if he would ever get to see Theo let his guards down while being awake, hoping that one day he
could stop tearing the walls around the other boy´s heart down violently, praying that Theo would
eventually quit building them back up again every damn time.

Sure, Theo had shared more of his past with him recently, and Liam was quite proud to be the one
person to have earned enough of Theo´s trust for that to happen. A few weeks prior, he would have
never believed it possible. Still, he was aware that every bit Theo had let out had seemed to hurt
him so endlessly bad, and that was pretty hard to take. He just wanted them to be able to talk about
their lives without tears being shed. Was that so hard?

Speaking of hard... Well, this was not the time for that. They had to get up soon. They had an
important game ahead. They really couldn´t be late. And as much as Liam wanted to continue right
where they´d left off the night before, he was certainly not stupid enough to do so when they were
in a hurry. No, he would take all his time with it, that much was for sure.

Liam turned his head slightly and brushed his lips against Theo´s forehead. It wasn´t even a proper
kiss. It was just touch, closeness, the highest form of intimacy possible. Theo grunted faintly, still
more than half asleep, but so undescribably adorable as he scrunched his face a little.

"Morning, sunshine," Liam whispered into his soft hair.

"Sunshine?" Theo repeated sceptically. His voice was sexy enough when he was fully awake, deep
and with a goosebumps-provoking rasp coming from deep down his throat, making it hard to focus
on the things he was saying sometimes. But the sleepy sound of it early in the morning, lower even,
and a little husky, the echo of sweet dreams resonating through it, was absolutely out of this world.
And if you really wanted to die over it, you could always look at his adam´s apple jumping beneath
the skin over his throat when he swallowed. Liam had to avert his eyes and calm himself down, or
they would never make it to the meeting point for their game.
"Yeah," Liam said as he finally remembered that Theo was probably awaiting an explanation. "Fits you, with the yellow and all."

Theo rolled his eyes, and Liam understood. He was a little creeped out by this sappy side of himself.

"How late is it?" Theo asked, letting his eyes adjust to the daylight.

"Ten-twenty," Liam replied, smiling at the way he was squeezing his eyes into narrow slits.

"Liam!" Theo suddenly exclaimed. "We´re supposed to be at the school in twenty minutes!" He sat up quickly, and uncomfortably cold air hit Liam´s chest where his body had just covered it.

"I know," Liam responded calmly, "I didn´t want to wake you earlier than necessary. I figured you could just drive a little faster."

"Oh Captain," Theo sighed, a loving smile on his lips, "you´re such a mess."

"If you think that insults me," Liam winked as he got up out of bed, "you´re in for a disappointment. I stand by the mess I am."

He only realized that he had made zero attempts to hide his boner when it was too late anyway, his resolution to get dressed and on the way faltering for a moment when he caught Theo staring.

Liam didn´t know where on earth he took the boldness from, but he said it anyway: "If we win today, I´ll give you your birthday present later." He watched Theo´s eyes widen. "And this time, I´ll make sure we won´t get interrupted."

"Wow, that´s what I call a motivational speech," Theo breathed out, "you´re such a good team captain."

Liam laughed.

"I hope you don´t plan on giving the same speech to the entire team though," Theo added jokingly.

Liam´s reply was dead serious. "No. Only you."

They made it in time, just in time, Theo´s truck coming to a halt in the school´s parking lot with squeaking tires just as everybody else was getting inside the locker room. Whether all eyes were in them because of what everybody had caught them doing the night before, or because they were breathlessly and messily-haired late, or maybe because people drew a connection between the two
things, Liam didn´t know, but didn´t really care about either. Nobody mentioned anything when they greeted them, or while changing, or during their warm-up.

Liam shouldn´t have been surprised by Theo´s exceptional good form that day, not after the promise he´d made, but he was deeply impressed at the very least. He´d never witnessed Theo making anything other than an amazing game, but that day, he felt like he didn´t even have to do anything. All the team got the vibe instinctively, falling back into the defense line and letting Theo run and whirl in front of the opponent´s goal, passing him every ball he could reach, assisting him with the countless goals he scored.

Theo was on absolute fire, and Liam knew it was majorly inappropriate to even be thinking it, but he couldn´t stop the pride welling up inside him at the fact that the prospect of his mouth on Theo was causing this incredible run. So his first try sucking dick probably hadn´t been that bad after all.

Beacon Hills High won the game more clearly than ever before. Liam waited on the field until everybody was done congratulating Theo on the insane game he´d just made.

"This calls for a night at the sinema," Corey declared as they finally all headed off to hit the showers.

Liam stayed behind on the grass, and so did Theo.

"Mhm, Captain," Theo mumbled, helmet under his arm, his air sweaty and sticking to his forehead. "Just who I was hoping to see." He slumped down onto the ground, his chest heaving and sinking heavily. He had to be exhausted. "I think you owe me one."

"What, here?" Liam asked in shock. It wasn´t like he was completely opposed to the idea. Lacrosse was kind of their shared thing, so it fitted well, and Theo looked like an absolute snack as he was recovering from playing. Liam would have jumped him right away, but he had wished for a little more intimate atmosphere for their first time.

"I´m just kidding, Liam," Theo panted, laughing, "I mean, you do owe me one, but it can wait until we´re home at least."

"Oh," Liam sighed. What a relief. Or disappointment? "So you just want to lie around here?"

"Fuck yeah," Theo shrugged, "I´m happy right now."

Liam watched the other boy closely, listened to his breathing, his heart melting over the lazy smile on Theo´s lips, the sweaty fingers stretching out in his direction.

*If I lay here*
If I just lay here

Would you lie with me and just forget the world?

They could both use a little time to forget the world, Liam figured, and lay down next to Theo, just far away enough so their fingertips were touching in the middle between them.

"Hey, Theo," Liam said after a few moments of warm silence and steadying breathing.

"Yeah?"

Liam had no clue what exactly he wanted to ask. There were so many mysteries about Theo, so many things he couldn’t make sense of, so many vague answers to his previous questions. Liam became strangely aware that everything he’d lost his heart to about Theo was just the tip of a truly massive iceberg. But hell, if he was to collide and crash, he would gladly drown in the middle of the open sea.

"Tell me a secret," Liam begged quietly.

He didn’t look at Theo, but instead up into the sky, not wanting to pressure him, but he could practically hear Theo’s brain working.

"Let’s see," Theo began, "I spooned you for a little while the first night I slept at your place."

"That’s not a secret," Liam answered, and Theo’s head snapped in his direction. He shrugged. "I wasn’t asleep that whole time."

"You knew that?" Theo gasped at him. "And you never said anything?"

"I might have been hoping for you to do it again," Liam replied, "now tell me a real secret."

"Liam." Theo’s voice sounded pained. "I know you’re just trying to get to know me. But you really shouldn’t. I’m bad news."

Liam strongly disliked the direction their conversation was taking. "That’s not a secret either, Theo," he insisted, "that’s a lie."

Theo sighed. He almost opened his mouth to say something else, but thought better of it. He closed his eyes, exhaled again. His voice was barely more than a whisper, words formed out of thin air as he was finally speaking.
"I had a sister."

Everything was silent for a moment. Liam turned his head to look at the tensed side of Theo´s face. He knew this was a real secret, one that Theo had been burying inside him for a long time, one that he hadn´t intended to tell anybody.

"What was her name?" Liam asked, trying to be as soft as possible.

"Tara," Theo answered.

"How was she?" Liam wanted to know. He couldn´t picture a person related to Theo. He couldn´t picture somebody being there, being a part of Theo´s life like a family would, and somehow, that made him eternally sad.

"Like a big sister," Theo began talking, his voice weak, but steady. "Kind of a bully as long as it was just us, but she could turn into a pitbull in no time when some other kid was messing with me."

Liam waited. He wanted to give the room to breathe. And talk, in case he would want to.

"She once made this one boy drink his own pee after she´d caught him trying to fill it in my shoes during gym class."

Liam smiled a sad smile for the sister that didn´t seem to be a part of Theo´s life anymore.

"My savior," Theo breathed out.

With that word, the tears started falling from his cheeks.

Liam held his hand tight while Theo was crying silently, tears sinking into the earth beneath them. He jumped when Theo sat up so abruptly it scared him a little, lifting his jersey and exposing his inked chest. Theo pointed to the river flowing from his shoulder to where his heart lay beneath. For the first time, Liam noticed the little bridge over the flooding water.

"This is where she died," Theo whispered, placing his palm right above his heart.

Liam reached out hesitantly. He wasn´t sure if Theo would let him touch the spot. He wasn´t sure whether he should ask the questions burning on his tongue. He wasn´t sure about anything except that his heart was breaking for Theo. And then they were suddenly interrupted.

"Hey, Liam, can I talk to you before we go to the sinema?" Mason called from too far away to
realize what he was barging into.

"Not now, Mase," Liam waved him off in annoyance. Mason was his best friend, but his timing was the worst.

"It’s cool," Theo said, wiping the tears from his face with the back of his hand, getting up hurriedly, scrambling his stick and helmet together and leaving without another word.

Liam just sat there in the grass helplessly, thinking that it was definitely not cool, but maybe it was for the best to give Theo some space. He wasn’t convinced though. He really wasn’t, but Mason was right in his face wiggling a finger at him strictly.

"Glad I’m finally catching you," he began, "since I believe you have a few things to tell me."

"Look, Mason," Liam sighed, "I’m sorry I didn’t tell you things were happening between me and Theo. I was going to, honestly."

"To be honest with you, Liam," Mason replied, "I am a little hurt, but I’ll get over it. The important question is, what exactly are the things happening between you and Theo?"

Liam was in no state to have this conversation right then, not after what he’d just learned about Theo. So he said nothing, just crossing his arms in front of his chest and pouting.

"You know," Mason explained, "I actually had this talk with Theo first."

"What? Why?"

"Because you’re my best friend and I thought I had to protect you. I just wanted to make sure he’s not playing with you," Mason elaborated with a serious expression on his face.

"He’s not, you dumbass," Liam sighed.

"I know that now," Mason admitted, "don’t take this the wrong way, Liam. But you know better than anyone that the dude has some serious issues. I’m just trying to make sure you know what you’re getting yourself into."

Liam knew Mason was just looking out for him, but his back mark was still itching and shining brightly. He genuinely tried not taking his best friend’s words the wrong way, but he had a feeling he was failing that attempt as he replied. He got up to meet Mason’s eyes.

"Honestly, Mason, I don’t know what I’m getting myself into. I have no idea what all of Theo’s
issues are, and it’s actually pretty hard to get those kind of informations out of him. But I’m getting there, okay? And you of all people should understand that you don’t just give up on people because they’re a little difficult.” *Because their lives have been difficult.*

"Liam," Mason tried to calm him down softly, "I do understand that. I’m one hundred percent on your side in this, okay? All I’m saying is you need to take a step back and breathe. Maybe talk everything out with your best friend? Because the last time you did you said you were confused. You said you didn’t know what you felt for him. But your reaction just now tells me something different. And I happen to know that the same counts for Theo."

"What do you mean?" Liam asked, too intrigued to notice the yellow sunrays shining on his arms.

Mason gave him a challenging look as if to say that Liam was supposed to know what he was talking about. But Liam had to hear it. Mason exhaled dramatically.

"For the record, I wouldn’t be telling you this if I didn’t think both you and Theo are absolute idiots who simply can’t manage on their own," Mason noted. Liam nodded, deciding to let the insult slide and focus on what Mason had to say next instead.

"You know he’s absolutely crazy about you, right?" Mason said.

"I don’t know," Liam replied, his heart beating wildly, even though he wasn’t sure how trustworthy of a source Mason was about this, "but if it’s true, it’s definitely not a problem."

"So you got your shit sorted out now?" Mason wanted to know.

Liam shrugged, unsure what exactly it was that his best friend seemed to want to hear from him.

"Liam, you have to be careful with Theo," Mason warned, obviously not convinced by his half-hearted reaction.

"What the fuck, Mase," Liam growled dangerously, a little pissed that Mason apparently felt like he had to pretend him from doing something stupid. As if he was completely incapable of doing something right for once in his life. "Why do I have to be careful, huh? Why can’t I just go and get myself what I want?"

"Is Theo what you want?" Mason demanded calmly.

"You know me, Mase," Liam answered, "do you really have to ask me that? After I let him live in my house? After his birthday yesterday? I think we both know I’m not usually nice enough to do stuff like that for just anybody."
"How sure are you about it?" Mason kept bugging.

"Fucking hell, what do I have to tell you? Yes, I want to be with Theo."

"Like, in an official relationship?" came the next question.

"If he wants to," Liam responded. Mason didn´t look entirely happy with that answer.

"So, are you gay now?"

"Okay, first of all, I don´t like that tone of yours," Liam snapped. "Am I not allowed to be gay? Because gay is too good for me? Is that what you´re saying?" Of course, that was not was Mason was saying, and Liam knew that, but he was mad, and the voice of reason wasn´t exactly the one speaking when Liam was mad.

"I´m not trying to piss you off here, man," Mason tried to allay, but judging by the aggressively glowing red in Liam´s neck, not very successfully. "It´s just that... what if Theo wants to know? What are you going to tell him? Sincerely Liam, in the name of all gay dudes out there, I can assure you, none of us likes to be told by a guy we´re interested in that he´s not usually into boys."

Liam could see how Mason probably had a point there, but why did he have to explain himself at all?

"And by the love of god," Mason added, "please do not give the poor guy the I-don´t-like-labels-talk."

"Wow," Liam gasped, feeling majorly called out as he was slowly realizing that that had been his entire attitude towards the topic of his own sexual orientation so far. He didn´t like labels, and he didn´t understand why anybody would need them. He didn´t see why it would matter if you knew the feelings were real. "Thanks for the support, Mason." He turned away with a bitter taste in his mouth.

"You know I always have your back, Li," Mason stated matter-of-factly. He wasn´t wrong. "It´s just that-" he sighed deeply - "well I guess, now I have to have Theo´s back too, and I´m trying to look out for him here."

"By making me come out as gay?" Liam accused. It wasn´t really what he was thinking, but he was planning to hold on to his little grudge for a little longer.

"No. Not if you aren´t. Or if you´re not ready. I´m just trying to prepare you for when the question comes up between the two of you. Because you´ll tell him then. Whatever you feel is the right
thing to tell him.

Liam let his stiff limbs relax and exhaled, breathing out all the air he’d been holding inside. "Was it this hard for you, too, figuring it out?" Suddenly, he was genuinely curious.

"Probably not," Mason admitted, "at least not since eight-pack-Brett entered my life. And he didn’t even have the eight-pack back then." He smiled. Liam knew he was joking, even if a little truth lay in his words as well.

"So you saw Brett and decided you wanted to lick an eight-pack one day?" Liam teased, playing along with a game the two best friends had played countless times before.

"Yeah, exactly like that," Mason grinned back.

They were just kidding, but it still made Liam think. "I don’t think it works that way for me," he finally noted. "I don’t look at Theo and notice things I like about guys."

"But you notice things you like about Theo?" Mason guessed.

"Yeah," Liam said, "I might be theosexual, after all."

"Oh god," Mason laughed, "you should definitely tell him that."

"Might be worth a shot, if it gets him laughing half as much as it gets you," Liam remarked sarcastically.

"No, but seriously," Mason insisted when the giggles had faded from his voice. "You should totally ask him to be your boyfriend. I think he really needs that."

"You think he’d say yes?" Liam asked, a weird fuzzy feeling in his belly, all sorts of colors dancing over his skin.

"Well, he’s pretty hot, so he could obviously do a lot better than you," Mason teased before he turned serious, "but I know for a fact that he’ll say yes without hesitation."

Liam’s heart fluttered at the thought. He was happily excited. A sudden wave of determination welled up inside him, a rush of energy that made him want to talk to Theo right at that moment. He was not free of fear, or doubt, that maybe a real relationship was not what Theo wanted. No matter how much Mason thought he knew about Theo’s feelings, it seemed to be a general rule that there always was a lot more about Theo that you didn’t know than what you did, so nothing was guaranteed. But still, the prospect of going home with Theo’s hand in his own, of their bed being
shared as boyfriends instead of roommates from then on, the simple idea of Theo smiling while yellow would be shining from his cheeks like sunrays, carried Liam on with a light heart.

And while his hands were shaking with nervosity, the blue and green and orange spots on them mixing into a blur, he welcomed the feeling, knowing that it meant he cared, and it was going to be a very important moment in his life, and even if it was hard to find the right words to say what he had to say to Theo, there was no way of holding them in anymore, and ultimately, with everything that could have gone wrong, Theo was utterly worth it in the end.

"I think I have to go now, Mason," Liam said, his mind already one or two steps ahead. Once again, he was extremely grateful for his best friend’s advice, but he was focused on nothing other than Theo as he turned away from Mason and started walking off with large steps.

"Good luck." Mason called after him, almost out of earshot when he added, "please don’t fuck this up."

Liam couldn’t stop grinning like an idiot as he made his way back towards the locker room. The bleachers were empty, it had turned chilly outside. It was silent when he entered the dressing area. Everybody was gone. He checked the showers just to be sure, but of course, there was nobody in there either. Weird, he thought to himself, Theo had to be waiting outside in the parking lot. Liam’s heart started beating even faster, probably close to popping out of his chest at that point, a bitter taste of anxiety mixing into his excitement. All cars were gone except Mason’s. Liam kept walking until he stood right at the spot where Theo’s truck had been parked. Where it still should have been.

Where Theo should be waiting to take him home.

No, he whined, not knowing why, just knowing that Theo was obviously gone. No, no, no, no. He started panicking instantly, whirling around wildly to see if maybe he was wrong, if maybe he was in the wrong spot, maybe he’d simply been too distracted by his undertaking to ask Theo out to find him. But the entire place was empty, two lone lamps burning at either side of the parking space, no other car around. No blue truck. No Theo.

There could have been a couple of perfectly reasonable explanations for Theo’s absence. Not all possible scenarios necessarily meant something bad, but the direction Liam’s mind was spiraling was clear: Theo was gone. And despite not knowing why, he knew it was his fault. He simply did.

Liam fumbled his phone out of his pocket hastily, almost throwing it to the concrete ground. He could hear his own heartbeat louder than the beeping sounds as he pressed the device to the side of his face, waiting for the connection to come alive. His body stiffened a little more with every second that Theo didn’t pick up his phone. "Please," Liam whimpered quietly, praying to a god that wasn’t listening. Nothing. It was hopeless. How he managed to shove his phone back into his pocket instead of smashing it onto the ground, not even Liam knew. The next few moments went by in some sort of shocked trance, Liam standing completely still, paralyzed by the fear of what was going on, completely still with the exception for his trembling lips.
"Oh no," Mason gasped from behind him after what must have been minutes.

The red was dark in his neck, a wide streak, appearing almost black. All the other colors were gone, gone like Theo was.

_Oh no_ was damn right. Liam thought about turning around to his best friend, considered letting him catch his miserable self once again. But it was too much. This was not about his IED, or his parents being hard on him. He didn’t want to complain about school, or Coach, or any other problem that was incredibly minor compared to what was happening right then. This was about Theo. And while his heart was tearing itself apart, Liam was physically incapable of holding still and waiting for it to be over. So he ran.

While Liam´s feet carried him from the High School towards his house, tears burning in his eyes but not yet falling, Theo was leaving from that same place, taking the opposite direction, getting on the road out of the city. His truck rounded the corner at the end of the street they´d both lived in together for almost two months just a second before Liam appeared at the other end. They never caught sight of each other.

Theo´s eyes lay on the dimly lit street ahead, his gaze empty, his thoughts running too wild for him to keep track. So he turned the radio on instead, intending to drown the world out once again. "Welcome home, Theo," he whispered to himself, glancing over to the old woolen blanket sitting in the passenger seat. How incredibly naive he´d been, how ridiculously stupid, to let himself believe he would never have to go back to this. And yet here he was again. He´d had it coming.

_In your eyes, there´s a heavy blue_

_One to love, and one to lose_

_Sweet divide, a heavy truth_

_Water or wine, don´t make me choose_

_I wanna feel the way that we did that summer night_

_Drunk on a feeling, alone with the stars in the sky_

Theo turned the music off again before the chorus could start. It was harder to drive in silence, now that he´d gotten back into music blaring from the speakers loudly. It was harder to drive away at all, now that for the first time in his life, he felt like he was leaving behind more than just the pain of things he couldn´t bear.

_You are now leaving Beacon Hills_, the sign informed him. Theo exhaled, and it almost hurt that
that wasn´t the end, that his body forced him to take another breathe in afterwards, not letting his broken heart off the hook. Theo stared ahead until his eyes were burning and the world turned black around him. Everything was dark except his skin. His skin was white. Blank.

Chapter End Notes

This is where the fun begins. Not to take "fun" the literal way, obviously...

The songs I used this time are Snow Patrol - Chasing Cars and Selena Gomez, Marshmello - Wolves.
Runaways

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Theo drove until he couldn´t keep his eyes open anymore, and then a little further, almost losing control over his truck a couple of times, but the nightly streets were empty, and anyway, what was the point in trying his hardest to hold onto life now that he was once again on the run to nowhere?

He finally pulled up into an abandoned parking lot beside the street somewhere in Nevada, his eyes burning, his limbs tired, but above all and everything, his heart was exhausted from the pain. Theo climbed into the backseat and covered himself in his blanket. He closed his eyes, but he knew the night would be short and rough, the car seats way too uncomfortable in comparison with the bed he´d grown used to, the ache in his chest not allowing him peace.

Wishing for more than two or three hours of rest that night was hopeless, as Theo knew, but it didn´t really matter. He wouldn´t have been better even after eight or ten hours. The only thing he would have needed was to close his eyes and fall out of consciousness for good, leaving the world behind for at least a few weeks, or months, or just as long as it usually took him to get over the strings attached, as long as it took his heart to grow cold and hard again. It was by far not the first time Theo was on flight, but it seemed the hardest one, maybe with the exception of the very first escape he´d made after his parents´ death.

There generally was something relieving about running away, about appearing at a new place out of nowhere, about being the new guy nobody really knew anything about. It meant that he was once again on his own, which might have sounded sad to others, but to Theo it sounded like freedom. Like he didn´t have to explain himself. Like he wouldn´t be asked any questions. Like he was finally back in his comfort zone where the secrets he bore lay buried safely deep inside his soul, and nobody would ever again threaten to dig them up one by one the way Liam had, Theo would make absolutely sure of that.

Theo had pushed his own luck by telling Liam about his parents, but the point of no return had been Tara. Tara was the one hole in the utter tragedy he called his life that could never be filled, that had no hope of ever healing. Tara had been the one to take his colors with her when she´d gone. And a part of his soul had drowned in the river when she had.

Theo saw everything that had happened after that day flash by behind his closed eyes like a movie. He saw her coffin, the coffin that had stayed closed the entire time of her funeral because of how bad her body had looked after being salvaged from the water. He saw his father´s silent tears and heard his mother´s tortured cries on that day that sent them all to hell on earth. He remembered the silence that had settled over their home after Tara had been gone, and how it had been eating at his almost ten-year-old self, and then how he´d wished the silence back once his parents had started discussing, arguing, shouting at each other from the top of their lungs over every tiny little irrelevant thing there had been.

Theo´s brain moved forward to the memories of the day they´d simply sat him in a packed up car,
no questions asked, no explanations offered, and had driven off, their destination some place outside of California, a place that’s name he’d never gotten to ask them. He remembered how they hadn’t even left the town before his parents had started fighting again. He remembered looking back outside of the window as they’d been passing by all the places that had tied his memories to his sister. He remembered being mad, because nobody had asked him whether he’d been okay with leaving Beacon Hills, and because if they’d had, he would have said no, because he’d wanted to stay, because he’d lost enough already.

But neither his Mom nor his Dad had bothered talking to Theo, or maybe they’d simply been too busy clawing each other’s eyes out. Theo remembered the feeling when he’d known something had been wrong, when the car had been slithering dangerously in the middle of the bridge leading out of Beacon Hills on its northern end. He remembered falling, and the fall was even longer in his memories than it had been in reality. He remembered water, and panic shooting through his veins, and the struggle to push the door of the car open. He remembered thinking of Tara as he’d fought his way to the surface. He remembered heavy breathing, and turning his head around, panting a relieved "I made it, Mom" as he’d been searching the soft waves for her face. He remembered finding nothing but bubbles, and how even those had stopped eventually.

Theo could still hear the siren ringing through his head, he could still smell the scent of the thick blanket he’d been wrapped in, and the sour breath of the deputy asking him questions about the accident. He’d been so confused, not understanding that his parents had been dead, that nobody had been left in his life. They’d still been there just a while before, fighting, breathing, alive. And they hadn’t been gone, they’d just been under water.

Theo remembered Sheriff Stilinski’s voice when he’d tried to explain everything to him. The man had been nice, had tried to catch Theo while he’d been crushing, but even back then, his words had never really reached Theo’s brain. Tara had been dead, and while he’d still been waiting for his parents to finally talk to him about her loss, they’d simply left him too. He’d been so angry at them. Theo had never attended their funeral, as he’d already been on the run by then.

This time was different in many ways, Theo thought. He was not a kid anymore, and even though he was equally clueless where to go, he had his truck, and a little money on him, and a lot of experience in what he was doing. He was an inked, broad-shouldered, all in all dangerously-looking young man now rather than a skinny, wide-eyed boy like he used to, so he had to work and pay for the stuff he needed rather than counting on anybody’s help and generosity, but Theo had never liked the taste of pity anyway.

In many other ways, his current situation resembled the one he’d found himself in a decade ago an awful lot. Theo wasn’t running from just anywhere, it was Beacon Hills that he was leaving behind for the second time in his life. And he wasn’t running from just anything. He was running from Tara, or the loss of her, still, even after all this time, and from the impossibility of moving on without her. He was trying to escape Liam, the boy he would never be good enough for, who he should never even have dared to dream of in the first place.

More memories flooded Theo’s mind, this time more recent ones. They were words he’d heard Liam say to Mason and vice versa, words he probably hadn’t been supposed to witness, but the damage was done, so what did it matter?
He’s not, you dumbass. He’s not what? Theo hadn’t understood the rest, so he’d simply figured it out by himself. He’s not my boyfriend.

The dude has some serious issues. Not that there was anything untruthful about that statement. Not that Liam didn’t have enough problems on his own. Not that he needed somebody to weigh him down the way Theo would eventually. Except drown was maybe a more accurate expression than weigh down. Not that Liam deserved that.

I don’t know what I’m getting myself into. I have no idea what all of Theo’s issues are, and it’s actually pretty hard to get those kind of informations out of him. Theo completely understood. It wasn’t normal for people to be as secretive as he was. It was strange, and it made him seem untrustworthy, like he had things to hide, which he did. No matter how much he craved for the capability to open up to Liam, he knew it would never come naturally or easily to him, and he knew it wasn’t fair to either of them, to put them in a position where Liam would have to renounce the closeness he wished for and Theo would have to force himself open.

Liam, you have to be careful with Theo. Theo could only envy Liam for a best friend that was trying to protect him so fiercely. It had hurt, and continued to hurt, even if it really shouldn’t, since Theo knew exactly just how right Mason was. Liam was a teenage boy, he’d be starting his last year of high school soon, he bore the responsibility for the lacrosse team on his pretty shoulders, and his IED was more than enough to live with. Liam deserved the world and everything good it had to offer. Liam deserved a life far, far away from Theo, who had plunged everybody who’d ever cared for him into death, and misery, and then more death.

Theo gave up on sleeping when he couldn’t stand the half-dreams any longer. He sat up, wrapped the blanket around his shoulders, felt the cold creeping inside the vehicle, lay his head back against the seat, exhaled, inhaled. He’d forgotten how boring it was to be alone, how much time you spent doing nothing, and how doing nothing was agonizingly meaningless if you had nobody to do nothing with.

He shifted yet into another position and his look fell onto his phone sitting in the passenger seat in airplane mode. Theo hadn’t wanted to receive any more calls or messages after he’d suffered through the first time Liam had let the device ring up for almost three minutes. He still couldn’t help but turn the phone screen on, let the picture of Liam in his lacrosse jersey light up that he’d saved as his home screen. Theo sighed. He went to the settings and picked another background, a simple and dark one. He turned the screen off and sighed again. He figured he should delete the picture altogether, so he went to the gallery and scrolled thorough it with a stiff thumb, looking for the picture, which was a stupid mistake, since there were too many similar photos. Brown hair, blue eyes, grumpy frowns, wide grins, Liam playing lacrosse, Liam flipping him off into the camera, Liam sitting at the dinner table next to his parents, Liam, Liam, Liam. Home.

In the end, Theo couldn’t bring himself to delete anything, and this was the tragedy about falling in love: you could always leave when it got rough, but you could never outrun it. It was only fitting, Theo decided, for a person as stubborn as Liam, to not let go of his head, his heart, and every fiber of his miserable being. Theo didn’t wait for the sun to fully rise before he let the engine of his truck roar to life again. He had a long way ahead of him.
Liam was dialling the same number again, sitting on the carpet in his bedroom, the exact same spot where he and Theo had made up the last time he’d thought everything was lost. And as he was sitting there, his hands might have been still trembling, but the initial panic was fading slowly, and it was making way for something worse, something darker, something Liam knew with a bitter certainty in his heart: This time, he wouldn’t get to apologize. This time, he wouldn’t get to make up for anything. This time, Theo was gone.

His head was hurting from the impossibility to understand what he was desperately trying to make sense of. What had happened? What had he done? Liam was very much used to upsetting people unintentionally. He had said countless things he hadn’t truly meant in his life. He had put his foot in so many people’s mouths. He had hurt so often and so badly that he would never stop loathing himself for it. And every single time, the guilt had tortured Liam. The shame. But that night, there was no room for any of that, since all that he had in him was a feeling of loss, and with every call Theo ignored, the fear that he wouldn’t return grew infinitely stronger.

Liam gave it another try, holding his breath while he heard the peeping sound of the connection being made. He hung up again when his lungs threatened to explode two minutes later. He threw his head back onto the bed he was leaned against with his back, but when he closed his eyes, the scent lingering in the sheets filled his nose, fooling his exhausted brain into believing that Theo had to be right there for a millisecond before reality sucked him back into the dark hole that was his life without Theo.

I should have told him, Liam thought, and he would have kicked his own ass, or punched himself right in the face if that had any chances to turn back time. He should have told Theo what he felt for him, it was as simple as that. He’d been a coward. Even in the guest room downstairs the previous night, even after being down on his knees for a blowjob, even after telling Theo that he wanted him, Liam had been too afraid to use the words he’d truly meant. He hadn’t said I’m in love with you. He hadn’t asked do you want to be my boyfriend?

With not a single one of his brain cells did Liam even remotely understand why Theo had left, why he’d simply taken off after the lacrosse game, and especially after the talk they’d had on the field afterwards. It had been sad, yes, and surely distressing for Theo, which was why Liam hadn’t wanted Mason to let them interrupt their moment. But he’d still thought that Theo opening up to him like that, telling him about his dead sister, a person he’d undoubtedly loved with all his heart, a person that he undoubtedly still carried with him wherever he went, should have been progress in their relationship. It should have brought them closer together. It should have meant that they trusted each other. Why it had instead driven them apart was so far beyond Liam that it hurt.

"Come back to me," Liam whispered into the air and shuffled beneath the sheets on the bed, lying down on the side where Theo had been sleeping for the last weeks. He pressed his nose into the pillow and inhaled deeply, breathing in a scent that was familiar. It was both calming him down and tearing him apart at the same time. Memories came flooding his mind.

Liam remembered the strange feeling when they’d settled down for the night after Theo had come
to him, he remembered the fidgety flutter in his gut when he´d seen Theo in his own white t-shirt, the awkward silence as they´d tried to sleep next to each other for the very first time, the nervousness, the insecurity. He remembered not knowing what the changes Theo had brought to his life had meant. He remembered not even knowing that it had been Theo who had brought them along. Liam closed his eyes and let the flashbacks engulf his senses as if he´d be travelling back in time in his mind, perfectly able to see, to hear, to smell. To feel. To taste. Skin. Softness. Sweetness.

He saw a mixture of yellow color and dark ink covering light skin, and the grey that was also green in Theo´s eyes. He heard the deep voice of Theo talking, heard it threatening to kick Liam´s ass in every existing video game, which had never happened. He smelled freshness and sleep and sweat and something that was so purely Theo that it couldn´t be described in any other word than the boy´s name. He felt warmth and twitching muscles beneath his fingertips. He tasted... love on his lips.

Liam´s eyes snapped open. His body felt like it was paralyzed. He grabbed his phone and pressed the call button for what must have been the hundredth time, and of course he didn´t expect Theo to pick up, but he had to try anyway. Again, nothing. So he punched another text message into the device, not that he believed Theo was reading them, but what was he supposed to do? He couldn´t just give up, could he?

With the memory of their kisses, all of them, from the first one to the very last one, a realization had come to Liam. Theo loved him. He did. Maybe not as much as Liam loved Theo, which was nearly impossible anyway, but he still did. And whatever it was that had caused Theo to run off, it wasn´t the fact that he didn´t care about Liam enough to stay. Liam knew Theo better than that by now. He knew the other boy was scared and hurting. He remembered Theo´s tears from earlier that day.

"Tara," Liam whispered again, talking to a ghost he didn´t know. "What have we done to him?"

Not getting an answer, and not being able to do anything to figure it out by himself was endlessly frustrating. Liam was heartbroken in a way that made him want to punch something repeatedly. He was mad at himself for whatever terrible mistake he´d made. He was mad at Theo for the way he dealt with pain, for shutting Liam out. He wanted to run, no matter how far he would have to in order to find Theo. He wanted to grab him and shake him until he would just fucking listen. He wanted to scream at him. You stupid fucking idiot. I love you.

Hurt made Liam restless. It made his fingers itch. He knew Theo was reacting to the same thing in the exact opposite way, could practically picture him sitting somewhere in silence, alone, beautiful and broken. If only he would have let Liam mend him. Didn´t he know Liam would have done anything?

Liam got up on his feet and started pacing through his room. He picked up a used towel from the chair by his desk, unaware of what he was doing until he realized how badly he needed something to hold onto that connected him to Theo. He typed another message into his phone and stared at the screen for a solid minute, waiting, stupidly enough. He walked over into the tiny bathroom and turned on the water in the shower. He didn´t intend to get in though, he was just desperate to get
the feeling back, the feeling of Theo being there with him, a tiny part of his spiralling mind hoping for Theo to magically appear from the steam.

Liam looked into the mirror and then away again, not ready to see just how much of his pain was written on his face. The water was still running when he heard the sound of a car pulling up into the driveway.

He crashed into the large tv as he ran over to the window in the bedroom, but the sting of pain never made it from his shin to his brain. Theo, Liam thought, his heart beating so wildly that it felt like it wasn´t only in his chest, but all over his body. His eyes widened as he pressed his nose against the glass, his hands leaving sweaty traces behind on it. Theo. This can´t be happening.

And it wasn´t. The car coming to a halt beneath his window was not a blue truck. And the person climbing out of it from behind the steering wheel was not Theo. Instead, Liam´s parents were returning home. His heart sank.

For no particular reason, Liam stayed at the window to watch David hurry around the car to the passenger´s side and open the door for Jenna. He couldn´t help but notice the smile on her face as she took the hand David was offering her and got out of the car. They walked up to the front door, arms slung around each other tightly, whatever their conversation was about making them both laugh out loud.

Liam snapped out of his trance when he heard the key turning in the lock on the front door. They were home. He was home. But Theo wasn´t. How was he supposed to explain that? How was he supposed to look into his mother´s eyes, his mother who had lost her heart to Theo even before Liam had, and tell her that he´d once again fucked everything up? That he´d fucked up the one thing that was too precious for that.

Liam considered his options for a moment, and then he decided that he simply couldn´t do it. So he opened his window and climbed out, almost breaking his leg by jumping down from the first floor, ducking down beneath the window of the living room like he hadn´t done in years. He wrote his Mom a text saying that they were celebrating their victory at the sinema while he was still standing in the backyard, just a few feet away from her. And then he started running. Maybe he and Theo weren´t reacting so differently after all.

Liam would have gotten off the busier streets of the town´s centre earlier if he´d known were he was running to, but he didn´t have a particular destination in mind, at least not one he knew the way to. The tears wouldn´t stop welling up in his eyes, and with the cold air hitting his face it was impossible to stop them from falling. Whether Liam was more blinded by his crying or the heartbreak, who knew, but it mattered all the same when he froze in the middle of the street, caught in the spotlight of two bright headlights.

No, was all he could think as he heard tires squeal in an awful noise. No, I have to find him.

It took a strangely unreal second until the impact on Liam´s body came, the hit knocking all the air out of him. I have to find... His brain couldn´t even finish the thought before everything went dark.
I feel like I should apologize, but I don´t know how...
Somewhere along the way Theo turned his phone on and checked it, but not actually read any of the texts, or listened to the voice messages, he only allowed himself to see whether Liam had tried to reach him at all, not that it mattered, but a voice inside of his head, weak but steady, begged him until he finally gave in. Eighty-seven texts. Nineteen voice messages. Theo had wanted to know, but as soon as he did, he had no idea what to do with the information. A part of him was happy that Liam had at least tried to catch him, but he did his best to shut that part up, to tell himself it was selfish, incredibly selfish to look at it that way. Another part wished that Liam wouldn´t make leaving harder than it already was, that he would let Theo go, go his own way and stay behind where he could be happy without him.

What was worse than Liam´s messages were all the other ones. Because Theo had in no way expected them. Twenty-three missed calls from Jenna. Eight texts that he didn´t dare to open, knowing that if anybody could make him turn around in the middle of nowhere, it was her. Corey had tried to reach him around forty times in total, and Mason had sent another twenty-two messages his way. When Theo even read Scott´s name on the screen, he couldn´t deal with it any more and sent the device flying out of the open window of his truck.

He closed his eyes for a minute to catch his breath. Why on earth did everybody always make everything so hard on him? It was exactly like ten years ago, when Sheriff Stilinski had carried him to the police car, had held him in his strong arms the whole night while Theo had been shaking, but in the end, the Sheriff hadn´t been his own father, hadn´t had any reason to really take care of him for longer than the time where his department had investigated Theo´s parents´accident, so what had it all been good for?

The same thing had repeated itself eight years ago, the first time a family had taken him from his orphanage and brought him home with them. There had been three other kids living there, nice and smart, clean and well-behaved kids, and not a second had passed in that strange house where Theo hadn´t wondered why they´d chosen him out of all the pitiful young souls to come live with them. He hadn´t eaten a single one of the deliciously looking sandwiches the woman, Lee, had made him for school. Only a few weeks later, little Theo had simply gotten onto a train, not knowing where to, but that question had never mattered to him anyway, not as long as it hadn´t been Beacon Hills. He´d hated sandwiches ever since, especially those made with the love of a mother, those with a lettuce leaf peeking out at either side.

Why wouldn´t the memories leave Theo alone? Why wouldn´t his stupid brain shut the hell up already? And why on earth did every thought of Liam lead to a thought of every single one of the bad things that had happened in his life? Wasn´t the pain of the last days enough? Did it really have to be more? Did he really have to be taken back to all the misery of the entire last half of his damn life?

Theo drove off, hitting the gas with full force, listening to the engine roaring as he gained speed,
passing a sign that told him to slow down by approximately twenty miles per hour that he ignored. He had to keep going. He had to get away. He had to put distance between him and Liam. He had to drive long enough not to be able to find the spot where he’d dropped his phone again.

It didn’t help. It didn’t help at all. Theo drove faster and faster until he could feel the tires losing grip on the street. And in that moment, something strange happened. He might have been driving without his seatbelt on, because who cared? He might have been going a lot over the speed limit, because who cared? But when he actually saw his life passing by, in that brief moment where he was scared he was really going to crash, Theo panicked. He cared. He did. Still.

Theo stepped onto the brakes violently until his truck came to a squeaky halt raising a lot of dust around him, making him cough, since the window on his side was still open.

"Fuck," he whispered, realizing that he should probably calm down, reminding himself that he might have been on flight, but not on a suicide mission.

He breathed slowly. A few sheets of paper and pens came into his focus. It was incredible how many things you had in your car if you made a habit of living in it. Theo started the engine again, driving slowly this time, slower than he would have been allowed to, but he was like in trance, turning around instead of moving ahead, his eyes straight forward but not really seeing clearly, his heart hammering against his ribcage until he was back where he’d left off a short while earlier.

He could see the small black rectangle lying in the sand next to the road. His hand moved to the doorhandle without his brain’s permission, but he stopped himself. What was it good for? He couldn’t allow himself to get any more tempted. He wouldn’t. Absolutely out of the question. But his fingers were itching, every last fiber of his body refusing to start the truck and drive off without the connection to Liam again.

Theo sighed and grabbed for a pen and the paper. He snorted at his own absurdity. Was he really going to...? Theo couldn’t remember the last time he’d written a letter. A real one, with a pen on paper. Maybe it was about time. Or maybe, he was going insane.

Dear Liam, Theo wrote and stopped to take those two words on the top of the paper in. They looked wrong. He would never talk to Liam like that, not that he had any intention to talk to him ever again. He hesitated another second before he rumpled the piece of paper into a tiny ball and threw it out of the window.

What else was there to say? Theo wondered as he started over, the pen in his hand hovering right above the paper, a thousand words running through his head, but what was he supposed to start with?

Dear Liam, he wrote again, thinking that he should be arrested for ruining Liam’s beautiful name with his disastrous handwriting. But he kept going, at least for two more sentences before the next sheet made its way onto the dry ground.
Even though I couldn’t stand asking you if you’re okay right now, and I couldn’t bear hearing your answer, I still hope you’re doing alright. I’m stupid, and this is stupid, and the world is stupid, and I know you can’t possibly understand what’s happening, but believe me when I say it’s for the best.

Bullshit. Theo wasn’t even remotely close to getting this right. It shouldn’t have mattered, since he didn’t plan to actually send the letter anywhere, but for some inexplicable reason, it was important enough for him to try again.

Dear Liam,
I know what you’re thinking about me right now, which is that I’m the world’s biggest asshole, which is true. I didn’t want to leave you. I didn’t want to sleep in my truck dreaming about you, regretting everything that has led us both to this point, but here we are. I’m truly sorry.

It was hopeless. Every word he wrote sounded utterly meaningless to him, and it wasn’t right, simply wasn’t good enough, because if Theo was sure about one thing regarding his relationship with Liam, it was that it was all but meaningless. He exhaled dramatically. This time, he ripped the sheet in his lap into shreds before he let them rain out of the window. Third time’s a charm, he thought sarcastically.

Dear Liam,
I’m thinking back to the time when I was mad at you for crashing my truck. Surely you remember. After everything that happened later, I now think that maybe a part of me has known all along, and therefore, has tried to keep us apart. Can you imagine us being teammates and nothing else, just what it would have been like if you hadn’t invited me to stay with you? Because no matter how hard I try, I can’t.

"Fucking hell," Theo exclaimed in utter annoyance and shoved more than just that one sheet out of the window, the noises of paper in the wind ringing through his head for a torturously long moment until they landed in the dirt. Every damn kid in elementary school would have been able to write a decent letter, but it seemed like not even that worked for Theo. He silently cursed Mrs Cook for apparently lying to him when she’d claimed that you always knew how to find good words to express yourself.

Theo closed his eyes for a minute, pinching the bridge of his nose with two fingers. Maybe it was a stupid idea to write that letter altogether. Maybe he shouldn’t allow himself to sit around in the middle of nowhere when he could be driving, bringing more distance between him and Beacon Hills, between him and Liam. But the longer he kept his eyes shut, the more overwhelming his running thoughts became, and Theo knew they had to get them out somehow.

Liam,
I’m not going to apologize, because I don’t feel like those words still bear any meaning coming from me. If you knew my life, you’d understand.
If you are hurting now, please know that I’m hurting just as much, maybe more. But above all, know that you don’t have to feel sorry for losing me. You will not regret that for long. You are young, you are beautiful, and you have a good heart even on the days when your IED makes life
I love you, and I’m only saying this because I know you’re never going to read it, but it’s still true. I love you like I don’t even love myself. I love you so much that I’m sacrificing the one thing I’ve ever really wanted, which is being with you. I know this doesn’t make sense to a sane person, Liam. And I doubt I can explain it logically, but I’ll give it a try.

It’s scary, for a guy like me, to know that somebody is walking around carrying my secrets, at least a few, with them. It terrifies the living shit out of me, even if it’s you who’s carrying them. Don’t take this personally. I’m damaged. I would trust you with my life, but not with my past. I simply can’t. It feels like I have laid a piece of my soul in your hands when I told you about Tara, and now I will never know what you’re doing with it, like I have lost control over where the shreds of my heart lie shattered. For the first time after a decade of numbness, I can feel a stinging pain in my chest, and it hurts, because I know it shouldn’t be there, and because I know there’s no way to mend me that wouldn’t destroy you in the process.

There’s no way to say this without sounding ungrateful, I assume. I owe you more than I could even put into words. But I need to be alone. I need space. I need to know I can fall apart without causing collateral damage, Liam, especially since I know you. You wanted to help me, you wanted to be there for me, but you can’t fix me, not when I’ve already lost so many of the pieces I’ve fallen into.

It wouldn’t be fair of me to watch you try any longer.

This means the goodbye that I couldn’t bring myself to say to your face.

I love you, and a part of me still hopes that deep in your heart, you know. I don’t hope to live another hundred years, but if I do, I will still not have forgotten you. The sky above my head will always be the blue of your eyes.

Love, Theo.

He folded the paper into a small rectangle and held it in his hand while the tears came streaming down his face. A song came alive in his head from a memory almost as old as Theo himself. He started shaking. No, he thought, not now, no, no, no, no, leave me the fuck alone. Of course, Theo had to sit through an eternity of the same torture that he’d known for many years, except now it was worse because Liam wasn’t there, which shouldn’t have made it anything, since Liam had never been in the picture before. Liam didn’t even know. Even though he had asked a couple of times.

"Excuse me, sir, are you aware that you’re polluting our precious environment?" The young woman had probably repeated that sentence at least twice before Theo had noticed her leaning down right into the open window of his truck. He wondered if she had an urgent death wish or something.

"You’re not excused, fuck off," he growled in response, his voice hoarse and his cheeks burning.

"Oh, I’d love to," she gave him a bitter smile, "as soon as you’ve cleaned up your garbage out here." She pointed to the balls and pieces of paper on the ground.

Theo rolled his eyes. He really wasn’t in the mood to fight her. He wasn’t in the mood to collect his failed attempts to write a letter up either, but he would have hated the thought of driving off and leaving his own words behind at her feet. Who knew what she would have done with them? In the end, he climbed out of his truck right beneath her strictly raised eyebrows, made sure to slam the door shut as violently as possible without breaking it again, and squatted down to pick up the
paper. He saw the words in his handwriting on the pieces, but it didn’t feel like he’d really written them.

Just when Theo was about to get up again, his gaze landed on his phone with a broken screen, the tiny blue light in it’s left upper corner indicating he had messages still blinking. His hand reached for the device before his brain could make the choice, wiped the dust off on his jeans and shoved it into his pocket. Without another word, Theo got into his car, started the engine and drove off, a bitter taste in his mouth, the weight of his phone against his bent hip heavy, the words he’d wanted to leave behind in the desert haunting him.

You’re such a fucking mess, Theo Raeken, he mumbled to himself. The saddest part about that was that he should have been used to it, to the incapability of making decisions and going through with them, living with the consequences. He should have known better than to be surprised by his little detour including a self-therapy session. Sometimes, Theo wished for somebody to be there just to give him that facepalm that his ridiculous ass deserved.

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It had taken Theo an eternity to make it to Boston by car, but somehow, the long journey, the stiffness in his back from sitting behind the steering wheel all day every day, the number of cities he’d passed by, offered him comfort, allowed him to tell himself he’d tried his best getting as far away from Beacon Hills as possible, which was good, was for the best, as Theo was convinced.

He drove through the city for a couple of days, checking out which were the quiet enough spots to park his truck at night and sleep without the fear of being murdered, not that being murdererd would have been the worst thing to happen to him at the time. He traipsed around coffee shops and grocery stores, looking for a job that wouldn’t require much qualification. The idea of starting over at a new school was pretty much off of the table. After a week and a half, Theo finally decided to take that offer to work as a night guard at the city morgue, pushing away the creeps that the thought of being alone with a bunch of dead bodies gave him, telling himself that at least he wouldn’t have to deal with living people, and apart from that, the night shifts would allow him to sleep in daylight, when it would be considerably noisier, but also a lot safer.

The problem with nine-hour-shifts spent in complete silence was that they gave way too much possibility to think and analyze things, things that Theo should have left behind somewhere along the long ride, but had epically failed to do so. He tried to distract himself by downloading uncountable songs onto his phone with the shattered screen, but of course, all the lyrics somehow reminded him of blue eyes and pink pouty lips, of a burgundy-shaded lacrosse jersey with the number nine on its back.

At some point, Theo started talking to the dead bodies that he’d gotten used to surprisingly quick. Once you’d spent enough time around them to be sure they wouldn’t suddenly open their eyes and start talking, they were in many ways a lot less scary than those people still alive in the city. At the beginning, he’d searched the tags hanging from their stiff toes for their names so he could adress him properly, but during one particularly talky night, he’d proceeded to give them new names that matched their pale faces, as if they were all in some kind of club, so secret that they had to stay
anonymous, even if they were all dead, except Theo, who could have been just as well, his skin
equally white now that he’d left the yellow behind in Beacon Hills.

The bodies never stayed long before they were collected to be dressed up and and styled pretty, to
be put into a coffin and look peaceful one last time before being buried to never be seen again. It
was ridiculous, really, and somehow, it made Theo glad that he’d never seen Tara after her death,
because no matter how nice a body was being presented, it was dead all the same, and everybody
knew that the soft smile had not been on its lips the moment its lights had gone out. One dude
though, Theo had named him Ralph, apparently didn´t have any family to organize a funeral for
him. Or maybe he’d been the victim of a murder case, and the police still needed him for
investigations. Whatever the reason, Ralph was alone, and the longer his starry eyes were directed
to the same spot on the ceiling, the more he started to grow on Theo.

Ralph was a tiny grandpa, the kind who gave his granddaughter with the adorable little ponytails a
second portion of ice cream after her mother had clearly forbidden it. Of course, Theo didn’t know
the first thing about the life that Ralph had left behind, but he didn’t have to. Those were the rules
he played his nightly games by.

"Did you ever have a boyfriend, Ralph?" Theo asked into the silence of the cold morgue on night.

He waited a minute. Not that he expected a dead guy to answer his question, but it still seemed
polite.

"Because now that I’m looking at you like that, and I’ve never felt like you look sad, but now I’m
thinking that maybe it doesn’t matter when or how you die, but it matters who you leave behind,
and that you’ve done a few of the things you really wanted to do in life."

He circled the narrow table that Ralph was lying on, becoming aware of how easy it was for his
own body to do all sorts of movements, how swiftly his knees bent for every step forward, how
instinctively he took every next breath in, and then out. There were still worlds between him and
Ralph. Theo still had time.

"Of course, Ralph, it could have been a girlfriend for you, if you must insist. It’s okay, I’m really
not that judgy, even if the idea grosses me out a little bit. I, personally, believe that nobody should
die before having tried dick, but, you know, we can’t all be that lucky, I guess."

Theo looked at Ralph. Most of the time, he preferred talking to someone who couldn’t talk back,
but at that moment, his joke turned all sad because nobody laughed at it.

"I’m sorry," Theo shrugged. "What I meant to say is that I’m in love. I tried to fight it. I really did."

He thought about Liam. Everything was silent, cold, dead, as if the world outside had stopped
spinning.
"I miss him so much," Theo sobbed. His hand slipped into the pocket of his jeans to touch the folded paper he still carried around with him everywhere he went.

The next night, when Theo started his shift, Ralph was gone. Simply gone, without an explanation, without a goodbye. The taste of his absence felt bitter as Theo tried to swallow it down.

***

Four weeks after Theo had left, Corey received a call from an unknown number on his phone. He was lying in Mason´s bed, head resting in his boyfriend´s lap lazily, a movie that he was too tired to focus on playing on the tv screen in front of them. He looked at the vibrating phone screen and put it back down onto the mattress.

"Who is it?" Mason wanted to know, fingers caressing Corey´s hair lovingly.

"Unknown caller," Corey mumbled sleepily, brushing him off.

"Answer it, you dumbass!" Mason exclaimed suddenly. Corey snapped up, shocked by the harsh words and loud tone. He wasn´t exactly used to Mason talking to him that way, at least not in a non-sexual way. He stared and gaped, still not taking the call.

"Theo," Mason explained softly when he realized that Corey was too tired to follow his thoughts. Oh. It clicked. Oh, Theo.

Hastily, his hand shaking a little bit, Corey pressed the green button and then put the call on speaker. "Theo?" he asked.

"No," a female, breathless voice informed him. "It´s Jenna. Are you with Mason? I couldn´t reach him."

"He´s listening," Corey replied, curiosity creeping up inside him, and a lot of fear. Liam´s mother didn´t sound like she was calling with good news.

"Can you two come to the hospital?" Jenna asked, her voice strangely absent, trembling, scared.

"Did something happen again?" Mason wanted to know, his brown eyes wide open with sorrow.

"Looks like it," the distressed woman croaked out, "I don´t know what to do anymore. Can you...? He´s just... my Liam... oh God."
Corey could hear her voice breaking, could tell the exact moment she started crying.

"We’ll be right with you," he promised, suddenly wide awake, jumping up from the bed on slipping into his shoes, running down the stairs behind Mason, who already had his key car in his hand. They were used to it by now, the Liam emergency protocol so well and frequently practiced that they made it to the hospital in record time, not even the weight of their worries slowing them down.

Melissa McCall, Scott’s mother, greeted Corey and Mason briefly at the reception, leading the way quickly as she spoke. "Jenna’s already with him. Doesn’t look too good."

Corey bumped into Mason who stopped dead in his tracks in the door to the room where Liam was lying peacefully asleep amidst white sheets, the cuts and bruises on his face being the only color on his equally white skin. Even the red in his neck was gone. Had been gone since four weeks, as Corey knew.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like I say this after every chapter, but I AM SORRY!

May 13th will save us all.
Lost Souls

Liam opens his eyes to the white sheets of the hospital bed he still finds himself in. The sharp scent of cleaning and disinfection solutions hits his nose, but he can tell that somewhere beneath it, there’s another smell in the air, a softer one, warmer, way more pleasant. Liam tries to move his stiff body and sit up against the headboard, but his left shoulder won’t move. He wiggles his fingers carefully to see how dead his arm is. They follow his brain’s order immediately and Liam realizes that what’s weighing his body down is in fact a head resting on his shoulder. A head attached to a body that is wrapped around his own, arm and leg swung over Liam beneath the blanket, holding him tight, radiating off a welcome heat. For weeks, Liam has been freezing on his own.

Theo’s eyes are closed, his features relaxed, his breathing even. He’s fast asleep, but the faint yellow glow shimmering from his cheek is alive, its outlines moving lazily beneath the pale skin. Liam lets out a deep sigh that feels like it has been sitting in his throat ever since Theo left him. He raises his hand cautiously to thread his fingers through Theo’s soft hazel-brown hair, the feeling of having the most precious thing in the world right in his hand soothing all his wounds at once, those on the inside just as much as those visible where his skin is broken. Liam almost laughs as he remembers that you can’t really disturb a sleeping Theo anyway, that ever since he’s come to take Liam up on his offer to crash at his place, Theo has been taking up not only the space in his bed, but also the rest and peace that it’s supposed to be good for. Maybe Liam is even happier for Theo to have had something close to a home for a while than he is for himself to have had Theo by his side.

Slowly, Liam leans down to place a tender kiss on Theo’s forehead. He remembers Theo doing the same thing the night they first kissed, and he remembers how special he felt in that moment. He remembers thinking that life can’t possibly get any better. Except with Theo, it always can. "I love you," Liam whispers. Theo is still asleep, he can’t hear Liam’s confession, but it still feels good to have said at last. He will repeat those three words eventually. Many times.

Liam has his arms wrapped around Theo’s strong shoulders when he finally comes awake, which takes a few sweet moments, a low growl announcing his awakening state long before he manages to force his eyes open, his hair pressed flat to his temple where he’s been lying on it. It’s still hours before sunrise, the hospital room only lit dimly by a single lamp above Liam’s head, but it’s a nice kind of darkness, the kind where you can still see most things but that also brings with it the assurance that the world lies resting at the moment. It feels like the universe has pressed pause on life to give them a moment to themselves, which seems absolutely logical to Liam, since cuddling Theo is that important to him.

"Morning, sunshine," Liam says with a lazy smile on his lips. It’s not morning, and the sun is not shining, but Theo is right next to him, setting his world alight with only so much as a smile. Liam could ask him where he’s been for the last four weeks, or why he’s left in the first place, but those questions seem so dangerous, and Liam is definitely not going to risk destroying the mood over such irrelevancies.

Instead of a reply, Liam’s greeting is met by a deep and passionate kiss. It’s so unapologetically Theo, he thinks, speaking with his body rather than with words, telling stories and spilling secrets.
all the time, but in a way that stays hidden from people who don´t care enough to listen and watch closely, to read between the many lines that are inked beneath his skin.

Their kiss starts out soft and loving, with light touches here and there, both of them simply relishing each other´s presence and closeness, breathing each other in until their heads get a little dizzy. But they wouldn´t be Theo and Liam if they didn´t turn a kiss into a hungry make-out-session, if their hands didn´t start roaming and slipping beneath pieces of clothing, if they weren´t both hard in an instant. Which they definitely are.

"Touch me," Liam begs, even if Theo´s hands are already all over his upper body and kneading as much of his ass as he can reach, but it´s simply not enough for him.

"We´re still in a hospital, Liam," Theo reminds him, but Liam can´t bring himself to care about technicalities like that. It doesn´t matter that the bed offers way too little space, and that it smells unfamiliar, and that it´s not their own. It doesn´t matter that they could be caught any moment and Theo would be thrown out and probably given a ban from visiting the hospital again. The only thing that matters is that they´re together, finally, and after four horribly long weeks, they both know that it´s time to be together for real, with everything that comes with it. Liam´s body has long stopped hurting. All he can feel is an urgent craving. Theo, his heart is beating loudly. Theo.

Of course, Theo understands, and doesn´t object any further. Instead, he drags his fingers along Liam´s waistband, his wrist brushing the throbbing erection only slightly too often to put it off as coincidental. Liam whimpers into their kiss.

"Patience," Theo whispers as Liam´s grip in his hair tightens. But Liam has been all out of patience for a long time. He´d been waiting for something to happen between the two of them for an eternity before they finally kissed. He planned a whole birthday party, not with the sole purpose of sucking Theo off, but that was definitely a big part of the plan.

He never got to finish what he started though, not with everybody barging in on them, and then the next day, of course, with Theo leaving. But you are only stupid if you make the same mistake more than once, and this is not a night for Liam to be stupid.

"No," he growls and moves them over, rolling on top of Theo and straddling him, earning a surprised look. "I´ve been waiting for too long, Theo. I´m starving for you."

"You have me now," Theo replies, the dark shimmer in his eyes indicating that he´s just as far gone as Liam is, not that the huge bulge straining the front of his pants hasn´t given that away already. "So have me. I´m all yours."

This is too good to be true, is the first thought coming to Liam´s mind. He leans down, but Theo is awfully far away. He cranes his neck, bends his arms, but he can never get close enough to reach him. Panic is rising in his chest. Liam tightens his grip around Theo´s upper arms, but all he can feel between his fingers are damp sheets. "Theo," he cries out. No, no, no, he thinks. Don´t leave me again.
Liam was still achingly hard when he awoke, but the mood was utterly destroyed by fear and panic, by disappointment and pain, by loneliness. He´d known even before he´d reached the surface of consciousness that what he´d been waking up from had only been a dream, had only been his mind once again making up the things he was craving like a drowning person would be craving air. He sat up abruptly, his t-shirt clinging to his sweaty back, and reached for the nearest thing he could get a hold on, took the water bottle from the nightstand attached to his hospital bed and sent it flying through the tiny, white room, watching it shatter against the wall, a thousand wet spots appearing on the wallpaper, narrow trickles of water running down from it like tears.

The worst thing about Liam´s anger was that it could never be stilled, not like that, not by crashing a glass bottle, which left a mess in his room that only made him angrier every time he looked at it. He let his balled fist fall into the mattress. One, two, three times, but his punches were muffled, and they didn´t help him at all. Liam felt like screaming. He wanted to pull all his hairs out with his own hands. He wanted to wake up every last person in the entire building. He wanted to roll his stupid bed out of the large window at the end of the hallway, wanted to see it fall down from the fourth floor and preferably into a few cars parked underneath. He wanted to get up and start running as far as his bare feet would carry him. He wanted to run for so long that he would collapse as soon as he would finally find the only person he´d ever really missed in his life. He wanted to yell at him. He wanted to punch that bastard in the face. And he wanted to fucking hold him so tight that he would never get the chance to leave Liam ever again. He started sobbing loudly.

"Liam, sweetheart, hey," Jenna´s gentle voice appeared in the doorframe to his room. Her blue eyes swayed from him to the shards on the floor and then back to her wailing son. "Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

Liam shook his head, but just to assure her that the bottle hadn´t done any more damage to him. In fact, he was pretty hurt. The cut across his eyebrow was deep, and the stitches were being seriously tested by the way he contorted his face. Several bruises covered Liam´s jaw and neck, but they were the least of his worries. His broken ribs hurt a lot more than the wrist that was hidden in a white cast, and every breath he took was a struggle, but ultimately, Liam could never be sure whether that originated from his injuries or the fact that Theo had ripped his damn heart out when he´d left.

Jenna sat down on the edge of his mattress hesitantly, and she put a hand on his shoulder hesitantly, and Liam prayed to all the gods he didn´t believe in that her reservations came from the fear of hurting him and not the fear of him being his old, angry self. She closed her arms around him and Liam let his forehead fall onto her shoulder where his tears were being soaked up by her sweater.

"Liam, what happened?" Jenna wanted to know after he´d calmed down a bit.

"Nothing," he lied, "I just... slipped and the bottle fell down." He couldn´t have thought of anything more ridiculous.

"No," she replied, "I mean what happened for you to end up in the hospital? Again? It´s been what, six times in four weeks? You get that I´m worried about you, right?"
Liam got it. He really did. "I´m sorry," he whispered, thinking back to how it had all started with Brett appearing after lacrosse practice.

"Looking shitty, Dunbar," Brett had commented his state that had been pretty miserable even before they´d met that day.

"Fuck off, man," Liam had only said and tried to get into his car without starting an argument over whatever Brett had been in the mood to argument about. But of course, that would have been too easy.

"Seems to me like you´re not doing that well on the field without your boyfriend," Brett had said and earned one of Liam´s well-practiced death glares.

"Leave him alone," Nolan had come to Liam´s defense, and somehow, that had been what had really triggered him, since he´d realized just how far he´d sunk for Nolan to defend him from Brett.

"Do you want to repeat that to my face so I can answer you properly with my fist?" Liam had threatened Brett. Of course, that idiot was almost as stubbornly stupid as Liam himself.

"Oh, do you need another punching bag, now that your favorite one is gone? Really got me wondering what might have scared him off," Brett had snorted and earned a growled warning from Nolan standing nearby, but Liam had already been on his way over to land the first punch.

Brett was way taller than Liam, and fucking ripped, but Liam had been blind with rage, his blood boiling hot in his veins, and he´d definitely done some serious damage on the other boy´s face, too, but by the time half of the lacrosse-team managed to end their fight, Liam had spit out a lot of blood, his entire body aching. He´d felt so alive, every attempt to suck in a breath ragged and painful, but at least that pain hadn´t come from the inside where Theo had left his heart in pieces, and that had offered Liam a certain kind of relief, even if not for long.

The lady at the ER had looked Liam up and down critically, clearly recognizing his face, no matter how disfigured it had appeared. He hadn´t blamed her. Most other people probably tried to stay away from the place after once being there.

After he´d been hit by a car the night Theo had left, Liam had been unconscious, but only for a short while. He´d woken up again before the ambulance had even arrived, and if the driver hadn´t urged him to stay exactly where he´d been and wait for the paramedics, he would have gotten up and run ahead. They´d made him stay at the hospital for twenty-four hours because he´d had a serious concussion along with several bruised bones, but nothing too bad. No permanent damage, except for the fact that Theo had been gone. Jenna had sent Mason and Corey away and stayed to sleep in the chair next to him, which had made him restless, knowing that she had been on extra alert for every tiny little sign of pain from him. Meanwhile, he´d been breaking apart silently, only on the inside, and no amount of blood, no number of broken bones could have done that heartbreak justice.
In the course of the next weeks after his accident and Theo’s vanishing, after uncountable failed attempts to reach him, after sleepless nights and minor outbursts, Liam had started getting even worse. He’d gotten into a fight at school that he didn’t even remember what it had been about, just that the crack of his nose being broken had made him feel better than it should have had, and that the blood on his hands had at least been a little bit like the red he’d been missing. He’d felt bad for his parents after they’d picked him up from the hospital for the second time in one week, had recognized the concerned looks on his friend’s faces, but in the end, he hadn’t been able to keep himself under control.

Everything reminded him of Theo. One time, he hadn’t even gotten into a fight with anybody, but had simply beaten tiny cracks into the wall above the headboard where Theo had been sleeping until his knuckles had been bleeding and two of them had been broken, as he’d later been informed. It was highly unfair, that a person could simply leave you, but memories of them were still haunting you everywhere you went, everywhere you turned your head. So much Theo came crashing down on Liam every day, and there was no way to stop it, and it was still torture, if only for the fact that the real Theo wasn’t there, and all the marks he’d left behind together were never enough for Liam.

Liam fought his way back from his memories to the reality where he half lay in his mother’s loving arms. "I’m sorry," he whispered.

"You’re not supposed to be sorry, Liam," Jenna responded with a sigh, "you’re supposed to be better. I understand your pain. I really do. But the way you’re handling it scares the hell out of me." She grabbed him by the shoulders and made him look into her eyes. His bad conscience grew a little worse.

"You don’t understand," Liam objected defiantly.

"Honey," she whispered softly, "I’ve been in love too, you know."

Liam stilled for a moment. He had never stopped to think about how much his Mom knew about the kind of relationship he and Theo were having. Or the kind he wanted them to have. The taken-for-grantedness with which she was speaking about him being in love with Theo made him both happy and eternally sad.

"I just wish I was a person that people would actually stick around for," Liam stated.

Jenna had always kept her composure. She’d been there holding his hand and having his back thorough it all, her words giving him strength and faith even when he’d thought nothing ever could. But not this time. This time, she started crying.

"Liam," she sobbed, holding his face in her hands. "My baby boy."
If Liam had thought his heart had been broken before, seeing the tears streaming down his Mom´s face was still a whole other level of misery. Never in his life before had he felt so helpless. "Mom," he said, squeezing her shoulders. She wasn´t allowed to cry over him. The only reason he still found some moments in a day to be positive, to think that life could maybe still turn out okay eventually, was her and her faith in him.

Jenna swallowed and tried to put on a smile. She always tried so hard for him. "You´re the best thing that´s happened to me, Liam," she assured him. "And don´t you dare think for even a minute that you´re not the best thing that´s happened to him, too." She wiped away a few tears with the back of her hand, not that it helped much. "He´s probably out there somewhere trying to drown his pain in really stupid stuff he keeps doing to get over you. And it´s probably not getting him anywhere at all."

Liam didn´t know whether the thought of Theo going through the same thing he was going through made him feel better or worse about it. He wondered if Theo was ever going to come back to Beacon Hills, but he didn´t dare speak the question out loud, since he knew his Mom wouldn´t tell him yes just to comfort him, and he couldn´t take her non-existent hope at the moment.

"It´s quarter after three," Jenna said after a long pause, "you should probably get some sleep. You ´ll be going home tomorrow."

It wasn´t until then that Liam started asking himself why she was even there, obviously wandering the hallways of the hospital in the middle of the night.

"Will you sleep too, Mom?" he asked her, begged her. "For real, this time? Not just sitting in that chair and counting my breaths?"

"No," Jenna denied, a strange and grim expression on her wet face. "I actually think I have one more thing to do." She left the room with her phone pressed to her ear, leaving a clueless Liam behind, the chances to find sleep that night at that point completely gone out of the window. It was a good thing Liam wasn´t connected to one of those beeping heart-monitors, since he would have alarmed the entire hospital-staff with the things going crazy in his chest.

At quarter after six in the city morgue of Boston, Theo clocked out and pulled on his jacket to go home, which meant driving his truck to a quiet enough corner to get a couple of hours of sleep, preferrably without being shooed away by a police officer. Theo hated when they interrupted his naps. It was hard enough to fall asleep as it was. Of course, the thought of it alone summoned his bad luck and Theo was asked to move his truck elsewhere before he´d even managed to spread the blanket over his tired limbs.

Theo tried two more times before he pulled up onto the parking space of a small coffee shop in the city centre. "This was so much easier in Beacon Hills," he mumbled to himself, but it didn´t matter, he wasn´t going to go back there. With his legs a mixture of stiff and weak, he climbed out of the car and went inside to get a big black coffee, craving both the heat to hold between his hands and the caffeine to rush through his system. He was utterly annoyed by the long line he had to wait in
for half an eternity, not that he had anywhere important to be, and he was even more annoyed to be asked his name when he finally gave his order. He was thinking about a fake name to give the skinny dude behind the counter when a voice behind him called him "Theo" so loud and clear that the coffee boy wrote it down.

Theo turned and looked around. His first thought was that his attempt to flee had failed. Nobody is supposed to know me here. His panicked eyes settled on a face surrounded by long, strawberry-blonde hair. He knew the girl, but Theo needed a minute to place her correctly.

"Lydia," he finally remembered. "What are you doing here?" It wasn´t supposed to sound like an accusation, but it did.

"Actually," Lydia responded, "I live not far from here, what are you doing here?"

Oh right. Oh fuck no. Theo had completely forgotten. "You study at MIT," he stated the obvious.

"I do," she nodded, "but you don´t, so why are you this far away from Beacon Hills?"

Theo had to remind himself to close his mouth, even if there was no real way to save him from looking stupid anymore. He shrugged dumbly. "I´ve moved on."

Lydia´s eyebrows were suspiciously raised and Theo thanked god silently when another employee than skinny boy announced that his coffee was ready. He turned around to get it and gather his thoughts real quick.

"What exactly do you mean by you´ve moved on?" Lydia wanted to know, suddenly standing a lot closer beside him. Her arms bore a pretty pattern of light blue and dark green and orange slung into another, her cheeks showed a faint red blush. It had never bothered Theo to live in a city with almost seven hundred thousand people and at least as many different shades of color beneath their skin, but suddenly, because it was not just anybody, but Lydia standing in front of him, and with that his connection to Beacon Hills and Liam had from one second to the other come back to life, suddenly it did. He looked at his own hands and remembered the two days he had actually enjoyed them being yellow before everything had gone to hell.

"I´m just not really the type of guy to stay at one place for long, you know." Theo wondered whether the words coming out of his mouth sounded as dumb to her as they did to him. "I need change every once in a while. And I didn´t really have an actual place in Beacon Hills anyway." Complete and utter bullshit.

"I thought you lived with Liam," Lydia half-asked, half-stated. A strange shade of pink that Theo didn´t recall ever seeing on anybody made its way across her face in tiny, narrow threads.

"I did," Theo answered shortly. He didn´t think he´d ever have to explain it to anybody. As a matter
of fact, that was exactly why he´d left in the first place, because he dreaded the explaining himself too much. "I did, but now I don´t anymore."

"And when you left, was that before or after his accident?" Lydia asked grimly.

Theo´s heart stopped beating for as long as it could without killing him. He grabbed Lydia by the arm, a little too harshly maybe, but he was barely even thinking straight. Hell, he was barely breathing. He dragged the poor girl into a far corner of the coffee place that was partly hidden behind a huge decorative plant and practically forced her down onto one of the chairs.

"What did you just say?" he asked breathlessly, dying for an answer that he was absolutely horrified of.

"I guess that answers my question," she remarked, rolling her big green eyes at his extreme reaction. "Frankly, I´m very confused that you seem so surprised. I mean, suddenly meeting you at the other end of the country is strange enough already, but how on earth come that you didn´t even know about Liam´s accident?"

"Is he...?" Theo couldn´t bring himself to finish the question. He wasn´t even sure what he exactly he was trying to ask.

"Alive and out of the hospital, as far as I know," Lydia assured him with a calm and steady voice. "Not that I know very much about the whole thing."

"Do you know what happened to him?" Theo wanted, needed to know. His heart was beating like crazy, his voice weak and high-pitched, his hands sweaty and shaking. He held onto the table so tightly that his knuckles cramped, but he needed the pain to ground him.

"Just that he ran into a car in the dark," Lydia began explaining. She paused for a minute and then kept talking, understanding that Theo needed more, more words, more information, more of her calm voice, more to time to process the whole thing being thrown at him with full force out of nowhere. "I think he was onconscious for a little while, but not too long. They kept him in the hospital for the night because of a concussion, but he went home the next day with nothing but a few bruises and scratches." She must have seen the horror in Theo´s eyes. "It´s been what, four weeks or something? I´m sure he´s fine by now," she added.

_Four weeks. _"When exactly was it?" Theo asked shakily. _"Four weeks ago?"

"I don´t know," she simply shrugged, "that´s what I´m guessing, but I can´t tell you exactly. Why does it even matter?"

Theo looked at her. So many feelings came crushing down on him at the same time that he found no way to keep bottling them up inside him. His voice was barely above a whisper when he finally
found the words, but she heard him. "I left four weeks ago."

Theo had been all alone ever since, had been lonely, but in that moment, he felt completely lost.
"Theo, I know we don´t know each other that well, but I feel like we should talk about this," Lydia suggested with an insistant look in her eyes.

It was strange, the whole situation, meeting Lydia in Boston, where he´d thought nobody would know him, and then hearing about Liam´s accident, and then sitting there in a coffee shop wanting to cry like a baby, and the only person around was a person he´d never even thought liked him, but somehow, he wanted to tell her the whole story of his miserable life and then just beg her to end his suffering.

"Why did you leave him?" she asked before he even got a chance to tell her there was nothing to talk about. There was so much to talk about that he didn´t know where to start.

And yet Lydia had managed to ask her question exactly the right way, exactly the way that hurt the most. She knew. She had only met him twice, and yet she knew that Theo hadn´t left Beacon Hills behind because he was a loner or a free spirit or some kind of bullshit, he´d left Liam behind because he was a coward and a lost case.
"Because I´m an idiot," Theo replied simply. After all, that was the core of it.

"Okay, but-" she raised her eyebrows at him- "do you intend to stop being an idiot anytime soon? Because in that case you could just go back and see for yourself if he´s okay. Or, you know, at least call him or something crazy like that."

Theo´s hand found its way over the phone in his pocket. He´d thrown away the sim-card and with it all the texts he´d never read, all the voice-messages he then realized would probably have informed him about the accident. He would have never left. He would have turned around immediately if he´d learned about it while being still on the road. But he was in Boston already, he´d found a job, he knew the best places to park his truck while sleeping. And he had a suspicion he might have broken Liam´s heart a little bit. How did one simply go back from that?

"I can´t call him," he said, shaking his head more to himself than Lydia. "What would I even say? After all the things I..." Midsentence, Theo realized that Lydia had no idea what he was talking about- "... it´s complicated, okay? I am fucking complicated."

"What does complicated have to do with anything?" Lydia interjected. "Do you think Liam cares about complicated?"

"Lydia," Theo insisted, "when I say complicated, I actually mean damaged goods. How many people do you know who don´t even show colors?"

"And Liam doesn´t want a boyfriend without colors?" She threw him an innocent look, but the question had been posed with a devious ulterior motive, as he knew.

"That´s not what I mean, you don´t understand-"

"I´ve noticed you have the same tattoo as Scott does," she suddenly said as she pointed to where two dark circles, one a little thicker than the other were wrapped around his forearm right beneath his elbow. "Tell me that´s a coincidence." Theo didn´t know where she was going with that topic.

"It´s not. It was our thing, kind of. Before I left Beacon Hills for the first time. Back when I had a normal childhood and normal friends," Theo admitted. Those times were long over, and he didn´t know why she would hurt him like that, why on top of everything with Liam, she had to rip open other wounds, older ones, ones that had faded into ugly scars by the time.

Lydia waited and searched his face as long as it took him to break and look her in the eyes. "You´re not actually the worst guy on earth, do you know that?" she said softly.

"I´m afraid I´ve been doing my best to get pretty close though," Theo shrugged.
"You don´t get to decide how much worth you are to other people," Lydia added. Her speech was seriously getting weirder with every word that came out of her mouth. None of it seemed to make sense to Theo at the first impression, but in spite of that, or maybe especially because of it, he took the time to think the points she was making through.

"I can´t go back," he sighed, "I´m already here. I´ve already left. I´ve already hurt him."

"Yeah, you know what else has hurt him?" Lydia threw him an expectant and slightly accusing look. "That car that hit him. But that doesn´t mean he has to be lying in the middle of the street bleeding to death for as long as it takes. You can always go back."

It hurt. Theo flinched when she spoke about Liam being injured after his accident. He couldn´t help but picture Liam´s lifeless body on the cold concrete ground, one leg in an unhealthy angle, blood spilling from his crashed skull, eyes still the same endless blue, but frozen and empty. A stinging pain was tormenting his chest from the inside. He was sitting in a strange position, knees bent, upper body leaned forward as if he planned to run off at any moment, run off and all the way back to Beacon Hills just to see with his own eyes that Liam was alright, just to press his ear above his beating heart, just to make sure the waves in the deep oceans of his eyes hadn´t truly died.

"I need to go," Theo stated, his body almost as restless as his mind.

"You need to go home," Lydia nodded sympathetically. Theo didn´t even bother correcting her, didn´t care to point out that he didn´t really have anything closer to a home than a truck. Except maybe his home was a person, and if that was true, then it certainly was Liam. The cup of coffee he´d ordered was left behind carelessly as he stomped out of the door, moving towards his truck with large, purposeful steps.

Theo climbed behind the steering wheel. He put the seatbelt on. He let the engine come to life. He stillled for a second. He fumbled his phone out of the pocket of his jeans. He looked at the screen that didn´t show Liam anymore, but he could still see him. "Fuck," Theo muttered to himself. He turned the car off again and turned on the music instead, remembering the song that had been flowing from the speakers softly the last time he´d been to weak to suffer in silence. He nodded his head to nobody. It was time to go.

It was strangely easy to tell the city his silent goodbye, simply driving until the last of its buildings faded away in the rearview mirror that Theo had no real attention for. He would have made it so far by nightfall.

The first time Theo had to stop for gas, he thought about getting the coffee he´d abandoned before, or some chocolate, but his body was on a rush of adrenaline that had sustained for hours by that point, and he didn´t feel like he needed anything more than the mixture of hope and horror that the prospect of seeing Liam again gave him. Music was blaring from the speakers loudly as he drove off and ahead, the goal in his mind simple. Coming home.
The way ahead of Theo was a long one, and as much as it seemed like it in the beginning, his excitement couldn’t make the time pass any faster. He became tired, still not having slept after his previous night shift, the last nap having ended more than twenty-four hours earlier. When the sun set, it took quite some of the determination on his mind with it, and as the moon rose on the night sky, it made fear well up inside Theo. Clearly most of his life choices had been the wrong ones, but which? Had he been stupid to leave Liam in the first place or was he being stupid now?

Theo started looking out for somewhere to stop and spend the night. He didn’t know how he was supposed to find sleep, but he was sure his body would kill him soon if he didn’t. With both a smile and a little tear escaping his eye, he thought back to sleeping in Liam’s bed for hours uninterrupted, how warm it had been, how peaceful. He’d always loved the magic a real bed could do, but now he genuinely wondered if maybe the magic had been Liam all along. Before he forced himself to close his eyes, Theo sent a text to the one number he had saved on his phone with the new sim-card. Help me.

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It felt strange to Liam to leave the hospital after they’d finally managed to get the paperwork straight and David had personally escorted him to the parking lot, where Mason and Corey were waiting to drive him home.

"Where’s Mom?" Liam asked him. If he was being honest, he was a little relieved that she wasn’t there, that for once, she seemed to have something else to do than holding her tragically damaged son’s hand, that his breakdown didn’t dictate every single step she made. Still, a tiny voice in the back of his head was crying for her like a baby.

"I think she wanted to get a few things done before you’d be home," David replied calmly, "don’t worry, she’ll be with you soon."

For a moment, Liam thought about saying something else. He wondered whether David had ever broken his Mom’s heart, or made her cry. He wondered whether he knew how lucky he was. Jenna wasn’t there at the moment, but David’s voice in his words didn’t betray the slightest doubt that she would return to them. Liam was tired, and his body was aching from the exertion of walking the whole way to the parking space. His entire being was too little of anything, too weak, too broken to put anything that big into words. So he simply climbed onto the backseat of Mason’s car, catching his best friend flinching while watching him struggle.

"I officially hate Brett now," Mason swore when they were on the way home, "I even changed his name in my phone from Eight-pack-Brett to Brett Talbot. That’s how much I hate him."

Suddenly, just like that, the craziest thing happened. Liam was too tired to will the corner of his mouth down when it perked up just for a second. It was so little, and neither Corey nor Mason had seen it, but it was the closest to a smile in four weeks, and all just because of how petty his best friend was over Brett Talbot, who really didn’t have to do anything with Liam’s misery at all. Well, nothing except that the bruise on Liam’s jaw had the shape of his fist.
"I´m sorry," Liam whispered, half expecting that they hadn´t heard him.

"You should definitely not apologize for making Mason stop drooling over that asshole," Corey argued.

"I mean I´m sorry for this," Liam explained. He didn´t want to elaborate on the this. He didn´t feel like spelling it out. For breaking down. For scaring everybody with his suicidal behavior. For making them rush to the hospital in the middle of the night on a regular basis.

"We know," Mason nodded, his voice low and soft.

Silence settled over them, taking up the space in the car until Corey finally spoke up.

"So, where do we start looking?"

Liam didn´t even realize the question was directed at him until Corey turned around in his seat with his eyebrows raised in expectation. "For what?" he asked, confused.

"The love of your life, dumbass," Mason almost yelled in response.

This is not happening, Liam thought, his heart beating too fast for it to be healthy, his own pulse ringing through his ears, deafening him from the thoughts making a mess in his mind.

"Shit, Liam, calm down, okay?" Corey reached out towards him with one hand. "We just have to think this through, alright? Just try to remember anything that we could start with. Do you know any of the places he´s been before? Has he ever talked about a place where he wanted to go? Is there anything that comes to your mind that could be useful?"

Liam was lost. He didn´t know anything helpful. Or he couldn´t think straight enough to remember it in that moment. He panicked. As soon as Corey had said it, he´d known that he wanted to fight, wanted to run wherever he needed to and drag Theo back home, but no matter how hard his body was shaking with his current overdose of energy and determination, his brain was too overwhelmed to come up with the necessary information.

"I don´t know," Liam squealed desperately, and never before had it hurt so much to not be an insider on the fine selection of Theo´s secrets and past mysteries. "I don´t know," he repeated more quietly, on the verge of crying.

"No, no, Liam, stop," Mason begged, "you know a lot. You know him. We just have to do this right." In that moment, he pulled up into the driveway before Liam´s house. "Let´s go inside and work on that, shall we?"
Liam met his eyes in the rearview mirror. And then Mason turned around and their gazes connected directly. Liam had been ready to fight for four full weeks. It was about time someone pointed him in the right direction to do so. He swallowed and hurried to get out of the car, the speed with which his sore body moved answer enough for his friends who followed him inside.

Lying down on the side of the bed that was still Theo’s, Liam closed his eyes and tried to concentrate.

"Do you know if Theo has any living relatives in the states?" Corey asked first.

Liam shook his head. "None that I know of. Probably not. He’s an orphan. I assume they would have made him live with his family if he’d had one."

"Alright," Mason continued, "what about the places he’s lived before he came here? Any special one?"

"No," Liam denied. "He’s never been anywhere for longer than a school year. And the only place where he’s been twice is Beacon Hills."

"Has he ever mentioned anybody who means something to him. A person? A friend? Do you know any name at all?" came Corey’s next question.

_Tara_, Liam thought, but didn’t dare say it, because somehow he felt like he’d be betraying Theo by speaking her name. "Only one," he finally admitted, "but that won’t get us anywhere. She died in Beacon Hills."

"So, basically," Mason concluded, "every connection that Theo has to anything starts and ends in Beacon Hills."

Liam nodded. _And yet he isn’t here_, he thought. It was so frustrating that once again, Liam felt like punching something. He tried to remember all the things that Theo had told him about himself. He thought back to all the little pieces of truth he’d gotten to see over the months they’d spent together. The last thing had been the death of Theo’s big sister who he’d loved very much. But there was more, so much more. The colors disappearing after she’d been gone. The accident in which his parents had lost their lives. The marks he’d used to show before. Green. A lot of green and yellow. The story of how he’d never been good at school. His smile when he’d gotten a good grade in his creative writing class. Theo’s love for his truck. The urgent need to be in control over the steering wheel. The story of how Stiles of all people had gotten him to get into lacrosse. The tattoos, one of them strangely similar to a tattoo of another person.

If Theo was a puzzle, it was at that moment that Liam realized he’d already seen more of the pieces than he’d thought, and even if they didn’t fit together yet, they lay there right in front of his eyes, and he could see the beauty of them without needing the whole picture.
"Scott and Stiles," Liam suddenly said as he sat up abruptly.

Both Mason and Corey looked at him in confusion.

"They were best friends when they were kids," Liam elaborated. "Scott, Stiles and Theo. They basically grew up together." He was already dialling Scott´s number.

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Theo knew he had dreamt something when he woke up, his hair damp beneath the hood he´d pulled down over his forehead. He felt restless, a highly unpleasant prickle crawling over his blank skin. Something was wrong, and it was written in the sky that he could see through the window of his truck. He closed his eyes again, trying to get back into his subconscious mind, desperately grasping for the remaining bits of his disturbing dream, not sure what it had been about, or who, but absolutely certain that it was telling him he was being an idiot. Again.

Instinctively, Theo reached for his phone after he´d given up, his thumb hovering over the home button before he stopped and stilled, considering whether he should really turn the screen on. What if his text had been answered? What would it say? And what would it mean? He laid the device down onto the seat, carefully as if it was a bomb about to explode. As long as he didn´t check his messages, Schrödinger´s cat was both dead and alive in his inbox, and he didn´t know which of the two options he was truly praying for, but he dreaded finding out. There would be no going back from there.

Theo had to clear his mind. He had to figure out his next step, and he knew that choice shouldn´t depend on anybody else than him. He stepped outside and stretched his rigid limbs, took a few deep breaths that only seemed to suffocate him. "What the hell am I doing here?" he asked nobody as he looked around an almost empty parking lot, seeing a lot of blue and grey, a little bit of green that didn´t look like it was supposed to be that green. He emptied his bladder and then got back behind the steering wheel, his stomach growling loudly in complaint. Against all odds, love and fear were apparently not enough to sustain the body of a twenty-year-old male.

The next move was to find a diner and order every single dish on their menu, that much was for sure, but the question remained whether Theo was going to look for that diner on the way ahead to California or back to Boston. He looked into the mirror and brought both his hands to his neck to cover the ink there. He wasn´t going to be able to make an unbiased decision like that. He started the engine and drove to the end of the parking lot, still undecided when the truck stopped right before it would get on the road in either of two directions. Theo hit the brakes and fished out a pathetically looking sheet of paper from his pocket.

Even just reading Liam´s name almost brought tears to Theo´s eyes. Liam´s name in his own handwriting, reminding him that he was never going to undo the connection between them. He could run all he wanted, but he would never get far enough to turn back time to a point where he hadn´t joined the lacrosse team that Liam was the captain of. Or where Liam hadn´t crashed his
beloved truck and later apologized a thousand times. Or where magical things hadn´t happened when they´d played together. Or where he hadn´t lost all sanity one night and ended up on Liam´s doorstep. Or where they hadn´t actually been living together for two months. He would never be able to create a reality where Liam´s colors weren´t the most beautiful thing in the universe, second only to his incredible eyes. Or where he hadn´t had the most breathtaking first kiss anybody had ever had. Or where his last birthday hadn´t been the happiest day in his life. Or were he wasn´t utterly, hopelessly and for all eternity in love with Liam Dunbar.

You will find everything you want from this life. Theo had meant it as an encouragement, but he now realized that he wasn´t even sure what Liam wanted from life and if under those circumstances, the phrase was completely stupid and without meaning.

I have lost control over where the shreds of my heart lie shattered. A place came to Theo´s mind. A very specific picture of a small town in northern California with a lacrosse-field on the High-School-grounds and a little bridge across a river in the park, and a house that he had wished to call his home before he´d left it and realized that a home was what it had been all along.

Theo´s gaze swayed to the left, where the sky was clear and blue. Maybe, probably, if he hadn´t read further than that, he would have driven on and followed that direction, but his own words reminded him of all the things he was only trying to protect Liam from.

I need to know I can fall apart without causing collateral damage, Liam. It was still true. Nothing had changed about that, not in four weeks. And nothing ever would. With tears falling from his cheeks, Theo turned right, where the grey of the clouds was only appropriate for the mood. He was almost relieved that he´d caught himself soon enough to be able to go back to Boston in time for his next night shift. His resolution had been seriously tested for a while there, but he would stay away from Liam, all was good.

***

"Liam, is everything alright?" Scott sounded a little alarmed by Liam´s random call.

"Yes," Liam replied. "No. I mean yes, I´m okay. Well kind of. Or I hope I will be with your help."

"What can I do for you?" Scott asked curiously.

"Tell me about Theo," Liam begged.

"What do you mean?" Scott wanted to know, his voice hesitant and quiet.

"I need to know where he is," Liam simply stated. Ultimately, that was how you could sum up his previous four weeks with all its meltdowns. He needed to know where Theo was, and not knowing did horrible things to him.
"I don´t know where Theo is," Scott answered. "Honestly, if he´s not with you then I´m all out of
guesses."

"You used to know him, right?" Liam wouldn´t give up as easily as that. "You have to know
something, Scott, please. Where would he go if something made him run away? Where on earth
would he go?"

"I had no idea the last time that he did, and I have no idea now," Scott admitted. "I think that´s kind
of the point about it, you know. He doesn´t want to go anywhere, he wants to go nowhere."

Liam was getting angry. Why didn´t Scott at least try harder? "But I can´t fucking have him going
nowhere, for fuck´s sake!" he all but shouted into his phone, making Mason jump a little. "I
fucking need him," he added quietly.

"Liam, I hate to be the one saying this," Scott began, "but if Theo left then maybe that means you
should let him go. You can´t hold onto something that doesn´t want to stay. You´re not going to fix
anything by dragging him back to you. He made a choice, Liam. And as much as it may hurt you,
it was his, and only his choice to make."

Liam ended the call without another word. "Thanks for nothing," he mumbled as he let himself fall
back into the mattress that seemed harder than usual.

"You don´t... you don´t actually believe what he just said, do you?" Mason asked cautiously.

"No!" Liam responded, but maybe a little too vehemently to even fool himself. "Of course not." He
got up from the bed and paced through his room, doing his best to ignore the nervous glances
Mason and Corey shared over his spinning head. Even Corey was covered in more red than green
at that point, out of anger or sympathy with Liam, who knew.

"Fuck, what do I do now?" Liam finally asked helplessly. He didn´t even care about his friends
hearing his voice break anymore. "Why does he have to be so good at running away, that son of a
bitch?" His hands were balled into fists. He lifted them into the air as if to punch something, but
forced them down again, biting his chapped lips. "Why did he leave me?" His gaze connected with
Mason´s, but his best friend only shook his head. How was he ever supposed to understand
something that not even Mason had an explanation for? "Why did he fucking leave me?"

The silence between the three boys hurt Liam more than is broken ribs. It meant that there was
nothing to say, nothing to do. But Liam couldn´t simply wait for more weeks to pass without Theo,
could he? He couldn´t just sit back and wait for a return that would never happen. Or was that the
right thing to do? Had Scott maybe even had a point in saying that Theo had made his own choice
and Liam had to accept it?

"What if he´s never coming back?" Liam asked, staring at the hoodie Jenna had given Theo for his
birthday. The hoodie that Theo had never gotten to wear. He prayed that nobody would answer the question.

"He needs you too, Liam," Corey said and Liam winced.

"What if he doesn´t?" Liam shot back, his eyes suddenly wild. He was angry. He was incredibly mad. Mad at Theo for making him believe that what they´d had had meant something to him. And mad at himself for falling for it all. "What if he´s not..."

Liam couldn´t even finish the sentence.

"He is," Mason insisted and placed a hand on Liam´s trembling shoulder. "Probably so much that it scares him."

Liam gave in. He let his head fall against Mason´s shoulder and closed his eyes. He was tired. So, so tired. But he was never going to sleep the same way again that he had with Theo breathing next to him.

"He is," Corey suddenly interrupted their silent moment. "He fucking is!" His voice got high pitched when neither Liam nor Mason reacted right away. "Guys! This is not a drill! He is!"

Liam barely managed to open his eyes again before Corey stood right in front of him, holding out his phone for Liam to look at. There was a text from a number he didn´t recognize. Help me.

***

Jenna could feel her body growing more heavy with every second that she spent driving through nowhere. Her feet were begging her to stop hitting the gas relentlessly and take a break, but she had a long way ahead of her, and a broken son waiting at home who she willed her eyes open for. She had been continuing to make the same mistake for a couple of weeks by then, but that was going to be over soon. The inner debate whether she was doing the right thing or not, whether she had a right to get involved hadn´t exactly been decided, but her mind kept going back to Liam sitting in the middle of white sheets, her baby, her everything, covered in cuts and bruises and stitches, his breathing heavy from a punctured lung, the circles beneath his eyes dark, tears running down his face, his voice so awfully broken.

I just wish I was a person that people would actually stick around for. That had been it. It had been hard enough to watch Liam fall apart since Theo had been gone, but nothing in the world had ever broken her heart as badly as that sentence. She couldn´t imagine any worse thing in the world than for her son to think of himself like that. She simply couldn´t. And so she´d made a choice that she still feared was stupid, but she was only human, and she was a mother, and nothing could have stopped her.
Jenna hadn’t known where Theo had gone after leaving. At no time during the previous four weeks had she had any clue where he’d been. That much was true. But what she had known, was that there had in fact been a way to find out. And it had kept her up at night, not solely for the sake of Liam, but also because she’d imagined a boy who’d made his way into her heart being all alone, possibly even more lost than Liam, who had at least been surrounded by familiar faces.

A few times, usually while sitting on an uncomfortable plastic chair at the hospital, waiting for David to find out what had happened to Liam again, she had actually dialled Deputy Parrish’s number, but every time, she’d ended the call before he could answer, telling herself that it was none of her business. Theo was a grown-up, legally, and Liam had to get through it all the hard way, since there simply was no easy way. She’d told herself that every mother had to watch her kid get their heart broken for the first time at some point. And when she’d seen a whole family break down in the hospital hallway, a mother screaming and crying and collapsing down onto the ground after her kid had died during surgery, after that she’d thought that in the end, she was still lucky.

But it didn’t count anymore. What did it matter, that things could be worse when they were in fact terrifyingly awful already? When Liam was close to giving up on himself? No, Jenna knew she’d had enough. Tired or not, she was on her way north-east, scared of what she might find, but too scared of what might happen if nothing changed soon. As soon as humanly possible with the long way she had to go. Sleep was not an option.

***

"I don’t get it," Liam mumbled, "what am I looking at?"

"A text from Theo," Corey explained.

"How do you even know that?" Mason asked his boyfriend incredulously.

"Just trust me okay," Corey insisted, both the tone in his voice and the look in his eyes suggesting that he was pretty damn serious about it. "It’s Theo."

Liam tried to let the information sink in before considering his options, but his racing heartbeat wouldn’t let him. His hands were shaking as he reached out for the phone beneath his nose, his eyes wide. The text he was reading over and over again consisted only of two words, but those two words were the first and only sign of Theo’s existence in a painful eternity of four long weeks. Liam didn’t dare to even blink, afraid that if he closed his eyes for just so much as a millisecond, the message could be gone.

He took a deep breath in and dialled the number it had been sent from. He took a deep breath out as the connection was being made. And then he held his breath until he was close to choking, but nobody picked up.

Liam looked at Corey as he slowly put the phone down. "Are you fucking kidding me?" he
accused, his cheeks burning hot, just the way he was used to it. "Do you think this is funny?"

"What?" Corey threw him an absolutely shocked look. "Liam, I’m telling you, that text came from Theo. I know it."

"Fucking how?" Liam all but shouted, his fingers curling into fists once again, blunt nails digging into his palms until they broke the upper layer of skin there, and then some more. "There’s not even a name anywhere here." He wagged Corey’s phone around in front of his face, watching the other boy’s hands twitch in justified fear of Liam slamming in against the closest wall at any second. "There has been no sign of him for weeks. Four weeks, to be exact. And now you want to tell me he’s texting you something stupid like this?"

"Hey," Corey said calmly, his hands raised in surrender, "I’m just trying to help here. I’m not the one you’re angry at, remember? I’m here. I’m not the one who left."

"Corey," Mason winced, knowing his best friend good enough to understand that Corey had just used the exact wrong words.

"I fucking know who left me," Liam yelled, "everything reminds me of him all the fucking time! So there’s, like, zero need to rub it in, you asshole!"

"I wasn’t trying to!" Corey defended himself, but Liam wasn’t even listening anymore. He just moved around with raged energy, turning left and then right, stopping Mason from getting closer with a harsh gesture of his hand in the cast, only half feeling the pain in his wrist that he might have broken again by not keeping his hands under control.

"Don’t you dare follow me," Liam growled as he stormed out of his room, the walls being too much of a limit to the anger building up inside him. He needed out.

"Leave him," Liam heard Mason say as he stomped down the stairs with deliberate noise. "He doesn’t mean it."

"I do fucking mean it," he shouted back before he slammed the front door shut behind him.

Liam took the same route to the park as usual, but running was a very bad choice, or a good one, depending on how much of a death-wish he truly had. He was barely able to suck air into his lungs, and there was not an inch of his body that didn’t hurt terribly, but Liam clung to the pain as if it was the only thing saving him from losing his mind. The doctor in David would have had a heart attack if he’d seen him, but Liam was so far beyond caring, he simply ran faster. With how careless he was, staying in the middle of the road for most of the time, there was a slight chance for him to be hit by a car again, but Liam figured that that would at least bear the possibility to put him out of his misery for good.
Not for one second did he think about Corey´s phone that was still in his hand.

***

Jenna jumped a little when her phone suddenly rang. It wasn´t the ringtone she´d set for Parrish, and it was neither David nor Liam, and she´d almost forgotten that there were other people existing. She thought about simply ignoring it, telling herself that she had no time for anything not Theo-related, but then she realized that there was still a tiny chance that Theo was on the other end of the call, so she picked up as her car came to a halt at the side of the road. "It´s Jenna," she answered, praying that she would hear anything other than her own pulse.

"He´s here," the voice on the other end said breathlessly, and her heart sunk, because the voice was female, but then she understood the words that it had used.

"Theo?" she half-asked.

"Yes," came the response that made Jenna release the breath that she´d been holding without realizing it. Someone had gotten a hold on the boy.

"Where?" Jenna wanted to know. It could still be a prank.

"Boston," the voice replied and Jenna sighed in relief. Boston was where Parrish had sent her. "This is Lydia Martin calling. I saw Theo here in Boston this morning. I told him about Liam´s accident. He seemed... distressed, to say the least. He took off quite quickly. He might be headed to California now."

"Oh God," Jenna breathed into the speaker. Theo getting back on his way home was everything she´d wished for during the past weeks, but not like that, not while freaking out about Liam being in the hospital. God knows what could happen to him if he wasn´t driving carefully.

"Jordan Parrish called me after he sent you on your way up here," Lydia continued to explain. "Just thought I´d let you know that he looked pretty okay. Not that I know what´s going on with him right now."

"I´m glad you called me, Lydia, thanks," Jenna said sincerely. She was worried for Theo, sure, but at least it sounded like she didn´t have to expect to find him in a similar state as Liam, and that was something.

"If he´s still close, I´ll try to go and talk to him as soon as Parrish can narrow down the area of his current whereabouts. Is that alright with you?" Lydia proposed.

"That would be amazing, sweetheart, thank you so much." Jenna would have thanked the heavens
for the angel that that girl was if she´d had the time.

***

Liam was sitting on top of the bridge at Beacon Hills´only park. It had taken him a while to calm down enough to let his body rest, and only then had he noticed the agonizing pain washing over him. He couldn´t even tell where exactly the worst of it came from. His entire body was a broken mess, but that only seemed fitting. Corey´s phone lay beside him on the wooden balk, almost forgotten. Liam was staring into the water beneath his dangling feet.

The soft waves didn´t look very dangerous, and from what Liam knew, the water wasn´t very deep, but he couldn´t help but notice how dark it was, how dirty. After a couple of minutes without blinking, he almost imagined hearing a girl´s voice scream for help. The whole scenery looked so much prettier where it was inked onto Theo´s chest. The reality of it was simply cruel.

"If you were still here, Tara," Liam began talking to the water, "would he be as well?"

Of course, he didn´t get an answer, which only made him think harder about it. The truth was, it was very likely. With his sister still alive, Theo would probably, most certainly have stayed in Beacon Hills forever. Liam simply knew that that was the way he´d felt about her. The way he still did. And maybe, very likely, Theo and Liam would have ended up on the same lacrosse team eventually. Yes, their paths would have crossed. But another truth was, the person Liam would have gotten to meet wouldn´t have been the same Theo he knew. And nothing would have gone the same way. And inspite of being torn into pieces, Liam wasn´t sure he would have traded any of the story that they´d shared.

Suddenly, the phone next to him started buzzing. Liam´s heart skipped a beat and then started racing so violently that it almost hurt inside his chest. The strange number. Liam recognized it right away, the last four digits being burned into his memory even though he hadn´t had any intention of letting that happen. He picked up the device and held it in his hand, staring at the screen until the number blurred in front of his eyes. But even then, the vibrating continued. So he took the call and pressed the phone against his ear. Liam was so paralyzed, he wasn´t even shaking anymore.

He wanted to say something. He really did. He had so many things to say, and he was sick of letting his fists do the talking that wasn´t even directed to any of the guys he´d beaten up over the previous weeks. But Liam barely managed to breathe, his tormented lung turning every inhale into a battle, and every exhale into a whistling cry of pain.

The line was quiet, but not dead. Even over his own struggle, Liam could hear breathing at the other end of the connection. It was way calmer than his, quieter, steadier, which was so typical. Theo´s name was burning on his tongue. Liam wanted to say it. He wanted to ask. Where are you? If he´d only had one question, that would have been it.

In the end, Liam was too scared. Scared of Theo to end the call and the breathing to disappear. At
this point, he was almost sure he would stop breathing, too. Or worse, what if it wasn´t Theo
calling after all? A tear escaped his eye.

For a moment, Liam would later find out that it had been around five minutes, but time didn´t truly
exist in that moment, two boys in two completely different places of the country were listening to
each other´s breathing. For a moment, that was enough, and leaving Liam craving at the same time,
and also overwhelming him completely.

*I miss you.*

*Why did you leave me?*

*Are you ever coming back to me?*

*Don´t you know that I love you?*

*Please.*

No words were spoken. Liam pressed his eyes shut so that the real world around him wouldn´t get
a chance to come in between them. It had done enough damage already. Or had that been him?
Liam was getting completely lost in Theo. It almost reminded him of them lying in bed next to
each other at night. He could have punched himself in the face for all the time he´d had the boy
right beside him, in arm´s reach, and hadn´t held him tight enough, close enough.

All of a sudden, there was a noise sounding from Theo´s end of the line that could have been a
horn. Liam didn´t know why, but his pulse quickened even more, maybe because the noise made
Theo more real, as if it proved that Theo wasn´t just calling, he was calling from *somewhere*, and if
there was a *somewhere*, then Theo could be found.

Theo held his breath. Liam couldn´t contain a whimper, even if it was barely audible. Except Theo
had heard it anyway, and just like that, he ended the call.

"No!" Liam shouted at the phone in his hand, staring at the screen that still showed the number. He
dialled it again, but nothing. "No!" His scream was high pitched and panicked, almost not Liam
anymore. He had a feeling like he was waking up from a dream, trying to hold onto the memory of
what had happened, trying to hold onto what it had felt like, but being pulled into consciousness by
an invisible force, losing every sense of the dream, never being able to go back to it. Except it was
worse when it wasn´t about a dream, but Theo.

Again, Liam had been left by him.

***
Theo was freaking the fuck out.

He’d made it halfway back to Boston before, for some absolutely inexplicable reason, he’d started stopping every five minutes. He’d read his letter over and over again, reminding himself why he’d chosen to be lost in nowhere rather than being the darkness in Liam’s life. He’d looked at his neck in the mirror. He’d cried. He’d screamed. And then he’d gotten his phone from the backseat. And he’d known exactly what kind of crucial mistake he was making as his fingers were pressing the call button on Corey’s number, the number that had tried to reach him after his help-me-text. But what he couldn’t possibly have expected, was for Liam to be the one to pick up.

Even though he hadn’t said anything, not a word in over five minutes, Theo hadn’t had a single doubt that it had been him. At the same time, one part of Theo’s broken heart had been healing, the connection to Liam being enough to make everything so much better, but another part had been breaking even more, the breaths he’d counted coming from the other end of the line sounding bad, very, very bad. Lydia hadn’t made the impression that Liam was gravely injured after his accident, but the images in Theo’s head after hearing him suggested otherwise. It was terrifying enough to make him stop before driving back into the city.

Theo wasn’t sure if Liam’s state - not that he really knew much about it - was supposed to change his resolutions. He had no clue if the restlessness that was tormenting him from the inside meant that he wanted to get back on the way to Beacon Hills. But he knew he couldn’t stay in Boston any longer. It was impossible.

He put his phone on silent and turned it around screen down when Corey’s number called him back. _Let me think, Liam._

What on earth was he supposed to do?

***

In his weakest moment, Liam sent a text from a phone that was not his own to a phone that he technically didn’t know who it belonged to.

_I once had an annoying temporary roommate. I regret nothing more than the temporary._

***

Theo’s meltdown had reached the point where he questioned every single one of his desastrous life choices. "I’m such an idiot," he cursed himself, sitting on the hood of his truck at a gas station in Massachusetts.

"Yeah, but do you intend to stop being an idiot anytime soon?" A calm voice suddenly interrupted
his pining. "I’m aware that I´m repeating myself," Lydia added as she came closer and sat down beside him. "But I genuinely feel like you need another push."

"I guess I do," Theo admitted. "The remaining question is, in which direction?"

"Liam," Lydia answered without hesitation. Just his name. Theo wondered if it really was that easy.

"I´m not even going to ask what you´re doing here," Theo remarked, "or why you seem to care about what I do about Liam." He definitely noticed the girl rolling her eyes at him.

"It´s not important anyway," she shrugged, "as long as you do the right thing."

"You know," he explained, "I actually thought the right thing was what I´ve been doing for the past four weeks."

"I get that," she nodded, the tone in her voice sincere, "but you were right, you were being an idiot. And that ends now." She jumped onto her feet with one swift, energetic motion.

Theo didn´t move. He wasn´t ready.

"My car or yours?" Lydia wanted to know.

"What?" Theo asked.

"Are we taking my car to Beacon Hills or yours?" she repeated slowly. "Jesus, this is going to be a long ride."

"Why on earth would you want to come with me?" The didn´t want to sound so accusing, he was just genuinely surprised.

"Just making sure Beacon Hills is where you actually go," Lydia shrugged, strawberry-blonde curls dancing around her shoulders.

"Oh, and by the way," Lydia added as theywere getting into Theo´s truck, "we´re meeting Jenna somewhere in the middle."

And at that point, Theo´s confusion was perfect. "What? Jenna?"

"Jenna," Lydia confirmed. "You know, small woman, mid-fourties, blue eyes, brown hair. Should
actually sound familiar to you."

"Fuck," Theo breathed. "Why?"

"Because she´s looking for you," Lydia said, as if that was completely normal information. But Theo´s brain was not capable of processing it. Not a chance. Still, his body managed to start the engine and get them on the road.

***

Five minutes after he´d sent the text, Liam was still waiting for a reply. Had he gone too far? Or was it not Theo´s phone after all? Or what if Theo simply didn´t agree to what he´d said?

Half an hour later, there was still nothing, and the cool air around him left goosebumps on Liam´s skin. Why would Theo do that to him? First call him, get all his hopes up, because no matter how much better Liam knew, he couldn´t help that to happen, and then leave him hanging? Why? What was so wrong with him that Theo apparently couldn´t stand more of him at a time? Why could they not simply stop that stupid game they were playing? Couldn´t Theo tell it wasn´t a game for him? Couldn´t they just... meet in the middle somehow?

***

Take a seat

Right over there, sat on the stairs

Stay or leave

The cabinets are bare, and I'm unaware

Of just how we got into this mess, got so aggressive

I know we meant all good intentions

So pull me closer

Why don't you pull me close?
Why don’t you come on over?

I can’t just let you go

Oh baby, why don’t you just meet me in the middle?

I’m losing my mind just a little

***

When Liam heard muffled noises behind him he tensed up and prayed for whoever had dared to step foot in the park that he was currently losing himself in to just go away and leave him alone, but steps came closer and a voice was talking in blurry words that only became clear when Liam heard his name and therefor, listened.

"Hey, Liam, didn’t you hear me?"

Liam simply shrugged, grateful that the person only saw him from behind. His face was probably not the prettiest thing to look at at the moment, and was not just because of his injuries.

"Hey man, are you alright?"

A hand made contact with his shoulder, the touch so warm even through the fabric of his shirt that he hissed at the contrast to his low body temperature. Liam still didn’t look up, didn’t answer, just stared ahead and into the water until a second pair of muddy shoes appeared in his vision next to his own.

"Here, take my jacket."

"Fuck off," Liam growled, but when the warm piece of clothing was laid over his shoulders carefully, the smell of it familiar to him, but usually not so close to his own skin, he didn’t fight it. He was too exhausted to fight anymore. He’d tried that for weeks, and yet Theo was still gone, and Liam was still not safe from the boy breaking his heart even from a distance. For a moment, everything was silent, except for Liam’s violent breathing.

"Such a small town, and yet so many assholes to fall in love with," Nolan sighed and let their shoulders brush ever so lightly.

"Thanks," Liam whispered. "You might just be the only person who hasn’t told me how shitty I look."
"Yeah," Nolan replied casually, "I figured you knew that. Also, I’d rather tell you that I’m sorry."

Surprisedly, Liam looked up into a serious face with green eyes wide open. "What on earth would you be sorry for?" he asked.

"My asshole," Nolan simply answered.

Liam nodded. Because he understood, not because he agreed.

"He had no right to say that stuff, and he only did because he knew it would set you off, which actually makes it even worse if you ask me, but anyway. I’m sorry. I’m sorry it landed you in the hospital," Nolan said.


"I’ve been in and out of the hospital six times since...-" Liam paused and gestured vaguely- "...you know."

"Theo," Nolan finished the sentence.

"Yeah," Liam nodded. "I don’t even know the name of every dude I got in a fight with. Honestly, I would have ended up back at the ER with Brett’s help or without it."

"No offense, Liam," Nolan began, and Liam had a feeling he was going to be at least a little offended, "but how can you say that just like that. Don’t you think you’ve had enough of... well, whatever it is you think you’re doing to get over him?"

Liam shrugged. The thing was, he was so utterly not over Theo that it hurt, so obviously he hadn’t had enough.

Nolan looked at him incredulously before he kept talking. "Look at you, Liam." And there it was. Nolan might not have said you look shitty right away, but look at you, Liam was not much better in the end. But he wasn’t finished.

"Frankly, you sound like Darth Vader on his deathbed. I don’t know if this is rude, and it probably is, and apart from that, it’s totally not my place to say, but Liam, Jesus fucking Christ, how far do you think you can take this shit without getting yourself killed?"

"Are you finished?" Liam snapped when Nolan paused to take a breath. "Because it’s not like I don’t know all that stuff! Do you think I chose this look because I thought it suited me? What the hell
do I know what I´m doing? But what does it matter anymore, huh? What the fuck does it matter when he´s..."

Liam´s voice broke. He turned his head away in a ridiculous attempt to keep up appearances towards Nolan.

"I might have ended things with Brett," Nolan breathed into the cool evening air a few seconds later, his words almost not audible over Liam´s battle to provide his lungs with air.

"No," Liam replied sadly, shaking his head in spite of it already hurting. There was absolutely no logical explanation for why he cared. Liam was genuinely surprised that there seemed to be a part of him that could break over something else than his own misery. "Nolan," he said, his voice whiny. "Why?"

Liam didn´t dare take an actual glance, but he could hear the tears in Nolan´s eyes when the other boy spoke either way. "Maybe I don´t want to be with someone who likes to hurt other people for his own amusement."

"What? What did he do to who?" Liam wanted to know. Why did Nolan have to look like sweet little child while crying? Why did he have to wake the protector in Liam?

"You, Liam," Nolan explained, "I´m talking about him provoking you. I swear, I can never unhear that crack when his fist met your jaw. That sound is fucking haunting me."

Liam was utterly shocked. As if destroying himself wasn´t enough. As if worrying his mother sick wasn´t the worst thing he´d ever done. Obviously, there was more. Things he´d never even wasted so much as one thought on.

"My jaw is fine, really," was the first thing he could come up with. "And we both know that Brett doesn´t just walk around and hurt people as a hobby. It´s just me. And we´ve had a long history of mutually hating and beating each other up. That doesn´t count, Nolan."

"To me it does," Nolan replied stubbornly, leaving Liam speechless. He would never have touched Brett if he´d known what kind of chaos it would set loose.

It was getting dark quickly around them, but Liam could still see the dark shadows of grey creeping up everywhere that Nolan´s sweater gave way to his freckled skin. There was red behind his ears, and a little orange on his cheeks, but the colors seemed matte and dim. It truly fitted the conversation they were having. Liam had always considered his extreme show of colors one of his biggest shortcomings. To him, it had meant that he had no control over his emotions. But he was slowly realizing that the colors had never made anything any worse than it had already been. For weeks, he´d been without the marks, and everything had hurt a hundred times more than he´d known possible.
"Where is he now?" Liam asked.

"What? Who?"

"Brett, of course," he explained. "Where is he now?"

"At home, I guess," Nolan shrugged. "It should be board game night with his sister and their grandparents."

Liam looked at Nolan, then at Corey’s phone at his other side, and then back to his teammate with the half-dried tears on his cheeks.

"Do you have any idea what I’d give up just for the bare information of where Theo is right now?" he asked. It was a rhetorical question, the answer probably more than obvious considering the miserable state he was in.

"I guess," Nolan said quietly.

"Yeah," Liam nodded, "except take that guess and double it to get even remotely close. And now get fucking out of here." Talking emotions had never been Liam´s strong suit. "I think you have a board game night to attend."

"What?" Nolan interjected. "I think you misheard me."

"Nope," Liam brushed him off. "I´m simply fixing things for you. You can thank me later."

Nolan got up on his feet. Not without hesitation, but at least he did. Liam already thought he was gone when he heard his voice again.

"When are you going to fix things for yourself?"

Liam knew it was time to stop lying, mostly to himself. He picked up the phone and dialled the number again. "I´m trying," he said. "I´m trying."

***

"We should find somewhere to spend the night," Theo remarked with a look at the digital clock in his car that had just turned to ten p.m. Normally, he would have just stopped somewhere and gotten his pillow and blanket out, but he had Lydia with him, and it had nothing to do with her being a girl that Theo felt like sleeping in the truck was inappropriate, it was more because she was Lydia.
The redhead turned her head to look at him and Theo tried his hardest to focus on the road while being stared at.

"I think you´ve wasted enough time already," she finally replied. "You can sleep in the backseat while I drive and we take turns in a few hours."

Theo wanted to object. He wanted to tell her she couldn´t drive his truck. That he´d never allowed anybody to do that, not even Liam. He wanted to tell her that he could simply not sit in the backseat of the driving car without having a mental breakdown. He wanted to explain to her that taking turns was a stupid idea, or maybe not a stupid idea, but definitely not a realizable one either. He wanted to say no, wanted to say how he could give up a lot of things, but not control, never control, not over this. His hands began to tremble.

Instead of saying anything at all, Theo brought the truck to a halt and climbed out of the driver´s seat, rounded the vehicle and waited for Lydia to switch seats with him. The backseat was definitely not an option, but maybe it was time for a compromise. Theo couldn´t bring himself to put the backrest back, and he didn´t bother gathering his blanket from the trunk, but he pulled his hood up over his head and closed his eyes, forcing himself not to look when Lydia started driving. It was in no way fair to her, considering that she drove in a carefully smooth way, keeping the noises of the engine steady, making Theo feel the safest that he could have in his situation, but he still pictured them flying over the edge of a bridge a couple of times before his brain finally released him into sleep.

When he came to, Theo panicked instantly, every alarm in his brain being set off by the fact that he found himself in a moving vehicle when he was clearly not awake enough to be in charge of the steering wheel. His right hand grabbed for the door handle, a part of him ready to jump out of the truck if necessary, the left one dug into the seat next to his leg.

"It´s all good," Lydia assured him calmly, drawing Theo´s attention to herself instead of the trees moving by in sickening speed. "We´ve made it way farther than I would have expected," she informed him. Theo needed a second to gather himself. It was broad daylight.

"Sorry," he mumbled, "I shouldn´t have let you drive on your own this long." He fumbled for his phone that was in neither of his pockets. "What time is it?" Theo asked.

"Almost seven," Lydia answered, a soft smile on her lips that Theo didn´t know how to interpret correctly.

"Holy shit," he gasped, "I honestly didn´t think I´d sleep that long." In truth, Theo hadn´t thought he´d sleep at all. "I´m sorry. You should have woken me up though."

Lydia shook her head softly. "It´s alright," she said.
She could have said more, and they both knew it. Lydia was capable of looking right through the walls that Theo had dedicated his whole life to building around his inner self like nobody else, and she didn’t even have to try very hard. He almost expected her to somehow know his whole story, and he was aware of the possibility that Stiles had at least told her about Tara’s and his parents’ death and the following escape he’d made, but for once in his life, that didn’t make him more uncomfortable than he already was. How that was possible, Theo had not the slightest idea.

They stopped at a diner for breakfast before Theo drove ahead and Lydia snuggled up in his blanket in the passenger seat, her eyes already closed when she whispered her warning.

"If you turn around while I’m asleep I’ll murder you."

***

It took a while for the cold of the night to properly creep beneath Nolan’s jacket still hanging from Liam’s shoulders and cool his entire body down to the bones. He knew it was beyond suicidal to risk getting pneumonia in his current physical state, so Liam finally pulled himself together and swung his damp feet around, away from the calm waves flowing underneath the bridge and got up shakily, the first steps after what had happened on that bridge feeling like the first steps in a new life. He shoved Corey’s phone into the pocket of Nolan’s jacket and almost smiled. Well, he smiled, but he wouldn’t have admitted that.

He walked home cursing himself for running all the way to the park earlier, wheezing by the time he made it back home. David’s car was parked in the driveway, soft, dimly yellow light was still burning in the living room and Liam’s own. He entered the house as quietly as he could, leaving his muddy shoes at the front door. He peeked through the kitchen into the living room where he saw David sitting in the big armchair that Liam had never found comfortable, his head resting against a pillow, his eyes closed. At first, it seemed like the man had fallen asleep while reading, but the second look told Liam that the thing in his lap was not a regular book, it was the album full of pictures from Liam’s childhood.

Liam hadn’t taken a look at it in ages, but now he did, trying to keep his breathing as decent as possible as he took the album from David’s slack hands. He sat down on the far corner of the couch and started at the beginning, curious what people saw when they looked at Liam. He’d been a sweet kid, an adorable little fluffball with chubby cheeks and soft blonde hair curling around his little ears, his eyes round and blue and full of energy. It was hard to believe that that baby smiling into the camera without knowing what he was smiling for was really him. "What happened to you?” Liam whispered to the picture.

Just when he wanted to put the album away and go to bed, Liam stumbled across a photo of himself in his mother’s arms, both of them smiling widely, their cheeks pressed together. He’d never realized how similar their eyes looked. Suddenly, Liam wished she was there. **

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Jenna had just gotten herself a coffee from a gas station when her phone buzzed with a text from Lydia containing an address.

This should be in the middle of where we are now. See you in a few hours.

She put the device in her pocket and got back into her car, the reality of an existing address, the prospect of truly getting there after just a little more driving finally gave her hope that she wasn´t just completely crazy to be driving across half the country. She started the engine but then pulled out the phone again, going to the gallery where she had one single picture of both her boys together. Just one, taken at Theo´s birthday party, with several other guys surrounding them, but Liam and Theo were standing close together, looking at each other, Theo in surprise, Liam with pride.

Jenna had known from the second Theo had appeared on their doorstep for the first time that he hadn´t just been one of the lacrosse guys. She really had. But she hadn´t known until Liam had started planning his birthday.

She only remembered Susan from across the street complaining about her teenage son in love all day long, coming up with the absolutely groundbreaking statement that he’s just a kid, he doesn’t even know what love is. Liam was just a kid too, but he knew. He knew more about it than she would have wished for him to find out so early in his life.

***

Liam climbed up the stairs to his bedroom only to find Mason and Corey asleep on his bed, feet hanging over the edge because they were lying on the mattress crosswise, faint snoring filling the room. He laid Corey´s phone down next to him, but not before checking that there was still no reply from Theo. He considered his already occupied bed for a while, not that he would have minded simply squeezing himself between his passed out friends, or throwing them out, if necessary. But in the end, Liam sat down at his desk instead and opened his laptop. He printed out every picture he had of Theo.

***

Theo drove while Lydia slept for a while, and then Lydia offered to drive again but Theo wouldn´t let her, not when he wasn´t in absolute desperate need for sleep to stay alive. A couple of hours into the day and the atmosphere became oddly quiet and tense around them. Even if an oddly quiet and tense atmosphere was basically the natural habitat of Theo Raeken, he started feeling more and more uncomfortable, and he was almost ready to ask what was wrong when Lydia spoke up first.

"We´re stopping here," she decided and pointed to a little gas station with a pub attached. It looked old and shabby, and Theo would have assumed it was abandoned if she hadn´t insisted on stopping there.

He remembered what Lydia had said earlier and his hands started trembling as he climbed out of
his truck. They’d come a long way, and Theo had no idea where exactly they were, but he guessed in the middle. He turned his gaze to Lydia slowly, his body paralyzed as the suspicion grew stronger, his brain telling him that there was no other reason for a halt at that godforsaken place. The redhead offered a faint but encouraging nod.

"She’s here," Theo whispered, frozen. He didn’t see another car at their side of the building, and he didn’t hear any voices from inside the little shop, but there was something in the air that smelled like home to him, so she must have been there.

And she was, as the arms suddenly wrapped around his shoulders proved. She’d come out of nowhere, hauling herself at him like she was scared he wasn’t real, almost like he was scared he was just dreaming. But when Theo closed his arms around her back, breathing in her scent, his eyes closed because a whole world existing around them was too much to take, he knew that only reality could be that painful and salvaging at the same time.

Theo was afraid of what she would say to him. She had every right to be mad. He’d promised her once that he wouldn’t come home late without checking in with her, and then he’d ran away to the other end of the country. But on top of everything he’d ever done wrong, on top of every part of him that was damaged and crooked and broken, he was the one responsible for Liam’s accident, and he didn’t expect her to forgive him that. He didn’t even dare to hope she would.

"My stupid, stupid boy," Jenna breathed into Theo’s neck without letting him go, her face damp against his skin, making it hard for him to understand what was happening.

"I’m sorry," was all that he could manage to croak out, feeling ridiculous, knowing that his I’m sorry would never do. Not after everything he hadn’t known to appreciate.

Jenna pulled back far enough so she could look into his face, holding it in her two hands, forcing his eyes up to hers. Theo readied himself to be told how stupid he’d been, how irresponsible, how ungrateful. How they’d given him a home that he’d run away from and how he now wasn’t welcome there anymore. How he was the one who’d landed Liam in the hospital. How he’d done everything wrong, again, but so much worse than ever before.

What came out of her mouth when she finally did speak was too much to keep his tears from falling.

"Come home, Theo," she begged, "we miss you so much."

Chapter End Notes

Fixing part 1 - done. Come scream at me for part 2.

The songs I used are Avicii - Waiting for Love and Zedd, Maren Morris & Grey - The
Liam had fallen asleep on his desk at some point during his nightly crafting session. A pair of scissors lay dangerously close to his face when he came to, scraps were covering the floor around him, the air smelled like sweat and glue. Liam had woken up to some seriously weird shit before, usually after a night out at the Sinema, occasionally even after movie night with his best friends, but never, absolutely never, had he opened his sleepy eyes to an album full of pictures of another person that he’d put together.

"What the hell...?" Mason asked, his voice drowsy and hoarse, Corey snuggled up against his side and still fast asleep.

"Yeah, you’re right," Liam answered with a critical look at his creation, "I should go back to getting beaten up as a coping mechanism."

"Definitely not," Mason shook his head so vehemently that Corey moaned a complaint about being disturbed.

"No," Liam said seriously. "That shit is over now."
"Wow," Mason responded, his eyebrows raised in impressed surprise, "not that I´m complaining, but what came over you all of a sudden?"

"I might have realized that other assholes have boyfriends, too," Liam explained, thinking about Nolan´s watery eyes when he´d said that he might have had ended things with Brett. "Also, I might actually die the next time somebody so much as touches me."

Mason laughed. "Glad you´ve noticed," he said.

"Yeah well," Liam shrugged, "one doesn´t simply ignore being told they sound like Darth Vader on his deathbed."

"Shit man," Mason laughed out loud, "whoever that was, they were not wrong."

"Yeah," Liam nodded. "They were not wrong about a lot of things."

The laughter faded quickly and the atmosphere between the two best friends grew serious.

"Liam, are we good?" Mason asked, holding Corey tight by the shoulder as if to protect him.

"Yeah, we´re good," Liam nodded, and then, looking at Corey, he added, "we´re all good."

"Are you going to be alright about Theo?" came Mason´s next question, a dark and scared expression of concern lingering in his eyes. For the sake of Mason´s peace of mind, Liam wanted to lie, but he didn´t. They were best friends after all, through good times and bad.

"Not for a while, no," he answered truthfully, "but I´m starting to think that that´s the point of it all. What would it have meant if I could just move on and get over him?"

"Yeah, you probably got a point there," Mason nodded. Liam was glad, because sometimes a friend to understand you was more important than a friend trying to fix you.

"I´m sorry for all the shit I´ve been pulling," Liam apologized sincerely, getting up and gathering two controllers and Mason´s favorite video game. Battle sounds filled the air as they started pressing buttons aggressively, Corey´s sweet dreams uninterrupted.

"It´s fine as long as you´re not keeping it up," Mason brushed it off, "even though you should probably cook your Mom dinner or something. That woman deserves all the awards in the world for putting up with you."
"Dude," Liam answered, "if I cooked my mother dinner every time I do something stupid, I’d be a five-star chef in Paris by now."

"True," Mason agreed without looking up from the tv screen.

Nobody heard Corey’s phone buzzing, not Corey, who didn´t even wake up from the noise of the video game, and not Liam or Mason, who were too occupied with talking like they always had again.

***

"Did Lydia call you?" Theo wanted to know, his gaze fixated on the blue eyes that looked so much like Liam´s that it physically pained him. Still, he couldn´t look away.

"She did," Jenna answered, "but I was already on my way to Boston by then."

"What?" Theo asked, now utterly confused. "You couldn´t have known I was in Boston." He traced back his steps in his mind, going over every detai of his escape, trying to figure out where he´d gone wrong, what had given him away, what tiny little thing could have possibly betrayed him.

"Remember when you and Liam fought after his dick day and you didn´t come home?" Jenna began to explain. Theo nodded slowly, still not following her thought.

"I did something stupid," she continued, "three times, to be exact."

Theo was listening attentively, intrigued, but completely convinced that whatever the woman had done, was worlds less stupid than any of his latest life choices.

"The first time was years ago, many years, when Liam started struggling with his IED real bad. He used to disappear to god knows where, and I was worried sick. So I planted tracker in every one of his jackets. Sheriff Stilinski helped me. I think he used the same stuff on Stiles. So whenever Liam was nowhere to be found, I just had to call the sheriff´s department to find out where he was."

Theo swallowed. Was Jenna saying that she had...?

"I shouldn´t have done that. I learned my lesson the hard way when Liam found out and from then on left his jacket behind every time he ran off. Also, he gave me the silent treatment for an impressively long time for a kid. He´s always been stubborn enough for a whole lacrosse team of boys, I’m telling you."
Theo didn´t want to, but he had to smile. He imagined little Liam stomping his foot and throwing his jacket on the ground, his lips contorted into an adorable pout, his eyes dark with anger.

"The second mistake I made was a couple of weeks back, when I was worried about you."

She looked at Theo with raised eyebrows. He remembered his surprise when he´d come home and been hugged by her, the relief of Jenna´s face taking him completely by surprise, the motherly concern being a totally foreign concept to him.

"So I hid one of those trackers in your truck," she admitted.

Theo couldn´t stop himself from gasping when his suspicion was being confirmed.

"I know," she said, "I´m sorry. I shouldn´t have done that either. But I was scared for you. And frankly, I wasn´t convinced when you promised me you wouldn´t stay away without checking in again."

Theo could hardly blame her. After all, he´d spent the last four weeks proving her point. He nodded, telling her that even if he didn´t approve, at least he understood her to a certain point.

"The biggest mistake though-" Jenna inhaled deeply- "is the one I´ve been making nonstop for four damn weeks."

"What do you mean?" he wanted to know. He hadn´t been aware that anybody other than him was capable of the same amount of regret, but one look into Jenna´s pained face told him otherwise.

"I could have called Deputy Parrish and found out where you were," she explained simply. "It would have been so easy. I could have gotten into my car and brought you back. I don´t know. I could have at least talked to you. I could have found you. I could have made sure you weren´t alone."

"I chose to be alone," Theo whispered. He didn´t want to defend himself, he just wanted her to know that she was not the one who let him down, that if anything, it was the exact opposite.

"Why?" she asked, her strangled voice barely above a whisper.

All of a sudden, Theo´s mind was as blank as his skin. All the reasons he´d kept telling himself all that time were gone. Jenna was standing right in front of him, and there was no way he would pretend like there was any better place in the world than at her home, the home that she´d tried her best to make his home, too.
"I...I thought...," he stuttered, averting his eyes in shame. No, he wasn´t going to give her a satisfying answer, because there was none.

"Yeah," Jenna nodded, "we all thought. Liam thought spending all his free time in the hospital was a good way to distract himself. Looks like we all should have known better than to think."

Liam. Theo had been too overwhelmed by Jenna chasing after him, tracking him down like she´d once done with her own son, her only child. As if Theo meant that much to her. Liam, Liam was so much bigger, so much more, so much more painful, so much more important that the thought of him simply hadn´t fit the moment. But now he was there, not physically, but almost, his scent lingering in the air that Theo was breathing in, the blue of his eyes glistening from Jenna´s face, his name ringing through Theo´s head like a never ending song. If Theo could have shown color, his color would have been Liam, and maybe that was the solution to the riddle beneath his skin. Maybe he didn´t show color because the color Liam didn´t exist.

Theo almost didn´t dare to ask, but not knowing would have killed him.

"How is Liam?"

"Oh lord," Jenna sighed, "I don´t even know how to answer that question."

Theo´s heart sank. "Oh my god," he breathed out. Had Lydia been wrong about him being out of the hospital? Was he not okay? Was his life in danger? How badly was he hurt after the accident? Jenna had sounded like he´d spent more than just a day or two in the hospital. But why? What was wrong with him? Theo was struggling for air when Jenna reached out for him with both hands to draw the attention of his spiraling mind back to her.

"Listen, Theo," she spoke empathetically, "he´s okay. He´s at home now. He´s going to recover. He just... hasn´t exactly been taking good care of himself since you´ve been gone."

"It´s my fault," Theo replied instantly. "I never wanted to do that to him. It´s all my fault."

"No," Jenna insisted, her tone firm and serious. "You´re not responsible for his stupidity. Stop that. I didn´t drive all the way out here into the middle of nowhere to blame you, Theo. I just want you back home."

Theo stared at her, tears burning in his eyes from the way she´d said the word home. As if it were normal. As if there was a home that was theirs and not just hers. In her eyes, there probably was, and for a moment, Theo allowed himself to dream of a reality where he saw it the same way.

"Get in the car," Jenna said like a mother, like objection was not an option, like she knew what she was doing and nobody would get in her way.
"My truck," Theo said dumbly as he was already climbing into the passenger seat.

"I´m sure Lydia will bring your truck to Beacon Hills safely," Jenna assured him, "and you´re getting it back as soon as you´ve proven to me that you´re not going to try and live in it anymore."

Theo couldn´t even find the words for a response. His brain wasn´t allowing him any other thought than of Liam.

"And for the record," Jenna remarked as she started the engine of her car and brought the vehicle onto the road that lead homewards, "I´m not draggin you back because Liam needs you, which he does. I´m doing this because you need him just as much."

***

Liam was close to okay again, truly, as he was spending the day playing video games with Mason and Corey, only taking a break when Dacid brought them food and drinks up to Liam´s room. He was aware that he was given an extra treatment, but he couldn´t bring himself to care. They were all just trying to be there for him, and Liam had spent enough time pushing them away.

Still, with every digital soldier that was killed, memories of Theo dying eternal deaths and never getting any better at any game at all came back, and even when Liam laughed lightly, on the inside, he felt like crying. He´d put on the hoodie that existed twice in his house, and he didn´t give a shit about David, Mason and Corey probably knowing exactly that it wasn´t his own that he was wearing.

"You guys really are the weirdest," Corey said suddenly, lying on top of the bed with his phone in his hands, the statement seemingly completely out of context.

"You´re one to talk," Mason replied without looking at him. It had almost gotten dark again.

"No," Corey shook his head, sitting up and leaning forward. "I mean Liam. And Theo."

"Theo?" Liam asked, his heart beating like crazy again. He just couldn´t helpt it. It still happened every time he so much as heard his name, or thought about him, or touched something that reminded him of the boy. He was so easily triggered, and he knew it would stay that way for a long time.

"Theo," Corey confirmed, holding his phone up into the air, "he´s sent a text. And it´s honestly the strangest shit ever."

Liam jumped up to his feet, the speed and swiftness of his movement close to impossible with how
injured he was, but many things were possible when every fiber of his being was focused on the love of his damn, miserable life. He lunged at Corey, who was already offering his phone to him anyway, smart enough not to get in the way, and then Liam grabbed the phone and pressed it to his chest while retreating to the bathroom, feeling a little bit like he was supposed to whisper "my precious" in a creepy way as he was looking in the mirror.

The world went silent as the brightness of the phone screen burned on Liam´s wide open eyes. Yes, the number he´d been holding onto definitely belonged to Theo. He read the message over and over again until he could have recited it from his memory, and then another hundred times, the urge to check again whether it was really there welling up inside him every time he averted his eyes for a split second.

A lot of things are temporary, Captain. A lot of feelings are not.

***

"What am I even going to say to him?" Theo wondered out loud, his hands shaking, his whole body throbbing with anxiety, with the fear of being rejected, the fear of getting to see what he´d done to Liam. He remembered quite well why it had always been his solution to simply run away, since that offered him the chance to close his eyes from the truth, so run off and create and new one, even if a life full of half started and never lived out realities wasn´t exactly very satisfying.

"Does it really matter?" Jenna asked back, and of course she had a point, of course it most likely didn´t, but he still had to say something. He still had to explain himself somehow.

Theo went through the possibilities in his head.

I´m sorry.

I made a mistake leaving you.

I´ve missed you all the time.

Everything he could have said sounded ridiculous, meaningless, simply stupid.

"I don´t think I can do it," he pressed out, his nails digging into the seat. He was struggling to suck air into his lungs. He could hear the sound of Jenna giving him a response, but the words were a blur to his ears, and the world passing by became one, too. Theo´s eyes were looking for focus, but everything was moving too fast. His fingers cramped, but it didn´t help him hold onto the world. He closed his eyes and tried to breathe, but he was already falling, his back pressed into the passenger seat, but nothing stopping his inner free fall.
It felt like an eternity before Jenna´s hands appeared as a warm connection to the world on his shoulders, and then another eternity before he could muster the strength to open his eyes and find his way back to her.

"We´re almost at home," she said, her thumps rubbing soothing circles in the skin on his neck as if he was a kid and the skin she was touching not covered in tattoos. A part of Theo wanted to cry in her arms, another part wanted to jump out of the driving car and hope for a quick death, but nothing in the world or beyond was capable of shutting off the part that wanted nothing else than Liam.

Liam, Liam, Liam.

***

Liam felt like the further existence of the universe like he knew it depended on his reply to Theo´s text and he was losing his damn mind over it. The longer he tried, the harder it became to think, but Liam wasn´t just going to respond anything. If there was even the slightest chance for Theo ever returning to him, he had to make his words count. He was seriously tempted to write I love you, the one simple truth that it all came down to in the end, but he deleted the words after he´d typed them in just as he did with a thousand other ones.

"Why can´t you just come back to me," he finally sighed, slumping his shoulders and putting the device down, giving up his attempt to form words that will only bee too small and weak anyhow. Liam let his head fall back against the cold tiles of the bathroom wall and felt alone, realizing that nothing of Theo was left in it, except Liam himself.

Drowning in desperation, Liam didn´t hear the careful knock on the door until it came for a second time, a little rougher, drawing his attention.

"Not now, Mase," he said, knowing that he had no right to be as annoyed as he was. "Go use the downstairs bathroom if you have to."

"Your Mom is back," Mason replied, "she wants you to come downstairs."

Liam was glad. He didn´t know how to face her, or how to apologize for what he´d been putting her through. Her tears from the night at the hospital would haunt him forever, and there was no way to undo the damage. Liam was almost eighteen years old, and not a baby any more, but he´d missed his Mom terribly during the almost two days that she´d been gone. So he told himself that he had to at least try to be better for her, got up and walked out of his room.

What Liam had expected was his Mom being home and smelling like concern and safety.

What he had expected was her making him feel relieved and guilty at the same time.
What he had expected was her wrapping him into a tight hug no matter how much he’d hurt and scared her.

What he hadn’t expected was to look over her shoulder and see Theo standing in the doorframe.

There was a long moment of staring, silent except for two sets of heartbeats going crazily wild.

Theo was paralyzed. Nothing he had imagined seeing Liam again would do to him came even remotely close to the reality of actually being back. He was drowning in a pair of darkly shimmering blue eyes, and he did absolutely nothing to fight it. He just kept still.

Liam on the other hand, didn’t.

"You fucking asshole," he growled as he stomped towards Theo, who waited for whatever Liam planned to do to him. He was going to let it happen. Nothing could ever hurt more than the painful anger in Liam’s face. Nothing ever.

A second later, Liam’s fist connected with Theo’s jaw, the impact almost knocking him off his feet. Yes, he deserved it. Liam’s rage was burning like a fire threatening to swallow Theo slowly.

The second blow let his nose crack dangerously, and Theo was seeing stars as he fell to the ground.

"I hate you."

The words were everything he managed to perceive before his lights went out. Theo wished he hadn’t come back. At least that way, he would have suffered in peace, and above all, he wouldn’t have had to hear Liam say it. He tried to focus on the pain in his skull, but everything went blank. Blank, he thought, how ironic, the universe cracking a joke at his expense even as he was losing consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

The song at the beginning is The Fray - You Found Me.

Part 2 of the fixing of broken hearts. Or are we not all satisfied with the ending...?
Forgivers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*I'll hit the lights and you lock the doors *

*Tell me all of the things that you couldn't before *

*Don't walk away, don't roll your eyes *

*They say love is pain, well darling, let's hurt tonight *

*If this love is pain, well darling, let's hurt, oh tonight *

***

Theo opened his eyes to the white sheets of the hospital bed he found himself in. The sharp scent of cleaning and infection solutions hit his nose, but he could tell that somewhere beneath it, there was another smell in the air, a softer one, warmer, way more pleasant. Theo tried to move his stiff body and sit up against the headboard, but his left shoulder wouldn’t move. He wiggled his fingers carefully to see how dead his arm was. They followed his brain’s order immediately and Theo realized that what was weighing his body down was in fact a head resting on his shoulder. A head attached to a body that was wrapped around his own, arm and leg swung over Theo beneath the blanket, holding him tight, radiating off a welcome heat. For weeks, Theo had been freezing on his own.

Liam’s eyes were closed, his features relaxed, his breathing ragged, but even. He was fast asleep, but the faint red glow shimmering in the back of his neck was alive, its outlines moving lazily beneath the pale skin. Theo let out a deep sigh that felt like it had been sitting in his throat ever since he’d left. He raised his hand cautiously to thread his fingers through Liam’s soft light-brown hair, the feeling of having the most precious thing in the world right in his hand soothing all his wounds at once, those on the inside just as much as those visible where his nose is thick and swollen. Theo almost laughed at the situation. Only Liam could knock you out with his fist and then plaster himself all over you until you regained consciousness. A feeling that he’d almost forgotten washed over him. He was happy.

Slowly, Theo leaned down to place a tender kiss on Liam’s forehead. He remembered doing the same thing the night they’d first kissed, as he remembered Liam looking up at him through incredibly long lashes, giving him a look that had made him feel so special. He remembered thinking that life couldn’t possibly get any better. Except with Liam, it always could, even if it had to get worse before. ”I love you," Theo whispered. Liam was still asleep, he couldn’t hear Theo’s confession, but it still felt good to have said it at last. He would repeat those three words eventually. Many times.
With touches light as feathers, Theo traced the features of Liam´s face, afraid of hurting him, the cuts and bruises tearing the remaining pieces of his heart apart. His own physical pain was gone, or maybe simply not important enough in the moment, with Liam in his arms consuming every part of him. Even then, the sleeping boy looked as beautiful as ever.

Liam blinked the sleep away as he came to, tightening his hold on Theo before he realized where he was.

"Morning, Sunshine," Theo smiled. There were a thousand things to be worried and scared about, but he couldn´t remember a single one of them when Liam´s eyes opened and looked at him. It simply took his breath away, and the last remaining bits of his sanity.

"Sorry for your face," Liam mumbled drowsily, rubbing his cheek against Theo´s shirt.

"It´s fine," Theo shrugged lightly, "you´ve always been the pretty one out of the two of us anyway. Also, I deserve it."

Liam looked at Theo, considering him, and then he mustered the courage to ask a question that had burning on his mind for a few hours.

"Did you get a new tattoo?" He pointed to the side of Theo´s neck, where the fresh ink was a little darker than the other images around it.

"Yeah," Theo nodded and craned his head for Liam to get a better look. It looked like a clamp was pierced through the soft skin, and hanging from it, a dark red jersey with the number nine on its back.

Liam raised his fingers to touch it while he marveled. "That looks fucking awesome."

"What can I say," Theo replied, "you´re under my skin, Captain."

"Did you know that in French, they don´t say I miss you, they say tu me manques, which means you are missing from me. That´s how those last weeks felt to me, Theo," Liam whispered, "you were missing from me every second of every day."

"I didn´t know that," Theo answered, stroking up and down Liam´s back that suddenly felt warm again along his spine, "I only knew that they say both in German. Du fehlst mir. You are missing from me, and that makes me miss you. Ich vermisste dich."

"Wow, T," Liam gasped, "I never realized you pay that much attention in class."

They both laughed, glad that not everything they had to say to each other right then was dead serious.

"Well, you might have made me a better man," Theo joked, "or at least a slightly less bad one."

"I have nothing against your bad side, Theo," Liam smirked before he turned more serious, "as long as I get to keep it. Like, here in Beacon Hills. Preferably in my bed."

"I shouldn´t have left," Theo admitted quietly, averting his eyes in shame. It was impossible to explain his reasons now that he was back and endlessly relieved about it.

"You shouldn´t have," Liam agreed, but he didn´t look angry.

"It´s all my fault," Theo pressed out, his gaze swaying over the countless injuries on Liam´s body and the hard cast around his wrist.

"No," Liam shook his head vehemently enough to surprise Theo. "You were stupid, okay? And I was just as stupid, maybe even more. But we can always stop being stupid. We can stop right here right now and forgive each other."

"I´d forgive you anything, Liam," Theo replied, "but I won´t forgive myself for making you end up here. Your Mom told me about-"

He was cut off by a firm kiss on his lips.

"No," Liam simply said. "Just no. Shut up or I´ll make you."

Liam´s lips were chapped and the sensitive skin broken, but they tasted sweeter than he remembered. He gave in. He wouldn´t have denied Liam anything. Not even when the thing that he wanted was Theo, and Theo couldn´t understand that want at all. Not even then.

"Alright, make me," he dared him.

It didn´t matter that the bed offered way too little space, and that it smelled unfamiliar, and that it wasn´t their own. It didn´t matter that they were still being in a hospital, and using the bed to make out was probably highly inappropriate. It didn´t matter how much they´d suffered apart from each other and why. It only mattered that they were together, and both of them had long stopped hurting. All they could feel was an urgent craving.

They kissed like it was the last chance they had before the world was ending, except after the first
kiss, another one followed, and another one, and then an endless amount of kisses, deep and passionate and loving, accompanied by hands gripping hair and clothes and skin, muffled noises and moans filling the air, warmth spreading beneath the blanket before it turned into heat and then full on fire.

Their tongues diving into each other’s mouth again and again, Theo was kneading the warm flesh beneath Liam’s clothes, needing perceptible confirmation that the boy was real, and Liam’s fingernails were scraping over the goosebumps covering Theo’s bemuscled chest. Every clock in Beacon Hills stopped ticking as they licked each other’s lips and nibbled along each other’s neck, as they were panting and feeling and wanting and needing, the first smaller fireworks exploding where their boners were pressing against each other’s thigh.

Finally, they were together, and it was time to be together for real, in every way. They both knew it, and they both wanted it, and there was nothing stopping them any more.

"Touch me," Liam begged, although Theo was touching him pretty damn much, considering that he only had two hands.

"Are you sure I’m not hurting you?" Theo asked, turning them around carefully for Liam to lie on his back.

"Yeah," Liam nodded and smiled. "I only have a punctured lung, nothing to worry about. Well, nothing that’s going to keep me from getting the dick I deserve."

Theo laughed. "You’re crazy," he said, meaning it in the best way possible.

"Maybe a little," Liam shrugged, "but more importantly, I’m incredibly horny right now."

"Well, I might be a complete trainwreck." Theo replied, "but I can certainly help you with that."

He leaned in to continue their open-mouthed kiss, only to feel Liam moan against his lips and tongue as he cupped his erection with the slightly trembling palm of his hand. He never would have left if he’d known Liam would feel like that, he thought.

Liam shivered and writhed beneath Theo’s delicate touch on his dick, although his pants and underwear were still preventing skin-on-skin contact. He had to close his eyes and lie his head back onto the pillow, letting Theo take control as he tried his best to keep breathing, Theo’s lips on his neck that he simply knew was red again, not that he could see, but it felt like a part of him that had been missing was back at its place. The sensation of Theo’s hand stroking his cock was indescribable, and he was harder than ever before, harder than any of the countless wet dreams had made him, harder even than he’d been with Theo’s dick in his mouth. They had so much unfinished business.
"I want..." Liam whimpered, not even knowing what exactly it was, just that he *wanted* and that it had to be all of it, and soon, and then more, and that he was almost starved for Theo.

"Shh, baby, I´ve got you," Theo mumbled against his collarbone, licking along the sharp edge and then sucking the skin between his lips, leaving small bruises behind that almost didn´t look differently to some of the million shades of color dancing over his body where Theo was pulling his collar down for better access.

Theo tried his best not to lie on top of Liam, remembering Jenna telling him that Liam had a few broken ribs, but the whines escaping Liam´s delicious lips were not of complaint, they were desperate pleas for more. He pulled the white sheet over his head as he dived down and exposed Liam´s torso to his hitched, puffy breath, taking his sweet time taking in the artful way the colors were moving restlessly beneath the skin, kissing the heavily bruised ribcage softly, burying his face in the hair covering Liam´s chest and sucking on his nipples, a tiny little bit less softly.

Liam moaned and held Theo close with one shaky hand, his hips twitching with every change of pressure by Theo´s hand over his crotch.

"Theo," he growled, saying the name finally not causing him agony any more.

It took a torturous eternity before Theo decided to show mercy and let his hand slip beneath the fabric, his hand directly on Liam doing pure magic. He wrapped his fingers around Liam´s cock, and it felt differently from the way Liam touched himself, but not in any way worse or less intense, on the contrary. The sheer thought of this being Theo, finally, finally, made Liam see colors. And that was even before Theo started moving his hand up and down.

"Fuck," Liam moaned, "please." He had no idea whether he was begging Theo to go faster, pushing him further towards his impending orgasm, or to take it slower, dragging the moment out as long as possible. It was too good to be over soon, but it was too good to keep patient as well.

Theo moved up to kiss Liam again, to feel the softness and hunger of his lips, to swallow the wonderful noises he was making, the noises that originated from Theo´s hand on him. He could have melted into Liam. He almost felt bad for how hard breathing seemed to be for Liam, and for how much harder he seemed to be making it, but the way that Liam was kissing him, licking into his mouth and sucking on his lips, nibbling and biting and only stopping to release little whimpers and groans left no doubt that the boy was clearly demanding more.

Theo squeezed his fingers and let his thump swirl over the wet tip of Liam´s dick, his tongue imitating the movement against Liam´s. He brought his own hips down against Liam´s cock in his pumping hand to at least get a little bit of the friction too when really, he could have come from the noises pouring from Liam´s throat alone.

"I want you to come, Liam," he whispered into Liam´s ear, the earlobe between his teeth. He kissed his sweaty cheek and the edge of his jaw, then down his throat, giving the outline of the red mark on its side a special treatment with his tongue. "I want you to come from my hand. I want to
know it was me who made you spill your load. And when you do, I want you to know that that
will only be the first of many, many orgasms I’ll give you.

"Fuck, Theo," Liam panted, squirming and twitching uncontrollably, clearly close to his climax,
his fingers clenched around Theo’s arms, holding onto him for dear life.

"You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me," Theo whispered and kissed Liam’s cheek, and
that was the point of no return, the point where Liam’s back lifted from the mattress, his body
tensed, his lips parted in a silent cry, and it looked like he was soaring for a moment before he fell
over the edge and shot his hot release over his abs and Theo’s hand.

Liam assumed that the entire hospital could hear him struggling for air as he rode the waves of his
orgasm with Theo so close that nothing, absolutely nothing could have come between them. He
needed several minutes to calm down, and after he’d managed to get his breath under control,
every inch of his body was hurting, except for the spot on his chest, right across his heart, where
Theo’s hand was resting.

David granted the two boys a little more time before he entered the hospital room, ignoring the
fogged up glares and the blushed cheeks and the messy hair, not commenting on the smell of come
or the fact that Liam’s shirt was still pulled up, or any of the hundred other signs of what had just
happened between them.

"Good news," the man smiled at both of them. "You’re going home."

After an awkward moment of staring between all three of them, David turned to leave them alone
and get their dicks in order before checking out of the place.

"And for the record," he added before the door closed behind him, "I don’t want to see either of
you in here ever again."

Things were a little weird between Liam and Theo when they were on the elevator downwards to
get home. They were together. They were going to be alright. Still, none of them knew where
exactly they stood in their relationship. None of them could be certain just how much damage Theo
´s escape had done to them. Theo wanted to grab Liam’s hand and hold it more than he wanted to
breathe, but he wasn’t sure if he had Liam’s permission.

"What?” Liam asked when he caught him staring and thinking.

"Can I...-" Theo felt his cheeks burning up with embarassment. He was truly the most ridiculous
person on earth. "Can I?" he asked, pointing to Liam’s hand hanging between them.

"I can’t believe you!” Liam exclaimed, intertwining their fingers, making Theo feel like now he
really was home. "You literally just had my dick in your hand!”
Theo shrugged. He didn’t know how to explain why holding hands was such an intimate and precious thing to him. Liam threw him a funny, considering look.

"You know what?" Liam asked rhetorically, hitting a button on the wall that made the elevator stop immediately as if they were in a sappy movie. "I think it’s time to get one more thing right at last."

Theo could only stare and gape, unable to move or speak or react at all as Liam was getting down on his knees in front of him, their hands still connected, Liam’s injured body making the whole exercise hard on him, but the smile on his face betraying no sign of had feelings.

"I’ve been on my knees in front of you before," Liam began, and Theo genuinely wondered where his strange speech could possibly be going, "and as much as I enjoyed sucking your dick, I’ve been feeling like I missed out on something back then. I should have made things more clear between us."

His pretty blue eyes were wide open, his hand shaking along with his lower lip, but his voice was steady.

"Theo Raeken, do you want to be my boyfriend?" Liam asked as if it was an official thing.

Theo would have fainted, but he didn’t want to take the title of biggest drama queen away from Liam. He simply sunk down to kneel on the floor with Liam, taking his face in his hands and bringing their lips together. They kissed, and kissed, and kissed, and Theo almost forgot to say yes when they finally pulled apart to catch their breath.

They hugged, arms steadying week shoulders, hearts healing in the presence of each other.

"Liam, can you promise me something?" Theo asked as soon as they’d made it back up to their feet and the elevator was moving further down.

"Most definitely not," Liam replied with a grin, "but continue."

"Can we please never set foot in this hospital again? Or any other hospital?" Theo pleaded.

"Sounds like a proposal worth trying," Liam nodded.

They’d been apart for four long weeks, but when Liam and Theo returned home, they climbed up the stairs, hand in hand, in silence. They retreated to their room, Theo finding that it looked just like when he’d last been there. They had a lot of things to talk about, a lot of issues to work through. Theo had to learn to let Liam in. But he’d given up on trying anything other than exactly
that, knowing that whatever would happen, he would always be better off by Liam´s side than without him.

They went to bed, each of them climbing onto the mattress from their own side, but when they slung their arms around each other in the middle, their tired limbs intertwined, there were no sides anymore.

"Good night, Captain," Theo whispered.

"Good night, Sunshine," Liam whispered back.

***

*So you hit the lights and I'll lock the doors*

*Let's say all of the things that we couldn't before*

*I won't walk away, won't roll my eyes*

*They say love is pain, well darling, let's hurt tonight*

*If this love is pain, then honey let's love tonight*

Chapter End Notes

The song is One Republic - Let's Hurt Tonight.

This is now really it for today, promise! (And probably for about two more weeks, since that’s how long I’ll have to sleep now.)

I hope you can forgive me for all the pain of the previous chapters, my heart has been breaking over and over along with those two boys.
Waking up next to Liam had always been the most special feeling in Theo´s life, and yet, after being apart for four long weeks, after being to the other end of the country and back, after falling hopelessly in love and still trying to fight it, it was so much different, even more special in some way, and in another, painful.

Really, Theo wasn’t even waking up next to Liam, but rather under and all over him, tangled up in the boy, scared sh*tless by how much Liam´s bent and crooked limbs must hurt. It had been easy to forget, with the emotionality of their reunion, but Liam was still pretty severely injured. Theo could have cried, really, only from looking at his bruised face, still beautiful, of course, because it was still Liam´s, but looking so broken, and that was just utterly wrong. Every breath that Theo sucked in hurt, because every one that Liam took had to hurt too, judging from the noises he made.

A broken rib. A punctured lung. Those were not nothing, no matter how many times Liam said otherwise. Theo knew better. He could see the pain in Liam´s eyes, even when the smile on his lips was supposed to fool him.

Of course, Theo was aware that there was no point in trying to leave again, and in the end, it would only have torn them both apart more, and worse, and maybe into irreparable pieces once and for all. But staying was hard as well, and got harder with every new day. Another heavy grey cloud appeared at the sky above his head every time he looked up. For the first time since he’d come to Beacon Hills months ago, Theo was back to carrying around his iPod wherever he went. He fumbled the headphones out of his pocket as he was lying flat on top of the freshly washed sheets on Liam´s bed and put them on. He wasn’t sure whether the music was supposed to save him from drowning in his guilt or pull him under for good.

I’m sorry that I hurt you
It’s something I must live with every day
And all the pain I put you through
I wish that I could take it all away
And be the one who catches all your tears
That´s why I need you to hear

I´ve found a reason for me
To change who I used to be
A reason to start over new
And the reason is you

The thing was, having a reason to try to be better, to try to be good, was a whole new sensation in the life of Theo Raeken, and not an easy one to deal with. Whenever he was holding Liam close, of course, he wanted nothing more than to keep him forever. Whenever he looked at the boy sleeping, the dark lashes resting on his cheek, he told himself he would do whatever it took to change himself into somebody worthy of Liam. But when Theo was alone, like in that very moment, alone with music and his thoughts, everything began crumbling inside of him so damn fast. He closed his eyes from all the stuff in the room that belonged to Liam and allowed his mind to get lost.

Theo thought of Jenna, and that maybe, probably, if he had grown up with a Mom like her, or any Mom at all, he would be different. He would have a place to belong. He wouldn´t have to feel bad for taking up air and space even after hurting people. He would have let himself fall into loving arms instead of barely trying to hold himself up. He skipped to the next song before it could hurt too badly.

The broken clock is a comfort, it helps me sleep tonight
Maybe it can stop tomorrow from stealing all my time
I am here still waiting though I still have my doubts
I am damaged at best, like you´ve already figured out

I´m falling apart, I´m barely breathing
With a broken heart that´s still beating
In the pain there is healing
In your name I find meaning
So I´, holdin´ on, I´m holdin´ on, I´m holdin´ on
I´m barely holding´ on to you
The broken locks were a warning you got inside my head
I tried my best to be guarded, I’m an open book instead
I still see your reflection inside of my eyes
That are looking for a purpose, they’re still looking for life

For a few minutes, Theo had forgotten who and where he was, his breathing becoming even, his broken heart beating steady. There was a calm welling up inside him as the song took over his mind, a calm that didn’t exactly make sense to him, but that felt irresistibly good, so he let it wash over him, lying still, embracing the peace that he’d never known.

Theo almost had a heart attack when Liam slumped down on the bed half on top of him. He’d had his eyes closed, had drifted off far away from reality, has disappeared into one of those rare moments when he didn’t miss Liam, feeling like he was all over and inside him anyway.

“What are you listening to?” Liam whispered, nuzzling at Theo’s unshaved jaw.

“Nothing,” Theo replied and put the headphones back inside the pocket of his jeans with his iPod, wrapping his arms around his boyfriend. He’d always wondered how others managed to talk so casually about the music they liked to listen to. For Theo, there was nothing more intimate, no bigger secret to himself than the songs that made him feel things. Everybody who knew would have had the very key to his soul and all its mysteries in their hands, would have only had to listen closely enough to see inside, to expose every last dark bit of what lived inside Theo.

Liam kissed him softly, their lips barely touching. It was only a ghost of a kiss, and somehow, that hurt.

“Liam,” he begged, even if he didn’t want to.

“Theo,” Liam breathed back before he pressed their lips together.

They were together. Finally. But nothing felt right.

Liam pulled away and laid his head down over Theo’s heart. Theo was almost afraid he could hear it beating lies over lies.
“My parents are gone, you know,” Liam’s voice informed Theo in a lower tone than usual. The younger boy brought one hand up and started caressing Theo’s cheek and jaw, then moved down his neck to the collarbone and let his fingers slip under the hem of his shirt.

Theo was an expert in denial, had been for many years, but not even he could close himself off from the simple truth that Liam’s hands on his skin gave him the absolute best of what a human body was capable to feel. He couldn’t help but close his eyes and lean into his touch, arching his back because no proximity was ever close enough, sighing a deep sigh of contentment at the soft pressure of Liam’s warm fingers. He would have felt whole right then, at home and at peace with himself and the world, completed by a boy he had always thought must hate him, but never had. He would have. But Theo couldn’t shut his brain up.

Liam craned his neck and began pressing kisses onto his neck, by now fully aware that that spot was Theo’s single greatest weakness. A moan slipped from Theo’s mouth before he could fight it down, which only caused Liam to suck on his skin harder, surely leaving a trail of marks behind, and then tracing that line with the tip of his tongue. Theo shivered. Liam smelled so good. As simple as that, he suddenly forgot what the last song he had been listening to had been. Hell, he almost forgot how to breathe when Liam let his teeth graze the fresh bruises on his neck ever so cautiously. Who was he kidding, he wasn’t truly going to resist that boy, was he? Was he even still trying?

Theo brought his hand up to thread his fingers through Liam’s soft and fluffy hair. It was longer than his own, curling slightly where the strands fell into Liam’s face, the dark brown an amazingly beautiful contrast to the piercing blue of his eyes.

“You are a fucking piece of art, Liam,” Theo breathed against his forehead. He was slowly starting to learn to pronounce some of the things going through his mind. “I hope you know that. I hope you know how beautiful you are.”

“You know,” Liam whispered in response, still busy nibbling his way along Theo’s neck, “you might just have to keep reminding me.” Theo could feel Liam’s grin against his skin.

Theo shifted beneath Liam and then flipped them over, being as careful as possible while lying Liam down onto the mattress, taking extra care of the arm that was still in a cast, making sure Liam’s head was comfortably resting on a pillow. “I will,” he promised with a firm look into Liam’s eyes, trying to convey the words he still failed to say, even if they had been on his mind for months, probably ever since his first crushing defeat at Liam’s favorite video game.

“Good,” Liam replied. A hungry look was lingering in his eyes, his lips were licked wet and
slightly parted. He grabbed Theo´s face with his free hand and brought him down to his mouth for a kiss. A sloppy, greedy, open-mouthed kiss, his tongue diving into Theo´s mouth over and over again.

Theo was holding himself steady with his forearms caging Liam´s head, his body hovering over Liam´s with enough distance to not hurt the boy any more than he already was, not much to Liam´s liking. Liam whined out when he arched his back towards Theo, contorted his face and slumped back down.

“Oh god, did that just hurt?” Theo asked, sitting up and examining Liam´s ribcage. What was he even doing? He knew exactly that Liam was in no state to fool around. It couldn´t be that hard to wait for a couple of weeks, could it?

“Good lord, Theo,” Liam grunted, “can you stop acting like you´re my nurse for five minutes, please?”

“Not if you´re hurt I can´t,” Theo shook his head. He was a stupid boy, he had certainly proven that, but he wasn´t stupid enough to risk Liam´s health any further.

“I´m not hurt, I´m-” he looked down at his middle as he finished his sentence- “horny.”

Theo rolled his eyes. What a Liam thing to say. Both Liam´s hands, the broken one as well as the other, were suddenly kneading his thighs.

“Alright,” Theo sighed, pulling Liam´s hands away and placing them onto the bed above Liam´s head carefully. “Alright. But you let me do the work, understand?” He pinned his arms down until Liam nodded eagerly, then smiled widely. “Awesome.”

Theo let retreated his fingers from around Liam´s arms slowly, dragging his fingertips across the sensitive inside of Liam´s still clothed upper arms. From that alone, Liam began squirming. Theo watched as the red in Liam´s neck started moving quicker, denseing around his touches, tiny sparks of yellow emitting where his fingers made contact. Nothing in the world could take his breath away like the colors beneath Liam´s skin.

“You know what,” Theo remarked, “I don´t need any colors on my own.” The yellow hadn´t found its way back to him so far. He had been back to being blank since the night he had left. “Yours are so much prettier anyway.”
“Can you see what they do when you touch me?” Liam asked.

“Yeah,” Theo answered, his eyes focused on exactly that as his fingers were ghosting over Liam.

“They´re your colors, too, Theo,” Liam whispered.

Theo stilled. He had imagined a thousand ways to tell Liam he loved him. He had been obsessing over it for a while. And then there Liam went, just blurting out things like that, just casually dropping words that were even bigger than what Theo had wanted to say, at least to him. They were everthing.

He leaned forward and kissed Liam gently. “I don´t know what to say to that,” he whispered.

“You don´t have to say anything,” Liam shook his head with a smile.

“I want to,” Theo argued, “I just… I just don´t-”

“I know, Theo,” Liam interrupted his stutter. “I know.”

It was Liam who closed the distance between them and captured Theo´s lips in another kiss. It was loving and slow, sweet and innocent until it wasn´t any longer, Liam´s teeth scraping over Theo´s lower lip and Theo not holding back his moans anymore. He let his hands roam across Liam´s chest, feeling the muscles twitch beneath his palms without putting on too much pressure.

“I´m not made of glass, you know,” Liam noted in between kisses, tugging at Theo´s jeans in an attempt to pull him closer. Theo hissed when their covered dicks rubbed against each other. He didn´t dare to put all his body weight in.

“Seriously, Theo,” Liam said again, “I need you to stop going soft on me. I fucking want you.”

“And I want you, too,” Theo replied, “but-”
“No!” Liam said firmly. “Just no. No buts allowed.” He lifted his upper body from the mattress a bit to pull his shirt off, presenting a colorful masterpiece of a body underneath, making Theo swallow hard. Blue waves were flowing across his chest, except blue wasn’t even accurate. The flowing mark consisted of dozens and hundreds of different shades, a bit of the ocean, a bit of the sky, a bit of spilled ink, a bit of blueberry cake. Sometimes Theo believed the entire universe lived beneath Liam’s skin. Further down, the blue faded into patches of pale green and dark purple. You couldn’t have painted a body more beautifully if you had tried.

Theo allowed his itching fingertips to make contact. Liam felt warm and alive, so alive. Theo’s brain grew dizzy from watching the marks flutter and sway. The hair covering Liam’s chest was soft beneath his touches. His mesmerized stare must have looked ridiculous, Theo was aware, but he didn’t have it in him to care. He was completely captivated by the art that was Liam. Suddenly, he needed to know what the colors would do if he kissed them.

So Theo tried it out. He let his lips brush Liam’s chest, right above the heart he could feel beating. While the colors had seemed to get drawn to his fingers, they made way for his lips, fading from where he made contact, leaving a small blank patch like a spotlight. Liam’s fingernails were scratching through his hair over the back of his head. As lightly as he possibly could, Theo started his mission to cover Liam’s entire upper body in kisses, keeping his eyes open to relish the sight of the blue dancing out of his way.

Strangely enough, at the lower edge of Liam’s ribcage, it stopped. The mark appeared in a mixture of pale blue and light green there, with a dense purple bit in the middle. Theo kissed it, and Liam shuddered, tightening his grip in Theo’s hair. Gently, almost not touching the skin, Theo gave it another peck. Nothing happened, except for Liam to flinch a little.

“Oh my God!” Theo exclaimed. Realization dawned suddenly on him. He pointed at the numb bit of color, horror in his eyes. “This is not... -” he swallowed hard- “this is not a mark.”

He hadn’t taken a close enough look at Liam after they had gotten home from the hospital, out of pure fear. He had kept avoiding to see the the damage with his own eyes. Liam’s tortured breathing had been bad enough. After several days, Liam’s face was looking much better, very much better.

“It’s okay,” Liam tried to calm him down, but Theo was panicking badly. He retreated to the very edge of the bed, sitting there in horror, unable to tear his eyes off Liam’s torso. It looked absolutely brutal, now that he was aware those weren’t just marks coloring the delicate skin.

“It’s not okay!” Theo objected. It wasn’t. Liam was hurt, and although it wasn’t Theo who had hurt him, at least not technically, he was highly convinced that the boy would have been alright then, if only Theo had stayed with him in the first place.
Liam sat up and reached out with one hand, but Theo flinched away. It wasn´t right. How could Liam let Theo touch him after what he had done? How could he still want to be touched by him?

“It doesn´t hurt,” Liam whispered as he crawled closer to Theo. “Not with your hands on me.” He took Theo´s finger between his own and dragged them across his chest, down his stomach, and then lower, until Liam´s hand was resting on Theo´s and Theo´s palm was cupping Liam´s erection.

Theo couldn´t have said it didn´t feel good. It did. But it felt good in a way that something forbidden feels good. Good like when you do something you know you will regret later, so you enjoy the fun as long as it lasts. Good like many things Theo had used to do to feel good, back in the days when he had been a nobody, living nowhere but in his truck, on the brink of crime and insanity. He had sworn to himself that he would never go back there.

So abruptly that it made Liam jump, Theo snapped out of his paralysis and hurried off of the bed, trying desperately to gather his thoughts, but losing grasp of everything running through his head so damn fast.

“I can´t,” he stammered, “I just can´t.” Very deliberately avoiding the look into Liam´s face, he rounded the large bed in the middle of the room and stormed through the door outside, ran down the stairs a little too hastily, but kept himself from falling. A while later, as if by magic, Theo found himself sitting on top of the little bridge in the park, wondering what it meant that he was still holding onto the spot so fiercely when the memories it brought back were so painful.

As a kid, Theo would have let his feet dangle in the air above the river, but as a twenty-year-old, he had his ankles crossed, tucked beneath his legs, afraid of falling. If only the kid in him had been allowed to grow a little longer. If only life had given him a little more time for carefreeness before snatching away everything he had loved.

Theo sat still, listening to the rushing waves and the singing birds, losing himself in the almost-silence. When he was finally ready, he pulled out his headphones from his pocket again. He wasn´t going to make another run. He wasn´t going to make things any worse. He simply needed time. When the soft sounds of a piano flooded his senses, Theo felt like his scars were torn open. He remained still, bleeding the poison of doubt out of his system.

We built sandcastles that washed away.

I made you cry when I walked away.
And although I promised that I couldn`t stay

Every promise don`t work out that way

Of course, Theo knew he was being stupid. He could have been at home with Liam at that moment, entangled in him on their bed, engulfed in his scent, holding his hand and kissing every inch of his perfect body. Instead, Theo had looked for an easy way out again, and not found one, just the way back into bitterness. He could have punched himself in the face. For the sake of Liam, he had to learn how to not walk away from things that got slightly difficult. For the sake of Liam, he would.

And your heart is broken `cause I walked away

Show me your scars and I won`t walk away

And I know I promised that I couldn`t stay

Every promise don`t work out that way

He got up and walked home. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and checked the time. He would have been away for less than an hour. Compared to four weeks, that was progress.

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“Are you two okay?” Jenna asked carefully as she walked into the guest room where Theo had prepared his bed for the night. After returning back home, he had been upstairs, planning to knock on Liam´s door and apologize, to beg for yet another bit of patience. The extremely loud noises of Liam´s video game had stopped him. He had basically been able to see the pulsating red in Liam´s back through the door, had imagined the firm set of his jaw, the grim shimmer in his eyes, sternly focused on the tv screen. With cold feet, Theo had retreated downstairs. You could call him a lot of things, and yes, a coward was definitely among them.

Theo considered his answer, looking into the clear worry in the woman´s Liam-blue eyes. Were they okay?

“Not sure,” he finally shrugged.

“Not that easy being back, is it?” she said as she sat down beside him.
“No,” he confirmed. Sometimes it scared him a little how easily she could see inside him. He stared at the grey carpet, silent. When Jenna didn’t say anything either, everything quiet around them for a solid minute, he realized that indeed, he did want to get a few things off his chest.

“Jenna?” he asked.

“Yes, sweety?”

“How can you not hate me?” The question had been burning on his heart ever since he had been back.

“As easy as this,” she replied, wrapping one arm around him and pulling him close against her side.

“How can you not look at him, at all his injuries, and hate me for doing that to him? How does it not tear you apart?” As much as Theo loved Jenna, and as convinced as he was that she had actually saved his life, he simply didn’t get it.

“Look, this is where being a mother gets really complicated,” she began. “I’m not going to lie to you, Theo. I’m conflicted. There’s this thing that Liam said one night when he was in the hospital again. I can’t repeat it. But it haunts me, and it makes me feel a little bit like I should tell you that, if you ever break my boy’s heart again, I’ll be coming for you. I’m sorry, truly, Theo, but this is how I feel sometimes.”

“I get it,” Theo nodded, “I think you have the right to feel like that all the time.”

“The thing is,” Jenna continued, “another part of me trusts that you have a bad enough conscience on your own. I know you do. And I know you never wanted to hurt him.”

“No,” Theo said. Never.

“See, I was on my way to Boston to get you back, you know that, right?” She searched for his eyes, an urge to be taken seriously visible in hers. “Because I know that you are what makes him happy.”

“I wish I could,” Theo sighed, but Jenna wasn’t finished yet.
“You do. But I also needed you back home because I know that he is what makes you happy. And because I missed you, you stupid boy.” She had tears in her eyes and a smile on her lips. In that moment, Theo knew he was exactly where he belonged.

“Do you believe that people can change, Jenna?” Theo wanted to know after another moment of silence.

“I believe that nothing can stop time from changing people, sweety,” she replied.

The next morning, Theo woke up spooning Liam. He had tried to sleep downstairs on his own, but not very hard, and not for very long before he had given up and marched upstairs and into Liam´s room, simply getting in bed behind him, wrapping one arm around the boy and pulling him close, inhaling his scent and feeling Liam relaxing against him, shifting just in the right way for their bodies to fall into place like puzzle pieces.

With the day´s first warm rays of sunlight shining through the window, Theo pressed their skin together, his chest flush against Liam´s back, his nose nuzzling the nape of his neck, soft strands of hair tickling his face. He tried to be as gentle as possible, not putting any kind of pressure on Liam´s ribcage that was covered in a light-blue t-shirt. He placed a kiss behind Liam´s ear and smiled when Liam´s sleepy voice gave a grumbled reaction.

“Morning, Captain,” Theo mumbled.

“Is there any nickname I could call you that would really piss you off?” Liam growled his reply. “Asking for a friend.”

“You love me calling you Captain,” Theo laughed. It had been their thing from the very first moment, through all the bullshit and the heartbreak.

Liam kept quiet for a moment, his body tense in Theo´s grip before he relaxed. “I do,” he admitted, not just referring to the nickname.
“I’m sorry about yesterday,” Theo spoke into Liam’s shoulder. “Actually, I’m sorry about a lot of things that happened before yesterday. I don’t think I’ve ever really apologized.”

Liam turned around onto his back, put a the uninjured hand in Theo’s neck and looked at him. “I’m sorry, too,” he said.

“No, Liam… I’m…” Theo sighed. “I mean I’m sorry for leaving. For leaving you. I don’t want you to think I didn’t want to stay. Because I did. I made this stupid decision with my head full of false information. I was confused and overwhelmed and scared. And during those four weeks on the road and in Boston-” he gulped- “it’s not like I was always convinced I was doing the right thing, okay? I thought I was doing us both a favor when I left. And I left with doubts all over my mind, believe me.”

“Then why didn’t you come back?” Liam asked. Such a good question.

“Because that’s how decisions work, right?” Theo tried to explain. “You make them one second and regret them right after. But the damage is already done. And so you keep going, suffering through it, hoping that someday, you will feel like it wasn’t in vain.”

“No offense, but-” Liam threw him an incredulous look- “I call bullshit on that. Literally every second before the moment you actually did come back would have been better.”

“I know that now,” Theo admitted quietly. His gaze drifted down to where he knew a massive bruise was hidden beneath Liam’s t-shirt. “I could have saved you a lot of pain.”

Liam caught his gaze. He opened his mouth to say something, but apparently thought better of it. He was clearly thinking his next response through quite thoroughly.

“Look at me,” Liam finally said. Theo was looking at him. “This-” he gestured over his own body. “This is a healing body, okay? I’m fine. I’m here. You’re here. And this-” he pointed at the broken rib- “this is not going to be here for much longer.”

Theo didn’t know how to respond. He felt so stupid about his words sometimes, and that was not the moment to say stupid things. As cautiously as humanly possible, he laid his hand over Liam’s chest, just enough above the injury to avoid hurting him. Liam truly was the bravest person Theo knew, giving himself into Theo’s hands with all his trust, more than Theo had ever had in himself.
“A few months ago,” Liam started talking like he was about to tell Theo a story. “A few months ago, I fell in love with this new guy on the lacrosse team.”

Theo’s heart was beating so loudly that he had to look down to make sure it was still in his chest. Liam had never told him he was in love with him before. Not with those words.

“He was kind of an ass, to be honest,” Liam joked, “and whatever this asshole did or said, it only confused me more, until my whole world seemed to be upside down. It was the most perfect thing, even when it hurt, even when he was gone, even when I thought I would never be happy again. And you know what I just realized?”

Theo raised his eyebrows. He had no idea what Liam was talking about. “What is it?”

“Maybe my world was upside down before, and you actually fixed it,” Liam said with a smile.

“You don’t mean that,” Theo breathed out in awe. Was this what it felt like to have somebody love you? And did it feel this overwhelmingly and terrifyingly beautiful because he was so broken, or because it simply was?

“I do,” Liam nodded. “I´m not calling you my boyfriend for that pretty ass you got there.” A hand that Theo hadn’t been noticing suddenly squeezed tight around the body part in question.

“Are you sure about that?” Theo laughed.

“Well, not only for that ass,” Liam shrugged.

They were good, they were okay.

“Liam?” Theo asked. There were a thousand things on his mind that he could have said to him. He needed Liam to know how happy he was in that very moment, how endlessly and irrevocably in love. He needed to say it. “Will you sing for me?” he asked instead. He would have plenty of time for the rest later.

“What do you want to hear?” Liam asked as Theo settled down against him, his head resting above
Liam’s beating heart.

“Doesn’t matter,” Theo mumbled, “I just don’t know anything more beautiful than you singing.” It was one little step on his way to confessing the truth.

Theo could feel Liam inhale deeply before the first words came pouring from his lips, his voice sweet and raspy and honest, the melody soft and soothing, but the words… Theo’s heart skipped a beat. His entire body tensed up. He had to remind himself to keep breathing while Liam continued singing, one hand stroking Theo’s hair. It was the most perfect thing Theo had ever heard, and it tore his very soul apart a little bit further with every note.

When the last tone had faded in the air, Liam looked down at Theo. “Theo,” he said softly, “Why are you crying?”

Theo couldn’t. He just shook his head against Liam’s skin.

“You can tell me,” Liam nudged him, gently.

“Why did you pick that song of all songs?” Theo wanted to know, his voice strangled and weak. It was a good thing he was lying on a bed, since he was pretty certain his knees were weak as well.

“I don’t know,” Liam shrugged, “it was just random. Just the first thing that came to my mind.”

“Oh Captain,” Theo sighed, “none of my secrets are ever safe from you.”

Chapter End Notes

The songs I used:
- Hoobastank, The Reason
- Lifehouse, Broken
- and thanks to the wonderful Kristina, Beyoncé, Sandcastles. (You made me cry.
Thank you! :)
After almost eighteen years of his life, after getting himself a girlfriend somehow, after watching his two best friends basically living the life of a married couple, after lots of cringe-worthy movies and grimaces drawn over his parents being sappy as hell, it was finally time for Liam to make an attempt at being romantic. He had never exactly been on a date with Hayden, no. Instead, they had basically punched each other in the face, had then proceeded to hold grudges for a long time before fate had thrown them back together, and after a couple of broken glasses and a whole lot of chewing gum sticking Liam’s ass to his chair in class, they had decided to make their thing an official relationship. With Theo, though, everything was different. Liam wasn’t in love with Theo the same way he had been with Hayden, meaning that Liam wasn’t just in love with Theo. Liam loved Theo. And it was about time Theo knew that.

His very important mission called for drastic measures, Liam was aware, and so he texted Mason, asking him to come over while Theo and Corey were at lacrosse practice that he was still excluded from due to his injuries, although he had been fighting his Mom over that.

“Seriously? That is your emergency?” Mason gasped, holding his side and panting as he stood in front of Liam’s door. “You made me rush over here like a lunatic because you need date advice?”

Admittedly, Liam could have chosen better words than Mason, I need you at my place right now. It’s an emergency. Especially after everything he had been putting his best friend through for the past few weeks.

“I´m sorry,” Liam apologized dumbly. He really was a shitty friend, but to be fair, it was kind of hard to compete with Mason in that area.

“You owe me eternal drinks at the Sinema,” Mason sighed as he stepped inside, “I hope you know that.”

“I probably owe you my life,” Liam replied, “and my sanity.” He wasn’t entirely joking.

“True,” Mason shrugged, “but let´s start with something you can actually pay me back for.”

“Gladly,” Liam assured him, “as soon as you´ve told me your secret on how to make your boyfriend never want to leave you again.”
Mason gave Liam a funny look. “You do realize how crazy that guy is for you, right?” he asked with a cocked eyebrow.

“Do I?” Liam shrugged. It was a strange thing to think about. Of course, he’d seen the look in Theo’s eyes when they were together. And of course, he knew that look. Liam was aware that Theo wasn’t exactly the type to stick around someone he wasn’t really into. He had been looking at that new tattoo on Theo’s neck for hours while his boyfriend had been asleep. It meant something. It all meant something. A whole fucking lot, actually. Still, Liam couldn’t be sure it was exactly the same that he felt, too. How could he? Everything was still so fragile between them.

“Have things not been good between you two?” Mason wanted to know, cautious curiosity in his voice.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Liam shrugged, “it’s just… complicated, I guess. Theo is complicated. And I don’t mind it, not one bit, but I don’t think he understands that.”

“Oooh,” Mason made an excited sound, “so you’re trying to make a statement, huh?”

“I’m just trying to leave all that bullshit behind for one night,” Liam explained, “all the secrets and the things we did wrong and everything that hasn’t really been working out so far.”

“Oh, I see,” Mason remarked with a knowing grin.

“You… Mase, why are you looking at me like that?” Liam asked.

“Oh Li, I can see right through you,” Mason smirked, although Liam had not the slightest clue what he was on about.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he tried to brush his best friend off, but without success.

“You’re trying to get yourself some dick,” Mason finally laughed out loud, red and blue strings intertwining up his arms.

The mark in Liam’s neck started widening, pulsating beneath his skin. “I’m what? No! I’m trying
to be romantic!” he denied vehemently.

“Nahh, you´re trying to get laid,” Mason smirked.

“I´m telling you, I´m not!” Liam defended himself. He really wasn´t. Or was he?

“Hey, I´m not judging,” Mason pointed out with a grin. Yellow and orange little dots appeared on his cheeks. On him, somehow those colors looked so different from everybody else.

“Because there´s nothing to judge,” Liam growled, turning away to hide his face, which was truly stupid, considering that he only offered his best friend a better look at his brightly glowing neck. Not that Mason could ever be fooled by him to begin with.

“Okay, you got me a little curious now,” Mason noted as he flopped down onto the big sofa in the living room. “Does this mean you two haven´t…?”

“Haven´t what?” Liam asked, although he realized just a second later that he didn´t exactly want Mason to explain.

“Banged,” Mason said dryly, a serious expression on his face.

Liam said nothing. He just shrugged.

“Seriously?” Mason gasped. “How is that even possible? Not once in all those months?”

“What do you want me to say, man,” Liam groaned, “it just hasn´t happened yet, okay? It´s not like I haven´t been trying…”

“What´s that supposed to mean now?” Mason wanted to know. “You´ve been offering and he says no? How dare he!”

“Jesus, Mase!” Liam rolled his eyes. His next words came out way more quietly. “I think he had some… reservations because I´ve been hurt.” He raised his shirt to show Mason the yellowy-green
remains of the bruise at the lower edge of his ribcage. He would never forget the horror in Theo´s eyes when he´d realized it wasn´t a color-mark.

Mason looked for a second and considered his reply. “Okay, as your best friend, I´m a little conflicted here,” he explained then, “because I feel like I should appreciate him putting your health first. On the other hand, if you need to get fucked, you need to get fucking. He´s your boyfriend. He better take care of all of your needs.”

“Oh my God, Mason!” Liam whined. He wasn´t used to awkwardness between the two of them. “You´re the one who once said I wasn´t allowed to talk sex with you, remember?”

“Yeah,” Mason replied, “but that was before I knew your sex talk would be about guys one day. As long as it´s Theo-related, you can tell me every little dirty detail.”

Liam really didn´t want to. He thought back to the things that happened in the guest room on Theo´s birthday, and the day of Theo´s return when he punched him in the face so hard that the other boy had woken up in the hospital. He remembered the touches and kisses and handjobs, and how it had never been quite enough. He didn´t feel like sharing any of it with Mason. It would stay between him and Theo, and it was good that way. But it would have been better if there finally had been an actual thing to stay between them. Fuck it, Mason was right. He was desperate for dick. There was no point in pretending otherwise.

“No details,” Liam shook his head, “just tell me how this date thing works, please.” He let himself fall into the armchair across from his best friend, listening attentively as Mason spoke.

“Wow,” Liam sighed when Mason had finished a minutes-long speech. “What would I do without you?”

“Yeah,” Mason smiled, “I´ve been asking myself the same question.”

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Theo drove home with a lazy smile on his face. He was tired, as always after lacrosse practice, but not in the same way. Not in a way that made him wish for sleep, no. Theo´s body wasn´t aching for rest, it was craving its second half. Lacrosse practice without Liam was almost physically painful. Of course, he wouldn´t have wanted Liam to play while he was still recovering from his injuries. Theo had made it very clear that he was absolutely with Jenna on that one. Still, the team
was missing their captain, Theo was missing the one face he would always seek out on the field. Every time he was about to pass, he looked up to find the number nine. Every time he didn’t find it, a sharp pain stung in his chest. It just wasn’t right. Liam belonged on that field more than anybody else.

It was almost like something beneath Theo’s skin was getting warmer the closer he got to home. Something deep down inside him fell into place with every corner that he rounded. Not in a hundred years would he have believed that love could feel like that. Theo turned the radio down. The music was nice and slow and melodic, but he didn’t need it anymore, not like he’d used to. Not to drown out the world around him and numb his brain. A smile formed on his lips when the house came into sight, no cars in the driveway, but light burning on the upper floor, which meant that Liam was home alone. Just what he’d been hoping for.

Not that Theo had anything inappropriate in mind. Absolutely not. Well, admittedly, he totally had it in mind, but he wasn’t intending to actually do anything about it, no matter how hard it was and how many ice-cold showers it would take. Liam was hurt. Liam was hurt because of him, and Theo wasn’t going to force himself on an injured person. Truth be told, he would need for Liam to explicitly tell him to do the things he wanted him to do - repeatedly. He was too afraid. Some things simply couldn’t be taken back, he’d learned that the hard way.

He just prayed for Liam not to be wearing that grey pair of sweatpants that they shared between the two of them. It was hard enough to resist him as it was, but those sweats? Goddamnit, they were definitely not supposed to be that sexy. The thing was, what Liam carried around beneath them was too large not to attract Theo’s constant attention. And sweatpants didn’t exactly do much to hide Liam’s reaction to him staring. Theo couldn’t help it, the memories of that one time when he got Liam off without even pulling those damn pants down came back to him, attacking him with a boner that strained against the front of his jeans.

“Not again,” he mumbled. He wasn’t sure how much longer he would survive not actually getting his brains fucked out.

Theo parked the car in the driveway and turned the music back up. It was just an old habit to drown out the shameful noises. He closed his eyes and unzipped his pants. He was almost certain that the neighbor’s hedgerow was hiding him from the street. It wasn’t the first time those kind of measures were necessary. Luckily, Theo knew exactly how to make it quick. He leaned back into the driver's seat and took his hard cock in one hand, fingers wrapped around the shaft, thump stroking over the tip until his entire body was squirming in his seat.

He grew a little harder even, and when he felt like any harder would make him explode, he started pumping his dick in a quick and steady pace, squeezing his fingers tight, not interrupting his movements, not even when he heard another car pass by on the street behind him. Just a few more strokes. Up and down, faster, tighter, more, until he was almost there. And then he reached out
with his free hand, reached out for where his phone was sitting at the windscreen as if it had been waiting for its usage. Theo laid the pad of his finger against the home button and let out the moan he’d held back so far when the screen came to live, a sweaty Liam in his lacrosse jersey grinning right into his face. It was all he needed.

With a strangled cry that he just hadn’t been able to fight back down and his eyes glued to the picture of Liam, Theo came all over his hand, pulling his shirt up just in time to mess up his bare stomach instead of the black fabric. “Fuck,” he breathed out. It probably wasn’t healthy how much he needed to jerk off recently. He wondered if Liam did the same.

Carefully as to not get any of his load on his clothes or accidentally get hard again - that one was a real challenge - Theo picked up a package of tissues and cleaned himself up before jumping out of the car and getting inside. It still felt strange to have a key to a house in his pocket. And even more strange to get it out and use it to let himself in.

Inside, the scent of everything Liam was so overwhelming, all Theo wanted to do was crawl right into his boyfriend and lose himself. Home was not a place. Not Beacon Hills and not Jenna and David Geyer’s house. Not even Liam’s bedroom. And certainly not a truck, like he’d kept so many years thinking. Home was a person. A person with a warm red glow burning beneath their skin and eyes blue like where the ocean fades into the sky. If Theo had been a little less of a trainwreck, maybe he would have managed to return home at least once without feeling the urge to cry.

Theo put his backpack away neatly, placing it on top of the little dresser in the hallway as always, then he picked up Liam’s too, smiling at the image of the other boy coming home and simply letting it fall from his shoulder on his way upstairs - also as always. He took off his shoes. It shouldn’t have made Theo that happy to climb the wooden stairs in his socks, but it did. He only wished he’d been around when Jenna would still warn little Liam not to run on those stairs in his socks.

Quietly, because Theo had come to find comfort in silence, he opened the bedroom door and stepped inside. A sudden wave of relief flooded his entire being, even though he shouldn’t have been surprised to find Liam standing there, right in the middle of the room on the carpet, facing away from him, looking down, the red in his neck exposed to Theo’s view. It was the most beautiful thing in the world, second only to the blue in Liam’s eyes. Theo sighed and wrapped his arms around Liam from behind, feeling his boyfriend lean back into him, placing a warm hand over his own.

“Hey,” Theo whispered into the crook of Liam’s neck. His boyfriend smelled so good there.

“Finally,” Liam whispered back. “I’ve been waiting for you.”
Theo didn’t know how to respond. It was still an unfamiliar concept to him, having somebody else miss him. And then that somebody else wasn’t just *somebody*, it was Liam. The most special somebody possible.

It was probably for the best that Liam couldn’t see Theo’s face as they were cuddling, since a deep pink blush crept up his cheeks at the thought of why he was a little later than planned. He looked down to make sure Liam wasn’t wearing the sweatpants, which he wasn’t.

“Not that I’m complaining,” Theo said quietly, his lips moving against Liam’s skin as he spoke, “but what exactly is the meaning behind that outfit?”

Liam turned his head on Theo’s shoulder to give him a smile that could have made the sun jealous. “We’re going on a date,” he replied.

“A date that you put a shirt on for?” Theo wanted to know with raised eyebrows. He couldn’t remember seeing Liam in anything quite like the black pants and the clean, light blue shirt he was wearing.

“Yes,” Liam nodded. “I’m aware that the first date usually comes before moving in together, falling in love, breaking apart and reuniting, but that doesn’t mean we can’t still have one now.”

Theo would certainly need a little more time before he could laugh about jokes like that one, but he knew how Liam meant it. It was okay. “Liam,” he said shyly. He was honestly the most ridiculous person on earth.

“What is it?” Liam asked as he turned around and took Theo’s face in his soft hands. Theo hated seeing worry in his eyes.

“I don’t think I own anything like that to wear,” he admitted as he looked down at Liam’s outfit.

“Oh,” Liam made.

“Please don’t tell your Mom that,” Theo begged.
“Why?” Liam wanted to know with a laugh.

“I don’t know,” Theo shrugged, “I don’t think she has to know the full extent of the mess that is my life.”

Liam laughed even harder. “God, Theo,” he answered, “you do realize that woman would go to war for you, right?”

Theo didn’t know how to feel about those words. “I.. well, kind of. But I don’t want her to.”

Liam swallowed down another sarcastic comment, Theo could tell. “I won’t tell her,” he promised instead, “I would offer you a shirt of mine, but I honestly don’t care what you put on.” Liam moved his hands down and intertwined their fingers. “I just need you there with me.”

It was the weirdest thing to hear Liam say things that were actually more like the things that Theo wanted to say to him. Of course, Theo knew in his head that Liam had to have kind of similar feelings for him than the other way around, but something inside him still couldn’t believe it true. He wanted to. It simply was a lot to get used to.

“I don’t deserve you,” Theo whispered.

“You deserve everything,” Liam insisted, squeezing his hands.

The lump in Theo’s throat was the only thing keeping him from disagreeing.

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“Here,” Liam said as the key was already flying through the air towards Theo, who caught it with both hands against his chest.

“Oh,” he made a slightly surprised noise. “Does that mean your Mom agreed to let me have my truck back?”
“Agreed would be a little far fetched, I guess,” Liam replied with a shrug, “but I know you don´t feel comfortable in my passenger seat.”

Theo didn´t know how to thank Liam. It wasn´t even about the truck or him driving any more. He was long over that. It was about coming home after a long day to Liam waiting with a smile. It was about Liam´s determination to make everything around him as comfortable as possible. Theo had survived on his own for half his life. He was nothing if not capable to adapt. Because the world he had been living in had been merciless. Life with Jenna, David and Liam, with Corey and Mason and the lacrosse guys, but mostly with Liam, meant to have people making compromises for him. Meeting him in the middle. Yet another thing Theo had never known he needed.

“Liam,” he whispered, staring at the car key in his hand.

“Yeah?” Liam answered, instantly stepping closer.

“Here.” Theo held it out to him. He had promised to take nice things with a normal amount of gratitude. “Take me on that date, please.”

The smile that spread on Liam´s face was like the sun rising, his eyes glowing up along with the neck mark, a soft yellow shimmer flaring at the edges.

“So you do feel comfortable in your own passenger seat?” Liam asked. Theo knew he was giving him another way out, but he didn´t want it.

“I don´t even know anymore,” Theo answered. Liam´s delicate features were making it hard to think straight. “I don´t think I have room for uncomfortable when I´m with you.”

Liam didn´t say anything back. He just wrapped him up in one of his special Liam-hugs, arms tight around Theo´s body, face turned against his neck, standing still and breathing the proximity in, making two people become one as simple as that. There was nothing sexual about the hug, or the kiss on Theo´s cheek. Nothing had to be said or done. It was nothing except being close, and the intimacy of it all was the most intense feeling Theo had ever experienced. God, he truly loved Liam with everything he was.

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Liam’s palms were sweaty, his mind in a constant state of anxiety. He didn’t know what was wrong with the situation, he just knew that it was. The movie screen was too big, too close, too bright. The noises were too loud in his head, the popcorn too sugary. A damn fucking armrest separated him from Theo to his left, and it was too high to just let his hand slip across casually. He couldn’t even say anything about the movie. So far, he had no idea what it was all about.

“Hey,” Theo whispered all of a sudden. He’d seemed so captured by the story being told on the screen ahead that Liam actually jumped a little. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Liam whispered back, forcing a smile onto his lips.

Theo looked into his eyes for a moment, then down to his lips, and finally up into his eyes again. He leaned in and placed a hand over Liam’s heart as he kissed him briefly. “Better?” he asked.

Of course, life was at its absolute finest when you were being kissed by Theo Raeken, so what was there to respond? Liam simply laid his own hand over Theo’s and went for another kiss, longer this time, more passionate. Theo licked over his upper lip and then inside.

“You taste so sweet,” he murmured.

Theo tasted sweet too, but underlying the sweetness was something hot and spicy, something tingling on Liam’s tongue, making him hungry for more. He shouldn’t have chosen the movies for their date. A bunch of younger teenagers were sitting in the row behind them, throwing popcorn at each other and giggling, possibly because of the show Theo and Liam were putting on.

“Theo,” he urged, nibbling at his boyfriends earlobe, feeling him shudder beneath his touch, “I don’t know about you, but I don’t feel like I want to see this movie.”

Theo let out a small laugh. “Thank God,” he sighed, and just a millisecond later, he was up on his feet, dragging Liam out of his seat as well, the bag of popcorn sitting on the armrest that had had the audacity to come between them, being left behind as they sneaked out of the darkened room.

“You know what?” Liam grinned once they were outside in the parking area, tugging at Theo’s hand. “Let me try this again.” He unlocked the truck and climbed behind the steering wheel.
“Where are you taking me this time?” Theo wanted to know. Liam could feel the colors going crazy beneath his skin. It didn’t feel like just red. He remembered the night he’d discovered the yellow on Theo.

“A special place,” was all that he was going to give Theo as an answer, so his boyfriend kept taking wild and absolutely senseless guesses until he finally pulled up in the parking lot on the backside of the high school bleachers.

“Come on,” he said with a wink. The confusion on Theo’s face was glorious, but he still followed Liam into the field until he let himself fall down onto the grass.

Theo followed suit and lay down beside Liam, one hand behind his head, eyes up into the night sky. “I get it,” he breathed out with a beautiful smile, “a special place.” It had all started with lacrosse. And it had also all ended on that very field once. Before Theo had learned to fight for what he loved.

“Special,” Liam nodded, “at least for you and me.” He reached out for Theo’s free hand. Their fingers found their way around each other like cogwheels falling into place.

The night was warm enough for the light breeze not to make them freeze. Countless stars were shining from the sky, but none of them as brightly as the green of Theo’s eyes.

“I didn’t know it was a full moon tonight,” Theo pointed out. Liam could have spent the rest of his life watching him watch the sky. The world was silent, their voices low and calm.

“Well, I hope that goes well with that wolf on your back,” Liam joked, stroking Theo’s hand with his thumb. “It’s not a werewolf, is it?” he added, earning an amused nose-exhale. “Wait, you are not a werewolf, right?”

“Actually,” Theo started explaining after he was done rolling his eyes. “Actually, it’s not really a wolf. I don’t know why I told Nolan that stupid story when he asked me about it.”

Liam was curious. “What is it, then?” he asked.

“It’s a coyote,” Theo replied.
“To be completely honest,” Liam admitted, “I have no idea what the difference between a wolf and a coyote is.” He’d never been that good at biology.

Theo’s voice was deep and serious as he elaborated. Liam wanted him to never stop talking. “Coyotes and wolves are really closely related,” he began, “The point for me is the different image we humans have of them. The coyote is a quite popular character in native american folklore, actually. It’s seen as a sort of trickster, an outsider to the world, rebelling against its conventions with deception and humor.”

“Wow,” Liam breathed out. He’d always known that Theo wouldn’t have just anything tattooed onto his back, but he was deeply impressed by his explanation. He understood why Theo identified with the animal.

“People generally like wolves, right?” Theo added. “I mean, at least they respect them. I think we see them as these dangerous, but majestic creatures. Coyotes are perceived more as sneaky, cowardly and untrustworthy. Which is completely inaccurate, considering that the natural behavior of wolves and coyotes is basically the same. It’s unfair to the coyote, but it’s just what society made of them.”

“I didn’t know any of that,” Liam admitted, looking at Theo, who suddenly had a whole new side to him, one that Liam was currently busy falling in love with as well.

“Well, even you can’t know everything,” Theo smiled at him, “you little historian.”

“Shut up,” Liam laughed, a warm blush creeping up his cheeks. He hid his face in Theo’s soft sleeve.

“I wish I hadn’t left after the last time we were here together,” Theo suddenly said with a strangled voice.

Liam didn’t want their conversation to take that turn, not again, but he knew he would spend as much time reminding the most important person in his life that he was exactly that as Theo would need to believe it.

“I wish I hadn’t thrown that tantrum and hurt you and Nolan after that game we lost,” he simply stated. “I also wish I’d never made my mother cry. I wish I hadn’t broken Billie Byer’s nose in
third grade.” He laughed. “I wish I hadn´t lain down on damp grass with my good shirt on, but life is too short for those kind of regrets, I guess.”

Theo didn´t seem entirely convinced, but he still couldn´t hold in a laugh. Liam turned onto his side and wrapped an arm around Theo. His head rested on Theo´s shoulder, his eyes directed at the pale skin and dark ink on his neck.

“I wonder what could possibly be the meaning behind this one,” Liam remarked sarcastically and breathed against the number nine. He´d expected an equally sarcastic answer, but Theo surprised him.

“It means that even when almost an entire continent was separating us, I wanted to carry you with me at all times,” he said simply, looking down at Liam. It was such a huge confession, a part of Liam felt like it should be like the climax in a really romantic movie, but there was no sappy background music, no fireworks, no rainbows. There were just two boys on the cold, hard ground, two sets of racing heartbeats, and one truth. Apparently, they both could say it in endless different ways, but in the end, it all came down to the same thing. They loved each other.

“Did it hurt?” Liam asked. He wasn´t entirely sure whether he was talking about the needle piercing through Theo´s soft skin or the being alone for four terribly long weeks.

“It did,” Theo nodded seriously, “but there are some things in life that you simply can´t have if you ´re not willing to take a little pain.”

“Okay, now I´m a little bit mad,” Liam told him.

“What?” Theo seemed shocked by that, craning his neck to get a better look at Liam´s face.
“Why?”

“Because I´ve been telling you for weeks now that I don´t mind a little pain,” Liam explained as he snuggled closer, nuzzling against Theo´s cheek, placing a gentle kiss there, “and yet you keep denying me what I want.”

Liam´s hand slides down from Theo´s neck across his chest and lower, dragging his fingers along the middle of his stomach slowly, the tension in Theo´s body noticeable as he finally found his way down and beneath the waistband of his pants.
“Liam,” Theo growled a warning. Liam was done listening to the warnings. He’d had so much time to make up his mind about this.

“Theo,” he replied, the name ending in a longing whine. “I took you out on a date, or at least I tried to.” Another kiss was placed onto Theo’s face, this time right at the corner of his mouth. “I put on a shirt for you,” he added, aware that his arguments were just as weak as Theo’s. “So if you don’t want to have sex with me-” he could feel Theo’s objections flying away with his hand down the other boy’s pants- “speak now or forever hold your peace.”

“Fuck,” Theo moaned and rolled them over so he was on top of Liam. “You-” he said and kissed Liam on the lips- “are going to be the end of me.” The next kiss was deeper, more greedy, and Theo was practically rutting against Liam. Fucking finally, Liam sighed internally.

“Okay so,” Theo kissed a sweet trail along Liam’s jawline, “I know you basically just told me so, but I need a lot of verbal affirmation, you’ll see.” He pulled away and lifted his bodyweight off of Liam, looking down with big eyes that were more grey than green in that moment. “Tell me again that you absolutely and wholeheartedly want to have sex with me,” he pleaded.

Liam swallowed. He hadn’t thought he would have to spell it out for Theo. It wasn’t something he’d ever said before. Not this explicitly. On the other hand, he was incredibly hard. Theo was right there, seemingly ready at last, and all he had to do was say it, so of course, he would say whatever it took.

“Theo,” he started, his voice slightly trembling, but determined and endlessly aroused. “I’m begging you. I promise you that I absolutely and wholeheartedly, with every fiber of my desperately horny being, want to have sex with you.”

A gasp escaped Theo’s parted lips, his eyes widened. Liam couldn’t wait, he simply couldn’t, so he lifted his back from the ground and pulled Theo down with one hand fisted into the front of his sweater, pressing their lips together, sucking and biting, seeking friction with every inch of his craving body.

“Fuck,” Theo moaned again. And then the next “fuck” sounded a little strange, and then Theo pulled away, looking around in confusion, an unamused look on in his eyes.

Liam was too out of it to realize what was happening, at least until the first few drops came raining down on him.
“Fuck,” he said breathlessly as they both scrambled onto their feet, “is that…?”

“Yep,” Theo nodded grimly, pulling Liam off of the field by his hand, “the lawn sprinkler.”

“So late at night?” Liam commented. He couldn’t believe it. Finally, Theo had been so close to stop the resistance, and then the universe was cock-blocking him? Outrageous.
Lovers At Last

Chapter Notes

Hello Manon, I hope you diiiiiiiiiiiiiiiie :) 

(not seriously, of course. you know I love you!)

Liam couldn´t fucking believe it. He´d been so close at last, so damn close, yet he was up on his feet again, his shirt wet where the lawn sprinkler had caught him, Theo pulling him towards the parked truck. He was so sick of it. He didn't want to run, he didn't want to wait, he didn't want to be told again that they had all the time in the world. Because Liam didn’t. He was so hard that it almost hurt, especially since he feared the moment was once again ruined.

Sure, it was stupid. He and Theo had had bigger problems than not getting to have sex. Liam wasn't sure what it said about him that he was letting the denial get to him, but there really was fuck all he could do about it.

“You drive,” he pressed out as he fumbled with the keys, only to give up and shove them into Theo's hands instead. “I can't really... focus right now.”

Theo looked at him, first into his eyes and then slowly down his body, eyes lingering at his middle before they went up again. He played with the car key between his fingers and licked his lips, stepping closer until Liam could feel his warm breath on his face. The ride home was too long, he decided. Too fucking long.

“That is very reasonable,” Theo said. His voice sounded lower than usual, raspier, a little dangerous, but in all the good ways. “One really shouldn't drive in that...” he reached out a hand and placed his palm over Liam's boner. He gulped. -”state,” he finished. “Unfortunately,” he then added, shuffling yet a little bit closer, so close that he didn't have to lean forward to whisper right in Liam's ear, “I find myself in a similar situation. So I guess I shouldn't drive either.” He leaned back a little so that Liam could see the wide and suggestive grin on his face.

“Fuck,” Liam moaned. He was so incredibly turned on. Theo started rubbing his hand up and down over his dick, and that alone, although two layers of clothing were still separating their skin, felt so good, came so close to what he needed - finally.
“What exactly are you proposing?” Liam wanted to know, holding onto Theo’s shoulders while practically rutting against his palm.

Theo pushed him back against the truck and kissed him deeply, their mouths wet and open, their tongues pushing and pulling at each other greedily. Moans were swallowed by their hungry kisses, Liam’s body was trapped between the cold hard surface of the car and Theo’s warm hard body.

When Theo pulled away, leaning back with his shoulders, but not his hips, Liam couldn’t help himself any longer. As well as he could, he started moving in his compromised position, provoking Theo to cage him better by pushing his thigh between Liam’s legs. Like that, it was harder for Liam to move, but the little jerks he managed gave him more friction, and he totally could have gotten off like that, Theo pinning him against the truck, tongue down his throat, one leg between Liam’s, Liam basically riding his thigh.

“Let me make you feel good,” Theo spoke against Liam’s lips, “before I get you home and make you feel really good.”

“Oh my God,” Liam groaned. He had no idea what Theo meant exactly. Technically, Theo had made him feel good numerous times before. The other boy had seen every inch of Liam’s body just the way nature had made him. He had touched almost every inch of said body, kissed it over and over again. He had watched and listened attentively to Liam’s reactions while touching his dick, moving his fist up and down around it, jerking him off, stroking him through earth shattering orgasms, licking him clean afterwards. Not that Liam was complaining, but maybe it was time for other things to happen.

They kissed again, Liam willing himself to lay back and respond to Theo being the greedy one for once. He loved the way his boyfriend leaned in, pressing their chests together to get better access, how his tongue alternated between licking over Liam’s lips and diving inside his mouth to explore, how he let his teeth scrape over Liam’s skin carefully, how little whimpers escaped his mouth, how he was equally hard and pressing against Liam’s hipbone.

Liam wanted Theo so badly that it pained him, but more badly, he wanted - needed - Theo to want him. So he took his hands off of Theo and put them against the truck, tried to keep his breathing as calm as his heartbeat, which both failed, tried not to buckle his hips, not to make too many noises. It took Liam all he had in him, but he couldn’t say he was disappointed by the effect it had on Theo.

“Liam,” he groaned into Liam’s mouth, his hands all over Liam’s body, groping him, sliding beneath the hems of his shirt, caressing his skin, digging his nails into it, rubbing and stroking and pulling. He placed kisses all over Liam’s face, down along his jawline and over the blurry edges of the red mark on his neck, undoing the buttons on the front of Liam’s shirt as he kissed his way down, sucking on Liam’s collarbone, nuzzling his nose in the hair on his chest.
It was so damn hard to resist putting his hand Theo’s hair. A little animalistic part of him wanted to pull his pants down and force Theo on his knees to finally suck his cock - not even that had happened so far, but as desperate as Liam was, he kept himself under control.

“Liam,” Theo mumbled again, nibbling his way across Liam’s chest, his lips chasing around the little dots and sparks of color appearing and disappearing beneath his skin. They were all there, all the colors, a million different shades, so alive that it would have shocked Liam at a time before Theo had entered his life, but not anymore, not since an entire galaxy of color-shades had found its home in his love-drunken body.

“Tell me, Theo,” Liam whispered back. The night had started out pretty well, they’d been talking so easily. Now he needed Theo to take the next step. He needed Theo to give him something to know that he wasn’t still regretting things. He just wanted to be certain that Theo wanted to be with him as much as he wanted to be with Theo. He just wanted to belong to Theo in yet another way. He just wanted them to share things that neither of them shared with anybody else. He was in love, and it was driving him insane, and Liam needed let all of it out, he needed to know it was okay not to hold anything in. He needed to know that Theo was okay, that Theo could take the full dose of Liam, all of him, with all the greediness for so much more.

Theo looked into his eyes with a dark shimmer in his own. He was panting as he spoke. “You’re so beautiful that I almost don’t dare to touch you,” he marveled, his fingers featherlight on Liam's chest. “Like the most precious piece of art in a museum or something.”

Liam laughed. He knew it was meant as a compliment, but he didn't quite agree. “But I'm not a piece of art, Theo,” he objected, his heart hammering against Theo’s palm. “I’m alive. And I'm more alive than ever since I’m with you.”

“I know,” Theo nodded. “It’s just that… sometimes it feels to good to be true,” he admitted with a sad smile.

“It's not,” Liam shook his head vehemently. “It's good. And it's true.”

“I know,” Theo stated. Liam couldn't stand the resignation in his eyes. What the hell was wrong? Was he not right there giving himself in Theo’s loving hands? Were they not together at last, maybe lost, but definitely found? Were they not happy?

“Look,” Liam said, taking Theo’s chin between his fingers and lifting it up. He had something
important to tell the most important person in his life. “This time, we're doing this differently,” he began, “you’re not telling me all the reasons why you’re not good enough for me, since they’re all bullshit anyway. You’re not telling me how perfect I am and all the things you want for me.” He threw Theo a serious look. “This time, I want you to tell me what you want.”

Theo swallowed and stilled, his body tensing up.

“Come on,” Liam nudged him, “it can’t be that hard. Just look at me.” He took Theo’s hand and put it back to his bare chest. “Touch me,” he continued, “tell me what it makes you want from me.”

Theo closed his eyes and exhaled deeply. Liam wondered whether anybody had ever asked him what he wanted before. The possibility that not made him eternally sad for the boy he loved. He wanted to hug him, but he waited instead. I’m yours, he wanted to say, I love you.

“I want to kiss you,” Theo whispered, all shy all of a sudden, but Liam would be patient with him.

“Do it,” Liam replied, waiting leaned against the truck until Theo’s lips were pressing against his, hesitantly at first and then with more pressure, more passion, more need.

“I want to touch you more,” Theo whispered in between kisses. Other than before, he didn’t wait for Liam’s reply before he let his hands wander down Liam’s body, undoing the rest of his buttons and stroking every inch of the exposed skin until there wasn’t a part of Liam’s upper body he hadn’t touched.

“Is that all you want to touch of me?” Liam asked with raised eyebrows. They were both panting heavily, and he could feel Theo’s dick pressing against his hips hard, his own straining against his pants painfully.

“No,” Theo answered, “I want to touch your cock, too.”

Liam let out a whine. “Please,” he begged, “I’m dying for you to touch my cock.”

Theo smiled and kissed him again, his hand wandering down Liam’s stomach and inside his pants, his hand closing around Liam’s dick, moving up and down too slowly, the tightness of Liam’s underwear not giving them enough space.
“I want to take these stupid pants off of you,” Theo continued, considerably more confidence resonating in his voice. Liam responded by pushing his hips forward, creating enough space between his ass and the truck for Theo to pull down pants and briefs at once.

“I want to hear you moan because of what I’m doing to you,” Theo kept on, one hand staying on Liam’s ass to knead the soft flesh there, the other returning to it previous task, pumping Liam’s dick in a steady, maddening rhythm.

Liam obeyed gladly, releasing his lower lip from between his teeth and letting all the noises out, groaning little “fuck”s and “oh yeah”s as Theo sucked on his neck, pushing him towards his impending orgasm.

“I want to taste you, Liam,” Theo said next. Liam threw his head back and let his hips snap forward as an invitation to do it. He would probably explode right the second that Theo would wrap his lips around him, but he was too far gone to care.

Theo placed a kiss at every inch that he made his way down across Liam’s chest, licking at his nipple and teasing Liam carefully with his teeth.

“I want to put my tongue on your dick,” Theo mumbled against Liam’s skin. “I want to know what you taste like when you’re so damn ready for me. I want to feel my lips stretching around your cock. I want to know how it feels when I go all the way down on you. I want you to come in my mouth, Liam. I want to swallow your load.”

Liam couldn’t hold back any longer. He simply couldn’t. He took his hands off of the car behind his back and threaded his fingers through Theo’s hair, tugging at the strands impatiently until his boyfriend was finally on his knees before him, looking up with the prettiest eyes in the world and licking his lips.

“I want you,” Theo said, and before Liam could die too much over it, his tongue was wetting Liam’s twitching dick, large hands holding Liam upright against the truck.

“Fuck,” he pressed out, but it was barely accurate. He’d been waiting so long for Theo to be so eager, for Theo to look at him with more lust than concern in his eyes. He just wanted to forget the things that had hurt them both, the things that were still making life hard on them. God, he just wanted to get his damn brains fucked out.
“I want you so badly,” Theo added, and Liam hissed when his hot breath touched the slick and leaking tip.

“God, how long I’ve waited for you to say that,” Liam moaned. He tightened his grip in Theo´s hair as the head of his dick got sucked in between Theo´s lips. Never in his life had he felt anything remotely like that. Never in his life had he even thought something like that was possible.

Theo didn´t waste much time getting adjusted to the thick hardness on his stroking tongue before he started bobbing his head, his fingers closing tightly around the base. Liam knew he wouldn´t last long. Theo would get exactly what he´d asked for.

“Oh fuck, Theo,” Liam groaned. He barely managed to keep still as his cock was sliding in and out of Theo´s hot mouth in a quick and steady rhythm. His legs started trembling soon enough, his breathing became ragged, his moans louder. Liam was losing control over himself a little more with every second, but Theo´s strong hands were there to catch him, and he felt taken care of, felt safe, even if they were in a public parking space in the dark. It didn´t matter. All that mattered was Theo sucking Liam´s cock like his life depended on it.

“So good,” Liam mumbled, the words too simple to express the overwhelming lust, but it was hard enough to get out even those very simple words. Everything about what Theo was doing to him felt too good, too much, and yet not nearly enough, not when Liam was still not there, not where he wanted to be, not quite that far gone, although it was almost not imaginable. “So fucking good,” he repeated, moving his hips carefully, fucking his dick inside Theo´s mouth without being too rough.

The next time Liam looked down, he saw Theo undoing his own pants as well and getting his equally hard dick out. The hand that had been holding Liam by the hip was wrapped around its length a second later, moving up and down with the same pace as Theo´s head was meeting Liam´s more and more uncontrollable snaps of his hips. It made the entire situation so much hotter, the thought that giving Liam pleasure turned Theo on as well, that he was chasing both of their satisfaction. Suddenly, Liam wanted to see Theo come more even than he wanted to come himself.

“Theo,” he warned, his voice hoarse, his ass clenched a little tighter with every thrust forward. “I´m close.”

As a reaction, Theo raised his hand from his own cock to Liam´s, collection a little bit of the saliva mixed with pre-cum running down it from between his lips, spreading the wetness on his fingers and returning them down to his dick, resuming the jerking until he was moaning around Liam almost as loudly as Liam was. Their eyes met, Liam looking down from where he was leaned against the truck, since he would never have been able to stand freely on his own in his current
state, Theo looking up from where he was kneeling on the ground before Liam, his cock prettily pink in his hand.

Liam could feel his fall before he was entirely over the edge, his balls twitching, his hips stuttering, the fuses inside his gut ignited, burning up slowly but surely. “Theo,” he breathed out, his head falling forward, eyes glued on Theo’s green ones, their gazes connected, Theo speeding up his movements one last time.

An obscene whine rang through the air, Liam’s hand became a fist in Theo’s hair, his teeth dug into his lower lip and his entire body shook and writhed as he came, pushing his hips forward, shooting his load down Theo’s throat, whimpering when Theo swallowed around him, feeling something hot and sticky landing on his leg.

Liam had had no idea he was capable of coming that hard, and all he could do was fall back against the truck and fight for air as Theo’s mouth was milking him until he must have been empty, willing his legs to keep carrying his body weight as he saw Theo pulling away with a wet plopping sound, licking his red and wet and swollen lips, getting up, his hand covered in white, sticky liquids.

“You taste so good.” Theo panted as he came close to Liam's face, smiling, but not kissing him. Liam was confused for a second, but then he realized that Theo didn’t want to kiss him because he didn’t know whether Liam was cool with tasting his own release on Theo’s tongue. Admittedly, he’d never thought that it was something he wanted. He’d never thought about it, but he could remember the saltiness of Theo’s pre-cum from the attempted birthday blowjob, and suddenly, or maybe not so suddenly, Liam was highly intrigued.

Eyes still locked with Theo, Liam grabbed his boyfriend’s wrist and brought his covered hand to his mouth. He stuck out the tip of his tongue and dragged it through the sticky mess, watching Theo’s jaw drop, silently smiling to himself for surprising Theo.

“Oh my fuck,” Theo moaned, and Liam couldn't have agreed more strongly as he closed his mouth and focused on tasting Theo, rolling his tongue inside his mouth until there wasn’t enough left, then licking Theo’s entire hand clean, watching the shimmer in Theo’s eyes growing darker again while his tongue was grazing his knuckles. It was all new to him, and yet, because it was Theo, it partly felt - tasted - like the most natural thing to him.

“I can't believe you,” Theo added breathlessly, “how do you become even hotter with everything that you do?”

“Oh,” Liam smirked, leaning in, bringing their lips together and smiling against Theo’s as he
whispered, “you better believe it.”

And then they kissed, mouths open, tongues greedily searching for each own´s taste on each other, both of them eager to mix them together, to create something new that would be nothing except Theo and Liam.

Their kiss was the hottest thing, but considering that Theo had gotten them off to resolve the tension, to calm them down enough so they could drive home, it wasn't very helpful. Liam at least was hardly able to drive. His pants were still hanging around his ankles, his dick still hard, or again? Or was he just constantly aroused in Theo´s presence? Probably the latter.

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Theo wanted to get Liam home as fast as possible. He really did. If they were finally going to do this, they were sure as hell going to do it right, in a bed, safe from lawn sprinklers or other potential interruptions, with access to enough lube - and condoms. Not getting carried away by Liam´s tongue on his own, by the heat burning between their bodies was one of the greatest challenges of his life - had been for an eternity now - but it was very important. Theo was not going to fuck things with Liam up. It was hard, and he had no idea what he was doing, since he'd never taken anything that serious before, but he was determined, willing to be everything that Liam needed.

“Captain,” he said, barely able to pull his lips away from Liam´s, putting all the love he felt for that boy in one single word, and there was a lot of that in him. He could feel Liam chuckle, all resistance against the nickname gone.

“Let me take you home,” Theo proposed. It was too dark outside. He wanted Liam splayed out on top of their bed, wanted to take one piece of clothing after the other off of him, wanted to see the show that Liam´s colors were going to put on for him beneath the smooth skin. He wanted to drag his fingers through the light brown hair on Liam's chest. God, how much he loved that chest hair.

“Are you sure?” Liam asked, moving a little closer until Theo could feel how hard he was, not that Theo´s own state was any less… urgent.

He swallowed hard. He shouldn't have looked down to where their dicks were touching, Liam's still glistening wetly. “No, Liam,” he pressed out, “I´m not sure, obviously.”

Liam let out a little laugh. When Theo leaned back a little to look at him, he was convinced he
could see stars shining from Liam´s cheeks. He brought his hands up to his face and let his thumbs stroke over them, a light beard stubble tickling his palms, Liam's eyes shining like nothing else in the entire universe.

Theo pecked his lips carefully, his eyes opening to a faint yellow-y shimmer dancing over Liam's face like a shooting star before it was gone just a second later. Theo looked up into the night sky for a moment, the moon full and white, bathing Liam in a pretty, soft light. Not one cloud was visible over Beacon Hills that night, only stars, but shining the most beautifully at that moment were still Liam's eyes.

“Compared to the moon,” Theo whispered, watching those little wrinkles in the corners of Liam's eyes appear as he began to smile immediately, “your eyes are so much brighter.”

“One day, Theo,” Liam giggled, “I promise you, I’ll be the one to make you feel that way.”

“Stop that,” Liam giggled, an aggressive blush appearing on his cheeks and his neck, mixing with the red of his mark, but Theo couldn´t stop. He had things to say, and he was terrified to speak them out, but nothing, absolutely nothing in the whole world scared him more than the thought of not saying them.

“You eyes are the only stars that I look for every night, that I need to shine from the sky of my life to be okay,” he continued. He was sounding stupid. Overly sappy. Completely ridiculous. But there were so many feelings inside him, and Theo was done with bottling them up. Absolutely done.

“You’re the most beautiful person that has ever existed,” he said, his eyes locked with Liam’s, that were widening with every other word, and he loved it, wished he had the words to keep talking forever, his hands holding the most precious treasure between them.

“You're perfect, Liam,” Theo kept on, “perfect. I don't know what my life would be without you. Or, I do know. It would be the same as it used to be for so many years, and I couldn't stand that. I don't know how I deserve you, but I don’t care anymore. I will never leave you again. I will never let you go. I belong to you. I’m yours. I…-”

He exhaled deeply. He was ready to say it. He’d practically said it before, using so many different words. He’d heard Liam say it, too, using different words as well.

“I know,” Liam replied with a loving smile. “Me too.”

Theo would have laughed out loud at the mess that was his life. The fact that they were standing
leaned against the truck in the high school parking space in the middle of the night, grass stains on Liam´s good shirt, Theo´s dick out, Liam's pants down, both of them hard, but too lost in their unspoken confessions, would be hilarious, except that it was so unbelievably real that it wasn´t just funny - it was soul consuming. It was the best thing Theo had never wished for.

Theo wanted to say something. A part of him wanted to object, wanted to tell Liam that no, what he had to say wasn't something you could answer with a “me too”, because there simply was no way for Liam to possibly feel the same as he hid, but instead, he pulled Liam closer and into a hug. Sometimes, words weren't big enough. Sometimes, there was nothing left but closeness. Nothing but feeling Liam's chest heaving and sinking against his own, sharing their body warmth, breathing each other in, letting each other consume them, being powerless, and utterly content with it.

Liam breathed against Theo´s neck, his arms wrapped tightly around him, his fingers found their way between his ribs. At home in Liam's arms again. Theo couldn’t be more happy.

Liam obviously could, nudging Theo with a little poke of his hips.

“Romance is over, huh?” Theo joked, but he wasn't really complaining. He kissed the top of Liam's head. He was so in love.

“I can totally touch your dick all romantically,” Liam replied dryly.

“I feel like we were talking about getting home first,” Theo pointed out. They could already be in bed if only they hadn't let themselves get distracted.

“I feel like the night is young and we´ve got all the time,” Liam smirked, one hand sneaking beneath Theo´s sweater, rubbing over his stomach, getting a little lower with every circle that his fingers drew.

“God, Liam,” Theo moaned. It had been hard enough before. He had been hard enough. Yet, he was getting even harder.

“What?” Liam shrugged. “You made me wait long enough,” he explained, “it's not my fault I’m this horny now. That's all on you.”

Theo laughed. Only Liam could actually make him feel a little bad about that. “Oh, excuse me for
wanting to make our first time special,” he chuckled.

Liam laughed, too, but then he turned serious, his voice low and his hand lower, fingers dragging down across Theo´s skin until they were wrapped around the base of his dick. “It would have been special anyway,” Liam whispered, “perfect, actually. Because it only takes one thing for it to be perfect. You.”

Theo groaned loudly, not knowing whether it was Liam’s words or his hand moving around Theo’s cock that sent a shiver down his spine. Memories came back to him. Memories of Liam whispering “happy birthday” while getting down on his knees. Theo hadn’t let Liam touch him like that again. Everything that had happened after his birthday had been solely focused on giving Liam pleasure, by his own choice. But with Liam's hand on him, Theo was so weak, he couldn't have stopped him to save his life. To save Liam’s, he still would have, but that was not the point.

“Liam,” he moaned, “I can’t believe I’m actually saying this, but please don´t stop.”

“Music to my ears,” Liam mumbled, busy sucking bruises into Theo’s neck. Theo was far too old to get excited about carrying hickeys around. Seriously. He wasn’t a thirteen-year-old girl. Still, he couldn’t shake the thought that those were the only marks he was going to bear - the ones that Liam was leaving on him, and somehow it made him accept the fact that he was otherwise white as the moon above them.

Theo didn’t know how, or when, only that suddenly the door of his truck was open, and he was shoved inside and onto the backseat, Liam’s hand never leaving his body, two pairs of pants magically flying to the passenger seat.

“Take your sweater off,” Liam growled while jerking Theo’s cock until Theo could almost see stars.

Theo did as he was told, but he couldn’t stop there, he had to get rid of Liam´s open shirt too, just so even when the light was dim, he could still see him properly. It was a sight of incomparable beauty, Liam leaning down above him, yellow moons and stars covering his shoulders, blue waves crashing together in the middle of his chest, the middle of the deep red streak down his spine suddenly appearing in a dark green. An orange spiral wrapped itself around his right arm, ending in a purple cloud where the arm ended and the shoulder began.

Theo let his hands wander, watching the colors make way for his touches and then densing around his fingertips, moving in the strangest ways until Theo suddenly understood that the marks were actually showing him a way. Liam was kneeling between Theo´s spread legs, making him lose
more and more control by pumping his dick, his muscles twitching beneath the colors and Theo’s fingers.

“How are you real?” Theo breathed out, his hand roaming, following a red trail up Liam’s arm, drawing a little circle around every single one of the little moons he passed on his way.

“Just like this,” Liam replied smugly, fastening his pace.

Theo continued to marvel, his fingers stroking Liam’s shoulder, moving down to the front of his chest, the soft hair tickling his fingertips, led by red and yellow until his palm was placed flat above Liam’s beating heart. He was real. And so alive.

There was so much more to see, so much more to discover beneath Liam’s skin. The boy was like an entire museum of artistic masterpieces, a new one coming to life with every tiny little reaction from his body to the world around him. Theo was sure there would never be anything more fascinating to him, and yet, he soon reached the point where it became hard to focus on the colors.

Liam leaned down and kissed Theo hungrily, his tongue diving into his mouth in the same rhythm that his hand had set around his cock. The feeling was so overwhelmingly good that Theo even forgot he was supposed to be the one giving Liam pleasure, so he simply dug his fingernails into Liam’s shoulder and the backseat, his bare ass tensing up as he felt another orgasm approaching.

“Fuck,” he moaned, “Liam. What are you doing to me?” And then the words he wanted to say became nothing more than noises when Liam moved his lips down along his neck again, and further down, until they closed around one of his nipples and Theo pressed his eyes shut, arched his back like all forces of nature were drawing him towards Liam, and then he started trembling, absolutely out of control in Liam’s magical hands.

“You taste so good, Theo,” Liam whispered, hot breath catching on Theo’s wet and hard nipple, making him shiver and squirm. “I need more of you. And you’re not going to deny me any longer.”

He bit down, causing Theo to cry out, being oh so close, and then Liam kissed his way down Theo’s stomach, following the path of the happy trail that suddenly became a very, very happy trail. His hand tightened, moving just barely up and down, but quickly, and when Theo could feel himself falling over, he looked down for the one thing to hold onto, just in the same moment when Liam looked up, blue meeting green, and that was it. When Liam brought his tongue out, opening his mouth so that Theo could feel the wet heat against his tip, he knew that he could have come from that just as easily, but he was already there, and so he groaned out his satisfaction as he shot his load into Liam’s waiting mouth.
With Liam lapping up every last drop, eyes glistening, fingers soft at his sides, Theo almost thought his orgasm would never end. Moments later, he relaxed his ass and let it fall back down into the seat, his vision fogged up, his legs still trembling, his hands pulling Liam down on top of him by the shoulders.

“Liam,” he sighed, and all he wanted in that moment was to fall asleep with the love of his life on top of him, breathing against his skin. Theo had never been a dreamer, but at another time, that had been because he’d been convinced his dreams wouldn’t have a chance to ever come true. With Liam in his arms, there simply was nothing more in life to wish for. Nothing, except for a warm bed and that night to never end.

“Theo,” Liam mumbled back, his eyes closed.

“Baby,” Theo said, watching the corner of Liam’s mouth quirk up from the nickname, “I know I said this before, but let’s go home for real now.”

“I don’t want this to be over,” Liam replied lazily.

“Oh, this is far from over,” Theo smiled, his fingers stroking through Liam’s soft hair. Liam snorted.

“What are you laughing at, Captain?” Theo demanded with a smile. He wasn't complaining. Liam laughing was the most beautiful thing ever, and he would have spent the rest of his life making a fool out of himself for it.

“You playing with my hair again,” Liam answered, “are you even aware that you do that all the time?”

Truth be told, Theo hadn’t been aware, but his life was long changed by then. His body was so used to being around Liam, it was drawn to the other boy, his hands finding their way into his hair by instinct. Them being together was his normalcy. Theo knew there had been a time when he had escaped stranger’s apartments before sunrise, when falling asleep had been almost impossible with an arm slung around him. There had been a time when human contact had almost pained him, had cost him all his energy. But that time was nothing more than a memory.

“You don’t have the slightest idea how much you’ve changed my life, Liam,” Theo breathed out.
“Like you’ve changed mine?” Liam answered.

“No,” Theo shook his head, “I highly doubt that.” And then he was up, pushing Liam off of him gently, climbing out of the car and getting dressed. There was a thing that needed to be done. A thing that may only have been waiting for Theo to be ready at last.

“I’ll get you home,” he declared as he climbed behind the steering wheel, seeing Liam’s confused look in the mirror, “there’s just one thing I have to get off my chest first.”

Liam was busy getting dressed in the backseat as Theo drove, and then he leaned forward and massaged his shoulders lovingly, but Theo still tensed up with every bit they got closer.

“What are we leaving town for?” Liam wanted to know.

“We're not,” Theo replied, hitting the brakes and bringing the truck to a halt. He exhaled deeply and got out with shaking hands. The air of the night felt just a little colder than before. He could hear Liam’s steps behind him as he moved towards the bridge’s edge slowly, a lump forming in his throat, but the words still pressing to get out.

“Ten years ago,” he started, his voice weak and shaky, but he couldn’t let that stop him. Liam put a reassuring hand on his back. “Ten years ago,” he repeated, “months after Tara had died, my parents decided they couldn’t stay in Beacon Hills anymore. We took this bridge out of town.” He swallowed. He felt like crying, but not a tear escaped his eyes. “But the only one who’s ever really left is me.”

Liam’s arms wrapped around him warmly. He was right by Theo’s side, looking down into the same waves of the same river.

“This is where your parents died.”

Theo nodded, but Liam didn’t need an answer. His fingers squeezed at Theo’s side. “You’re the bravest person I know,” he whispered.

And then the tears finally fell, simply because it all seemed so twisted. He was still the kid who’d
run away, wasn’t he? Away from Beacon Hills, away from Liam. Away from serious plans for a future. How was that brave?

“Because you’re still here,” Liam continued, apparently knowing exactly what Theo was thinking. “And because you’re still kind, although life has been returning that favor rarely enough to you.”

Theo sniffled. “I only wish it hadn’t taken so many fuck-ups to get here.”

“Theo,” Liam said softly, “you were just a kid. You weren’t supposed to be alone. You were supposed to have a sister, and parents to take care of you. You were supposed to be happy and carefree and loved.”

Theo could barely stop himself from sobbing. He was happy and carefree and loved. He was. But Liam wasn’t done yet.

“I can’t even imagine your life. I-”

“My life is wonderful,” Theo smiled. He knew what Liam meant, but what he’d gone through before didn’t matter anymore. It no longer held power over him.

Liam turned his head to press a kiss on his cheek before he looked down into the water again, but Theo knew there was nothing to see there. Maybe he should have waited a little longer before running away a decade ago, but the time for waiting was over. “Let’s go home,” he said. They held each other’s hand during the whole ride, Theo’s hand on top of Liam’s on the gearshift, which would have felt ridiculous, if it hadn’t been so important to keep the connection.

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Liam almost sighed in relief when they were finally home, pulling up in the driveway that was still empty of David’s car. He remembered his Mom telling him about their plans for the night earlier, but he couldn’t recall what those plans had been. He didn’t care about it. Liam only cared about being home with Theo, about closing the door of his bedroom behind them and forgetting the world that lay outside of it, about all the time they finally had for each other, and all the things they could do with it.

He looked over at Theo eagerly undoing his seatbelt, and he commented on it, but he thought better
of it in the end, simply getting out of the car and inside the house with a smile on his face and Theo’s hand in his own, dragging his boyfriend right inside and upstairs without letting him take off his shoes, or his jacket. He’d take care of all the unnecessary clothing soon enough.

“You know what I was just thinking?” Theo suddenly asked, surprising Liam a little bit by his will to share his thoughts.

“What is it?” Liam wanted to know, squeezing Theo’s hand in encouragement to talk to him, to tell him everything he wanted.

Theo spoke quietly, but with amusement in his tone. “I was just thinking about the first time I came here. About how strange it felt to walk up those stairs. I felt like an intruder. Everything I saw of your life - your bedroom, all your books and your clothes and all that stuff lying around on your carpet, your bathroom, hell, the used towel hanging from your chair - it all felt like I wasn’t allowed to see it. Like it was all so much of a normal life, and deep down inside I knew that it wasn’t for me.”

“Wow,” Liam replied, “that is… sad.” It was. Even back then, when he hadn’t known what his strange feelings for Theo meant, when his offer to let Theo live with him had been more out of a bad conscience than genuine friendship, even then, he hadn’t lost one thought over Theo being there in the middle of his life, seeing the chaos, all of it. He’d slept right next to him at night, vulnerable and defenseless, and it hadn’t bothered him at all.

“It’s not sad,” Theo shook his head with a smile, pulling Liam close enough to understand his whispering, “because I don’t feel that way anymore. I was just thinking about how I don’t have to watch the stairs when I climb them. How it feels the most natural to go to this room after coming home. I was just thinking that I want to make love to you on our bed.”

Liam smiled a content smile. There was nothing more to say, so he simply slung his arms around Theo’s waist and pulled him closer, hugging him tight so that their hearts were beating against each other’s chest as they shuffled towards the bed, a foot kicking the door shut behind them, hands busy tugging at each other’s clothes.

Theo let his jacket and sweater fall to the ground and whirled them both around, his broad chest smooth and warm beneath Liam’s fingertips. Liam let himself fall back down onto the mattress when his legs hit the bed frame, leaning on his elbows and looking up to his boyfriend standing there, drinking in the sight. He’d done this before, leaning back and letting his eyes sway over Theo’s bare torso, drinking in every inch, watching the images inked beneath his skin like a children’s book.
There were the wild ranks and patterns wrapping around his arms like dark sleeves, interrupted for the double-circle right below his elbow. There were the waves of the river flowing across his chest with the little bridge over it, ending in a dark whirl over Theo’s heart, in forever lasting memory of his beloved sister. There was the angel with the fangs stretching across his entire stomach, and the baby in its arms, helpless and at the mercy of a life that didn’t stop for anybody, that sometimes showed the fangs more clearly than it lifted you up with its wings. There were the coordinates of Beacon Hills behind Theo’s right ear, marking a place that was his home, his personal hell, and then again, his home.

On the other side, covering the softness of Theo’s neck, there was the tattoo that’s ink was still a little darker than the others, the jersey with the number nine, the one that Theo had gotten for Liam alone, and somehow, although Liam generally appreciated all of Theo’s tattoos very much, somehow, that one bore so much more meaning, or maybe not somehow.

Other than Liam with his colors, Theo had chosen every single one of the images he wore beneath his skin. He’d thought them all through, and he carried them around with pride, and they were all wanted, and that meant that Liam was wanted. Wanted at a special place on Theo, wanted where everybody could see it. Where it would stay forever. That tattoo meant commitment, and Liam knew that commitment hadn’t exactly been a big thing in Theo’s life so far, and he knew that however what they had in that moment would end, they had changed each other’s life for good, and neither of them were ever going to be able to go back to who they’d been before.

“You know what I was just thinking?” Liam asked with a cocky grin, repeating Theo’s words from just minutes before.

“Tell me,” Theo smiled in response while kicking his shoes away and peeling off his socks. Every damn movement of his body looked so endlessly graceful, it was hardly fair to a mere mortal like Liam.

“I was just thinking about how I lost my first video game to Mason because I kept getting distracted by you when you were fresh out of the shower,” he said. Back then, he’d tried to hide his staring, but he didn’t have to do that anymore. He didn’t want to do that anymore. He wanted Theo to know exactly how turned on he was, although his boner made that pretty obvious already.

“Yeah, no shit, Captain,” Theo laughed as he came closer and leaned above Liam, “I totally noticed that.”

Liam laughed along with him, it was too late for embarrassment anyway, but his laughter was soon drowned in soft kisses. And then soft turned into passionate, and then passionate turned into demanding, and then demanding turned into hungry, and then all there was were tongues and teeth and loud moaning, Liam’s hands in Theo’s hair and Theo’s body moving up onto the bed as well,
knees placed at either side of Liam’s hips so that he was sitting on his lap, their dicks rubbing together through pants that needed to go away immediately.

“Theo,” Liam groaned, his hands sliding down along his strong back and beneath the waistband of his underwear, kneading the flesh there with greedy fingers. “Strip,” he simply commanded. “Now.”

“Still hungry, huh?” Theo remarked with raised eyebrows, but Liam didn’t return his smile. It wasn’t even funny for him anymore. Damn right he was still hungry. More than ever before. He’d had those needs for so many months by then, and even after Theo had come back home to him, even after they’d made their relationship an official thing, even after things had started to happen regularly, none of it was enough for Liam.

“Theo,” Liam whined, and Theo got up to his feet, pulled in own pants down hurriedly, his briefs following them onto the floor, his hard cock bouncing against his stomach as he reached out to undo the buttons of Liam’s jeans as well, being gentle as always, taking things slow even when Liam lifted his ass off the bed to grant him easier access, throwing his head back with a moan when his dick was finally freed.

“Do you have any idea how many times I’ve imagined this while I was in the shower?” Theo panted, his eyes glued to the glistening tip of Liam’s dick while his tongue came out to lick over his lips.

“Yeah,” Liam nodded in agreement. Actually, he had a pretty good idea. “Or while jerking off in the bathroom at school.”

“I the car after lacrosse practice,” Theo admitted. Liam couldn’t say he was surprised, considering his own growing need to get off, but the thought of Theo sitting in the car jerking off while thinking about him turned him on so much more than he already was, and for the record, he was pretty turned on.

“At night when you were sleeping,” Liam added, drawing boldness from the fact that they seemed to have gone through a similar struggle over the previous weeks.


“Because we’re both idiots?” was Liam’s best guess.
“Yep,” Theo laughed, “but we stop that shit now, okay?”

“Oh, we stop that shit so hard now,” Liam grinned before he grabbed Theo by the shoulders and pulled him down on top of him. His skin was on fire where Theo was touching him, soft and loving fingers exploring Liam’s body, his colors chasing Theo’s touch, the soft pressure of Theo’s thighs on his own absolutely maddening, the taste of their joined lips the best thing Liam knew. At least until Theo pushed him down onto his back and began sucking on his neck.

This was what life with Theo was like, thinking that things couldn’t be more perfect, only for him to go and prove Liam wrong with the next thing he did. Liam was losing his goddamn mind in Theo’s hands, but he gladly let it happen, sighing out his contentment, practically melting.

Theo’s cock was brushing against his own again and again as Theo moved above him, his lips nibbling at Liam’s neck, his teeth scraping over the sharp collarbone, his tongue dragging through the soft chest hair, his eyes looking up and catching Liam’s as his lips closed around one of his nipples.

Liam whimpered and laced his fingers through Theo’s hair again in a desperate attempt to keep his head right where it was, not that Theo was planning to leave Liam’s sensitive nipple alone, no. He licked over it until Liam arched his back towards him, sucked it between his lips, bit down carefully, looking up to search Liam’s face for his reactions to everything he did.

“Theo,” Liam begged, bucking his hips helplessly, not really getting anything out of it with the way Theo was straddling him.


Liam didn’t know how. He just knew that he wanted. That he needed. What exactly, Liam wasn’t so sure about, and how could he have been? He hadn’t exactly done this before. He didn’t know what he liked and disliked. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do. All he knew was that Theo seemed to get it all right by instinct, and he trusted Theo.

His boyfriend, though, didn’t let him get through with that.

“I know how you feel,” Theo commented on Liam’s desperate writhing against him. “And I’ve got you, Liam.” He leaned in for a kiss, soft and reassuring. “But there can only be one first time,” he
continued, “and I’m not risking it being anything other than exactly what you want. So you’ll have to tell me. Tell me what you want. How did you imagine this...” he looked down to where their dicks were touching- “...to happen?”

“Oh,” Liam gulped. Was Theo asking him whether he wanted to fuck or get fucked? His palms turned sweaty all of a sudden. He’d thought about it so many times, imagining their first time both ways, aware that he should probably decide for himself which one he liked to happen, but he hadn’t really made it to a conclusion.

Liam tried to think, but of course everything became too much in that moment, which Theo could tell by just a look in his eyes.

“Hey,” he said, bringing one hand to Liam’s face and stroking his cheek. “It’s okay, we won’t do anything you don’t want to happen.”

“But I do want things to happen!” Liam blurted out. It was the truth. He was ready. He wanted to go all the way. “I’m just not very familiar with the technicalities,” he added more quietly, seeing the red spreading on his own chest.

“Is this weird for you?” Theo asked. “The thought of having sex with a guy?”

“No,” Liam shook his head.

Truth be told, it was very weird, but the reason that it was weird was the same reason that it was special and thrillingly exciting, goosebumps-causing and wonderful. Because it wasn’t just sex, and it wasn’t just with anybody. It was Theo and him, the invisible walls separating them finally gone, no distance left between them, no secrets, just things they hadn’t gotten around to telling each other.

“Look,” Theo whispered gently, “in some way, this is the first time for me, too.”

Liam looked at him curiously. Judging from the way Theo had touched him before, he could hardly be a virgin.

“I’ve never had sex with a person I was in love with,” Theo explained. Liam’s heartbeat became a rollercoaster.
“Does that make you nervous?” Liam asked.

“Honestly,” Theo replied, his eyes wide open and miraculously green, “I’m totally shitting my non-existent pants right now.”

“Why?” Liam breathed out. “Everything you do to me feels like I’m in fucking heaven.”

“Because I’m scared of making you feel uncomfortable,” Theo answered, “or hurting you.”

“You could never,” Liam objected vehemently without a second of hesitation.

Before Theo could say another word, Liam lifted his back off the bed and pressed his lips on Theo’s, pulling him down with one hand in his neck. Maybe they were both new to what was happening between them. Maybe they were both scared. But there was no way on earth and beyond that their first time would be anything other than incredible. Perfect, even. Yeah, perfect was definitely not too far to go. This was Theo after all.

“Can we try it out?” Liam asked bravely. He wasn’t going to let this chance slip because Theo believed he wasn’t doing good enough.

“Sure,” Theo nodded before he asked, “what exactly do you mean?”

Liam tried avoiding his eyes, which was hard with how intensely he could feel Theo’s stare tingling on his probably bright red face. “I mean… I…”

“You mean you’re not sure you want to be fucked in the ass,” Theo concluded his embarrassed stutter.

Liam shrugged and blushed even harder. When Theo said it like that, it sounded like he didn’t believe Theo was going to make it feel good for him, which deep down inside, he definitely did.

“I’m sorry, it’s just…”
“No,” Theo shook his head with a smile, hands warm and soft around Liam’s face. “Don’t you dare apologize. You’ve simply never done it before, there’s nothing to be ashamed about. And if you don’t want me to fuck you, that’s fine, I’ll gladly have my world rocked by you.”

“Theo,” Liam giggled shyly. How could he just go and say things like that, and so nonchalantly?

“What?” Theo asked with a laugh, and then turned quiet, whispering. “I can’t wait to see in how many more ways you’re going to change my life tonight.”

And that was the moment where Liam decided the time for talking was over. God, did he love Theo. And there they were, back in the bed that was now theirs, naked and vulnerable and full of trust in the other. They kissed and kissed and kissed and touched, until Liam grew impatient and flipped them over, showering Theo’s gorgeous body in endless kisses, testing which spots he had to flick his tongue over to make him moan.

Liam settled on his knees between Theo’s spread legs, but then he remembered the bottle hidden in the bottom drawer of his dresser, right between his underwear and socks.

“You have lube, right?” Theo said with one eyebrow raised at the dresser. Not that he was wrong, but how the hell could he have known?

Liam’s confusion must have been written across his forehead, because Theo suddenly burst out in laughter. “You didn’t think I wasn’t going to steal a pair of socks at some point, did you?” Theo asked.

“Oh,” Liam made. That explained a lot. “So you found it.”

“Yeah,” Theo nodded. “Oh and there are condoms in the drawer above it. Beneath my underwear.”

Liam got up and walked over to grab the bottle and condoms from the dresser, playing with them in his hands on his way back to Theo on the bed. “So you knew I was… prepared, and you still denied me?” he summed up the events and non-events of the previous weeks. “That is so rude.” Despite the accusing words, Liam smiled. He understood why. And it hardly mattered anymore. Not when they were finally about to do it.
“Shut up and put your hands on me,” Theo laughed. Never in his life had Liam obliged to anything more willingly.

Theo’s legs spread wider apart as he kneeled down before him, kissing Theo hungrily while coating his fingers in lube, nibbling his way down Theo’s incredible body and placing a quick peck on the tip of his dick.

“You have to tell me if I’m doing this right,” Liam pleaded, looking up and searching for Theo’s eyes. Suddenly, he understood why Theo hadn’t just given in to his physical urges about him. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t,” Theo reassured him calmly. “Just go slow and be careful.”

Liam nodded. He looked down, marveling at how hard Theo was, and how soft the insides of his thighs looked, so he kissed them, both sides, earning a soft whimper. The round globes of Theo’s ass looked perfect like that, splayed out on the mattress before him, the pink puckered hole in the middle waiting, only for Liam. He brought up one of his slick fingers and dragged the tip over it carefully, barely touching Theo, but still causing a moan to escape his lips.

Encouraged by Theo’s reaction, Liam repeated the movement a few times, teasing the tight ring of muscle until it was thoroughly slicked up, and then he increased the pressure of his finger against it, all the while kissing the soft flesh around it.

“Damn, Liam,” Theo panted from above, “that feels so fucking good already.”

Theo’s praise was music to his turned on ears, but Liam knew they both needed more soon, so he pressed his digit against Theo’s hole until he could feel it giving way to him, and then a quick tremble went through Theo’s legs, accompanied by a strangled whine. It was just one finger, Liam thought, and his dick wasn’t exactly small or thin, and he couldn’t help but be a little worried, but he knew it was all a matter of good preparation, so he started moving his finger around inside of Theo, drawing circles, massaging his inner walls, pushing deeper inside and pulling out again, only to repeat the same routine over and over again until Theo was a writhing mess around his finger.

“More, Liam,” Theo demanded impatiently, his body moving to push down against him. “You’re making me feel so good. I need more of you.”

The praising words almost felt like being touched himself. With all the caution his turned on body
could muster, Liam added a second finger, feeling Theo’s rim stretching around him, listening to obscene groaning as he set a steady rhythm pushing inside.

“You’re doing good, baby,” Theo moaned, “you’re doing incredible. I feel like fucking exploding.”

Liam wasn’t sure whether he was supposed to feel that proud hearing those words, but he did. Theo was pressing his eyes shut, his fingers digging into the sheets, his body moving restlessly, his breathing ragged and heavy, the sweetest sounds falling from his lips, and all of that was caused only by him. Still, there had to be more.

As gently as possible in spite of Theo’s wild thrashing around, Liam pushed another finger inside, but there wasn’t nearly as much resistance as before. Theo moved up and down, fucking himself onto his fingers like they were made for that exact purpose while Liam sucked on his thigh, feeling his own cock aching and twitching and demanding attention. The condom was lying right there next to him.

“As amazing as this is,” Theo pressed out between heavy breaths and sweet moans, “you really shouldn’t let me have all the fun alone.” He then sat up, leaned forward and captured Liam’s lips in a kiss, soft and warm and tasting like a promise.

Liam was trembling with fear and love and excitement. Theo took the condom out of his hands and rolled it down over his cock, and then they were kissing again, their lips never leaving each other, their breathing one as Liam laid Theo back down and lined up with his entrance, pushing carefully, feeling Theo’s nails digging into his thigh to pull him closer, and they kissed and kissed and breathed and then both stopped for a few seconds as Liam was pushing inside slowly.

He could see his fingers turning red and blue and green and purple, even orange at either side of Theo’s head, and stripes curled up his arms from there in color, and an entire galaxy of yellow stars appeared, covering his skin everywhere he could see. The red was more alive than ever in his back, but also different, more intense, but still not able to draw Liam’s focus away from where Theo’s ass was stretching around him.

“Fuck,” Liam pressed out, “Theo, fuck, this is the best thing ever.”

“It is,” Theo replied, whispering against Liam’s trembling lips. “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me. You’re the best part of my life.”
Liam couldn’t believe the words he was hearing. It was almost comical, Theo walking right into his life with all the mysteries about him, turning everything into beautiful chaos, making Liam feel so many things he hadn’t been ready to feel, consuming his entire soul, painting colors beneath Liam’s skin that had never been there before, and then saying stuff like that.

They barely moved at first, the shaking of both their bodies creating enough friction between them, but soon it wasn’t enough anymore, and Liam had to will himself to go slow with all the strength he had in him, pushing all the way inside Theo, rolling his hips against his soft flesh, relishing the tightness and the heat and the way Theo reacted to every move he made with a flinch or a twitch or a noise. Or all at once.

And then, urged by Theo’s hands on him, Liam started to move, pulling out almost entirely, pushing back inside, kissing him deeply, letting Theo’s demanding tongue convince him to fasten the pace, growling and moaning with the damn endless pleasure that came with fucking into Theo’s ass again and again. And again. And then the feeling changed, and gentle, loving movements became hard and fast thrusts, and kisses turned into open-mouthed panting, and words became noises, and the world slowly dissolved around them, and all there was left was their connection, and a firework of colors, and it didn’t matter where they colors came from, because they were finally one.

Theo lifted his legs further up and crossed his ankles behind Liam’s back, pushing him closer with a heel against Liam’s ass, not that much more closeness was even possible. The changed position offered Liam a better angle, judging by the shudder that went through Theo’s body with every hit inside.

“Fuck, Liam,” he moaned, “this is fucking it.”

A look into Theo’s eyes had Liam wondering what that it was and what it felt like. Sure, he was close to combusting himself, and Theo’s ass clenching around him every now and again was the best thing he’d ever felt, but he couldn’t stop wondering if there were even better feelings. It physically pained Liam to stop and pull out, and the same seemed to count for Theo, who looked up with a shocked whine, a brief flash of complaint in his eyes, but more than that - concern.

“Everything okay?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Liam nodded quickly, feeling stupid for making him worry. “Everything is perfect.” He kissed his boyfriend deeply, groping his shoulders greedily, not knowing how to say what he wanted, but the need was bigger than the shame in the end.
“When you just said this is it,” he began, exhaled deeply before he continued, “I realized I do want to know. Show me what it feels like, Theo.”

And with those words he climbed off of Theo, pulled off the condom, got on his hands and knees, looking back over his shoulder at the other boy, unable to hold back a grin at Theo’s expression, a perfect mixture of surprise and lust.

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“Are you sure?” he checks again.

“Are you sure?” he checks again.

“Never been more sure about anything in my life,” Liam replied, wiggling his ass in a little invitation.

It took Theo a second to process the sight in front of him, and Liam felt strangely proud at that, but truth be told, he didn’t have much time to wait in that moment. “So, are you just going to stare and drool, or are you actually going to fuck me?” he teased.

Theo snapped out of his daydream and back into the reality where Liam had just begged him to put his dick inside him. From that moment, it only took him two seconds to appear behind Liam with a condom rolled down onto his cock and the bottle of lube uncapped in his hands. “How did you know that this is basically what all my wet dreams revolve around?”

Liam almost laughed out loud. Was it really possible that they’d been sleeping next to each other, sharing a bed, dreaming about the exact same thing, but never telling each other, let alone doing something about it.

Those times were over, though, as Theo made perfectly clear by putting his big warm hands on Liam’s ass, spreading the cheeks apart, letting out an audible gasp before leaning down and kissing the small of Liam’s back, sucking on the skin where his ass began, kneading his flesh, dragging his tongue down, drawing wet circles into Liam’s skin, lower, lower, and Liam knew every next thing that would happen could as well have been the end of him, clenching his fists around the sheets, trying to keep calm while Theo’s touches were driving him insane.

“You don’t know how beautiful you are,” Theo murmured against his ass. “So fucking perfect. So damn incredible. I want to eat you up.”

Liam groaned, pushing his ass further back and into Theo’s hands, silently begging for more. He could feel his breath ghosting over his hole, tingling and teasing, feeling unfamiliar and a little
Strange, but not at all unpleasant. Liam whimpered and bit down into the sheets as the warm air was replaced by a slick tongue gently stroking over his rim, wetting and teasing it, filling his entire being up with something that was both satisfaction and the exact opposite, the maddening craving for infinitely much more.

“Does this feel okay?” Theo wanted to know, and in that moment Liam regretted his earlier reservations about letting Theo do things to his ass, because if his tongue on him was any indication, Liam was about to have the night of his damn life.

“No, Theo, it doesn’t feel okay,” Liam whined, “it feels fucking incredible and I need more right the fuck now.”

He heard Theo chuckle behind him, but only briefly, and then his hands were massaging Liam’s ass again, exposing his hole to Theo’s hungry mouth. The next time he made contact there was no careful licking, no gentle strokes and soft pressure. There were greedy slicked up fingers teasing him, lips closing around his rim and sucking, causing Liam to arch his back and cry out and send a silent prayer to heaven that he wouldn’t come before they could get to the really good part.

Theo held Liam’s trembling ass in place and sucked while moaning, sending vibrations through Liam’s body that made his arms go weak, so Liam lowered his chest onto the mattress, his ass high up in the air, giving Theo the best possible access, being rewarded by Theo’s tongue pushing inside him.

It wasn’t like he hadn’t imagined that exact thing being done to be before. It wasn’t like he hadn’t imagined it being Theo to do it to him. It was just that no fantasy could have prepared him for the feeling, for the burning that came with being stretched open, and the incredible waves of lust and pleasure it sent through him. The colors on his fingers were moving so quickly that he got dizzy looking at them, so he pressed his eyes shut and moaned around them, biting down roughly in order to hold it in, for a tiny little bit longer at least.

Theo took more time with him than Liam thought he had, pulling out and pushing in, licking, sucking, moving in circles, coaxing him open, soothing the minor pain with kisses and a lot of lube. Liam was fucking gone on him, was rocking his hips, not caring about the fact that he was fucking his practically virginal ass onto a guy’s tongue. He was in heaven, and yet, he was soaring, flying a little higher with every second.

He panted and groaned and squirmed, let out little pleas for god knows what, except that actually, it was Theo who knew what, and so he dribbled yet more lube onto Liam’s hole, and then one finger was inside him, and a tongue right around it, and Liam wanted nothing more than to feel what Theo’s cock could do to him, and he didn’t even know how many fingers exactly he had in him at some point, because the sensation was so far from everything he knew, from anything he
could possibly have understood in his head.

“Theo,” he groaned. He wanted and needed and couldn’t wait. It was like being pushed towards an edge without seeing it, only feeling that the air was getting thinner, that control was slipping out of his hands, that falling over was inevitable.

“Tell me that you want me,” Theo begged, kissing Liam’s spine that he could feel was burning red.

“I want you,” Liam breathed out. His voice sounded so unfamiliar to his own ears, endlessly turned on, gone beyond the hope of getting back down to earth. “I want you, Theo. I want you to touch me. I want you to be inside me. I want you to love me.”

Theo moaned and moaned as he listened, and then let out just a little whimper when Liam said *I want you to love me*. And then he wrapped his arms around Liam’s heaving chest, pulled him up so that they were pressed flush together, holding Liam tight against his beating heart with one strong arm, guiding his cock where it belonged with the other.

Liam craned his neck, begging for a kiss with only one look in Theo’s eyes, and his boyfriend, his lover, his damn freaking soulmate understood, complied, met him in the middle, leaned forward as he captured Liam’s lips in a kiss, sharing the air that they both had to struggle for as Theo finally, finally, pushed inside.

“Oh boy,” Liam pressed out before he had even bottomed out, “this is not going to last long, I’m afraid.”

“Nope,” Theo agreed while panting. He was being so soft with Liam, stroking his chest and kissing his neck, whispering sweet nothings in his ear, pushing inside slowly, pulling out with even greater caution, rolling his hips in wide circles.

Liam was sure he was making all kinds of obscene noises, but he was feeling too much at once to be able to pay attention to that, he only knew the flames inside his gut turning from red to blue, about to set off a firework, and then he shifted just an inch on his knees, but the mere change in their position caused Theo to hit a spot that Liam would later call his little heaven inside. Suddenly, he knew what Theo had meant by *this is is*.

Yes, this was it, except that Theo had a lot more of it in store for him, hitting the spot again with definite purpose and full force, making Liam cry out his name as a warning. The end of Liam was
the moment where Theo grabbed his cock and closed his fingers around it. He didn’t even have to do anything other than jerk his hips again, letting Liam see stars and melt, or explode, or dissolve, or turn into rainbow-colored dust - whatever you wanted to call it.

“Theeeeeeo,” Liam cried out again, losing himself in nothing and everything as he came harder than ever before, shooting his load across his own chest, and his face, and into his hair, trembling through an orgasm that Theo alone helped him get through at all, holding him close to his heart, never stopping the kisses.

When Liam had caught himself a little, moments later, Theo turned him around and laid him down, leaning above him, kissing his swollen lips, pulling off a condom and throwing it away, pumping his dick. “That,” he breathed out, leaned over Liam, kissing and kissing and kissing him, “was the best thing ever. I loved it. You are… fuck I’m so in love with you.”

And then Theo came as well, and there was no way of telling which of the sticky mess on Liam’s body belonged to who, but after that night, they no longer were two completely distinct persons anyway.

Theo pulled Liam into his arms as he fell down onto the mattress and made sure to cover all of Liam’s wrecked and sweaty body with the sheets.

“Thank you,” he whispered against Liam’s temple before he pressed a kiss to that spot.

“That is a very weird thing to say after sex, Theo,” Liam mumbled, already half asleep, but not quite.

“I don’t mean for the sex,” Theo replied and then remained silent for a moment. “Sometimes I fear I’m only dreaming this. You. Us. And that one day, I’ll wake up and poof, it will all be gone. But with every word you say, with everything you do, you make me realize that not even all of my dreams combined could ever make me feel as good as you do. And that is reality. And waking up to a reality that is better than your dreams is happiness. And I think it took me a while to learn that, but with your help, I did. And this is what I’m thanking you for. Because I’ll never go back to being the dude who never knew what happiness was.”

“Damn,” Liam said. “You don’t know what hearing those words does to me.”

They kissed, their tired limbs entangled in each other, both of them sprawled over both sides of the bed, the moon shining on the sheets covering them, even when nothing in this world was perfect, life was good, and they were together, and neither of them knew what else to possibly dream about as the fell asleep.

Now that sex with Theo had happened, Liam could die in peace, a little voice in the back of his head sighed contently, but another voice objected that no, he couldn’t, because this was where his life truly began.
Liam was still fast asleep when Theo woke up, his hair pressed flat to his head on the side where it had been resting on Theo’s chest almost the entire night, the warm sunlight throwing shadows of his dark lashes onto his cheeks, his lips slightly parted, steady breaths escaping them. Theo’s first thought was that nothing in the world or beyond could ever live up to the beauty of Liam’s face. His second thought was that if something could, it was the galaxy of colors living beneath his skin.

In that moment, as everything was safe and calm and peaceful, the red mark along his spine was nothing more than a thin line, the shade almost the same as the boy’s lips. According to the extensive research Theo had used to do to familiarize himself with a phenomenon he wasn’t a part of, most people didn’t show colors while they were asleep. He’d once read that the human brain processes too many informations at once during sleep, but working silently in the background rather than putting anything on display. Only when people dream or have very specific and dominant emotions, feelings that stand out among the other things their brain is working with, only then do they show.

Liam was a miracle. Sure, the rest of the world was already much more colorful than Theo himself, but Liam, Liam was everything. Every shade the universe had ever seen. The indian holi festival of colors among people. Dutch flower fields. Like a thousand airballoons, carrying him up and into the sky. Like the rainbow on his very personal horizon.

There was a green patch fluttering around in the small of his back like a spot in the green outside. Faint yellow sunrays were shining down on it from his shoulderblades, pink and orange and purple blossoms blooming everywhere on his broad back, soft light blue waves flowing down his sides. Theo would never understand how it was possible for one single person to find so many new ways every day to take his breath away.

The most wonderful thing about Liam, though, and the greatest miracle as well, was that all of those things were right there for Theo to see. That Liam was alive and beautiful and a damn piece of art, yes, that was all true, but unlike Theo would have expected, he wasn’t unattainable for him. He wasn’t untouchable. No, Liam could actually be touched in that very moment, Theo’s fingers stroking through the soft strands of his hair and over the scratchy beard stubble on his jaw, feeling the smoothness and warmth of Liam’s skin, allowing him to breathe in more than just the air he needed to survive. Life and survival were no longer the same things to him.

Theo pulled up the sheets to keep them both inside the warmth that they’d created underneath them over night, wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, closed his eyes and pressed a kiss on the top of his head. A smile settled on his face as he drifted off again, his last thought being that he could do that every day from that moment on, just taking Liam is his arms, holding him close, kissing his head as much as he’d want to.
Theo was dreaming a wonderful dream. He was lying on the bed, propped up against the mountain of Liam’s pillows, legs stretched out, feet touching Liam’s back. His boyfriend was sitting at the far end of the mattress, his eyes glued to the tv screen ahead, the muscles in his back and shoulders twitching as he pressed the buttons on his controller not only with his fingers, but his entire body, getting lost in the virtual reality, but not so lost that he could forget Theo was there.

“Hey, Theo,” dream-Liam said, still facing away from him.

“Yes, Captain?” dream-Theo asked.

“I believe I owe you a birthday gift,” Liam answered, and so suddenly that Theo hadn’t seen him moving there, he was sitting in his lap, straddling his legs, leaning down and kissing Theo with hunger and passion.

Theo needed a minute to catch up, and then his mind went back to the birthday he’d celebrated months earlier, the only one in a decade he’d actually celebrated, and only because of Liam, only because Liam had decided it needed to be done that way. He remembered Liam dropping down to his knees, remembered the blue flames in his eyes as he’d looked up with his lips wrapped around Theo’s cock.

And just like that, just from the memory, Theo was hard again. Admittedly, maybe Liam’s hands on his chest had something to do with it as well. Or his lips sucking on Theo’s neck maybe. Or all of those things combined with the smell of crackling fire and crashing waves and belonging.

“I believe I wanted to get you naked,” Liam continued, pulling up Theo’s shirt, tugging at the fabric impatiently until Theo helped him take it off. Liam left a trail of kisses across his chest and down his stomach, his hands sliding down Theo’s sides, igniting goosebumps and little fireworks, marking quick work of the zipper of his jeans.

“I believe I wanted to see you in all your glory,” Liam kept on as he pulled both Theo’s pants and underwear down at once, freeing his cock and looking at it with hungry eyes.

“Wanted to get my hands on you,” he added, wrapping his fingers around the base.

“I’d been dying to get a taste of you,” he said before licking up the length of Theo’s aching dick, swirling his tongue over the head, spreading pre-cum and teasing Theo with tiny licks and touches.
light as feathers until Theo bucked his hips and whimpered in desperation for more. So much more.

“Patience, Sunshine,” Liam smirked, his lips moving against the tip of Theo’s dick, “I’m getting there. If I remember correctly, I wanted to get my mouth on you as well. I wanted to feel your cock between my lips so badly. I wanted to swallow you down. All the way down.”

“Fuck, Liam,” Theo panted. He didn’t exactly want his boyfriend to stop talking. Preferably not ever again, but then again, he’d definitely been promised a blowjob, and he’d kind of been waiting a long time for it.

“Let me make you feel good,” dream-Liam said.

Theo’s reply was muffled by a loud moan as his lips closed around Theo’s cock and moved down around it. A shudder went through Theo’s entire body, a vibration that had every single hair on his body standing, the muscles in his upper body tensed.

“You’re going to end me,” he mumbled deliriously, “this feels so good already, if it gets any better I’m going to explode.”

Of course, it got better. So much better. It got better when dream-Liam moved his hands to Theo’s thighs and pushed them apart, settling between his legs that Theo spread willingly and wrapped around him, except the warmth of the touches and the pressure on his skin somehow didn’t feel like a dream anymore, and then, for a short moment, Theo was falling, but it wasn’t like the usual dream-falling, it was more like landing in a fluffy cloud, being caught by two strong hands on his hips.

“I just want to make you feel good,” a voice told him, “you deserve this and I want to give you all the pleasure in the world.”

It wasn’t the voice of dream-Liam anymore, it was Liam’s actual voice, sounding almost the same, but closer, warmer, lower, more alive, getting deeper under his skin. Theo’s eyes fluttered open and he found himself with his legs closed around Liam’s body just like he’d dreamt it, Liam kneeling on the mattress with his gorgeous lips stretched around his cock, his cheeks hollowed, stars and flowers dancing across his face. Theo could see the red mark leading along his spine to where his ass was stuck out into the air.
“Liam,” Theo sighed. It wasn’t a dream. It was real, and it was Liam, and it was the best fucking thing next to all the other best fucking things Liam had done to him since they’d met.

Liam bobbed his head, taking Theo in almost all the way down to the base, gagging when his tip hit the back of Liam’s throat, but going again, just as far down, and then even further, licking and sucking on his way back up, rubbing circles into Theo’s skin with his blue-stained fingers as Theo was losing his mind.

“Fuck, baby,” Theo pressed out, his brain fighting his writhing body, “don’t go too deep. You don’t have to do that. This is already the best blowjob I’ve ever gotten.”

Liam looked up at him for a short moment and then winked so briefly that Theo wasn’t entirely sure whether he’d just imagined it or not, but he knew that he hadn’t when Liam went down around him again, pressing further even when Theo could tell he was almost choking, drawing in hair through his nose, swallowing Theo down like it was the one purpose his mouth had been made for, tears glistening in his pretty eyes. Theo had wanted to save him that, but once again, Liam had decided differently, and Theo was done fighting him.

“Oh my gooooood,” he cried out, burying one hand in Liam’s hair, simply because he had to hold onto something in order not to dissolve into nothing right then and there.

Liam continued to bob his head eagerly, sucking on the tip with his fingers squeezing around the base before going down again, fastening his pace more and more until Theo was shaking uncontrollably beneath and around him. Liam took his hand away from Theo’s hip and found Theo’s free hand to intertwine their fingers, and Theo didn’t understand how it was possible that that alone gave him the push he still needed, since it was just two hands joined together, but it was also a connection, a bond between two boys who felt inseparable at the moment, and he really wanted to warn Liam, to give him the chance to pull away before he’d have his mouth full with his load, but somehow, the words never made it out.

The only word Theo managed was Liam’s name, and even that was barely more than a noise, a scream, a cry that echoed through their room as Theo’s hips stuttered and snapped up, all hope of control over himself gone overboard with his ability to speak, but Liam didn’t seem to mind it one bit as he pressed his head down and stilled to focus on nothing but swallowing, his thumb stroking Theo’s trembling hand through the afterwaves of an incredibly intense orgasm.

“Not that I believe in him, but oh my god, Liam,” Theo panted once he had calmed down enough to form words again. He relaxed his aching legs and sat up to meet his boyfriend for a kiss, hungry for the taste of himself on Liam’s tongue.
“Well, you had to wait long enough for that,” Liam answered smugly. He might have been inexperienced, but he knew exactly what he’d just done to Theo.

“Can’t say it wasn’t worth it,” Theo replied. Honestly, he was feeling like he would have gone through literal hell for that kind of a blowjob, which might have been the adrenaline speaking, but in that moment, it was true.

“Oh, it will be,” Liam promised. “We’ll have so much time to make up for everything we’ve been missing out on.”

They kissed, greedily at first, but then it was almost just dumb grinning against each others lips.

“Like what?” Theo whispered.

Liam smiled. “We could start by finally using the shower together, you know. Together, like in the fun way.”

Theo couldn’t contain his laugh. Liam had an indescribable way to make his heart swell with those little ridiculous things he said. “You mean shower sex?”

“Of course I mean shower sex,” Liam replied. “And while we’re at it, there are a few other places where we have to do it. I have a list.”

“You have a list?” Theo couldn’t believe that something stupid like that was making him fall in love with that boy even more. He held Liam close by his faintly red neck.

“Of course. I’ve had a lot of time to think about these things.” Liam was talking like it was the most natural thing ever, and maybe it was. Maybe it just sounded weird to Theo because it was about him, and because he’d never had someone in his life making those kind of demands, having wishes, wanting more of him than just what was permanently useful.

Theo brought their foreheads together, feeling Liam’s breath on his face as he spoke. “Tell me more about that list,” he pleaded.
“Well, there was the bed, of course, and just to get rid of the trauma, I feel like we should do the guest room downstairs too,” Liam began explaining, “and if you don’t mind it, I’d totally be up for a round in your truck, and since there have been like a hundred times that I wanted to eat you up there, the locker room obviously goes on the list too, and then there’s the playing field, because I have petty feelings towards those lawn sprinklers, but for now, I think I’d be okay with starting with the shower.”

“Whatever the Captain commands,” Theo smiled.

“Just what I wanted to hear,” Liam said and was up on his feet a second later, standing next to the bed in all his naked glory, pulling at Theo’s hand, dragging him to the bathroom. As Theo was walking behind him, watching that delicious ass of his bounce with every step, ideas formed in his mind as to how he could pay Liam back for the incredible morning that it had been so far.

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The worst part of Liam’s healing injuries were the couple of days when he was well enough for Jenna to make him do his full part in the household again, but he still had to wait for David’s go to play lacrosse again. Liam missed the team, and the physical exertion, the smell of grass and dirt and sweat combined. Plus, Liam hated doing laundry.

He looked at the wild colorful and foamy whirl the humming washing machine made, then pulled out an entire mountain of clean clothes from the dryer and got to work folding them. If you asked Liam, you could have just put clothes in your closet - or on your clothes chair - like that, the neat folding completely unnecessary considering that the clothes were only going to be worn again, but sure enough, Jenna didn’t even listen to his whining about it. And so he did as he’d been told, with a little pout on his face, folding some of the pieces three times because it never looked as pretty as when Theo did it.

After a few minutes, grinning like an idiot every time he came across a piece belonging to Theo, rubbing the fabric between his fingers for a moment before putting it on the Theo pile, Liam thought he understood why his boyfriend found that task relaxing. It was the clean and fresh scent of lemon and pomegranate. It was the softness in his hands. It was the fact that Theo’s shirts were a little bigger than his own, his jeans a little longer, and the fact that they still had a basic wardrobe that they shared. It was the fact that there were two dark red sweaters instead of one, and yet the same one appeared in the laundry over and over again, the one that had belonged to Liam before Theo had claimed it for himself. And then there were the socks.

Usually, picking the single socks apart and searching for their matching other was the most annoying part of his task, but it reminded Liam of Theo admitting to stealing his socks, and as he was thinking about it, tying pairs of socks into little balls that didn’t look the way his Mom or Theo
made them at all, he realized that indeed, he could only recall seeing his own socks on Theo’s feet.

There had been that one movie night, when Theo had had his legs draped over Liam’s lap, a knowing smile on both Mason’s and Corey’s faces as Liam had been rubbing circles into his feet absentmindedly. The blue and grey striped socks he’d owned for ages. Liam hadn’t noticed back then. There had been that one time when they’d tried to cook something together, unfortunately letting themselves getting distracted quite much, and so they’d ended up making a mess on the kitchen floor, and Theo had complained dramatically as he’d taken off a wet pair of socks and thrown it in Liam’s direction. The black pair with the red *Friday* written on them. It hadn’t been a Friday, if Liam remembered correctly.

A wide smile spread on Liam’s face as he remembered another occurrence, from ages ago, before they’d even so much as kissed.

“What are those?” Theo asked curiously, peeking inside the open drawer of Liam’s dresser from where he was splayed out on the bed, phone in his hands, but eyes on Liam and his wardrobe.

“What do you mean?” Nervosity shot through Liam’s body. Something in the tone of Theo’s voice told his instincts to be ashamed of whatever Theo was referring to, but he didn’t know what it was.

“The red ones,” Theo replied, getting up and walking over, his movements graceful as everything he ever did. He picked up a pair of socks before Liam could collect himself. Why did his heart have to beat so damn loudly with Theo standing next to him? When the other boy looked at him, there was a brief moment where he was sure he could hear it.

But Theo didn’t say anything. Well, not about anything other than the socks he was unfolding to examine them.

“The perks of being tiny, huh?” Theo smirked. “You can still wear the same socks as in pre-school.”

There it was, the embarrassment. Liam’s face must have been as red as his neck. “They’re not from pre-school,” he pressed out, snapping them out of Theo’s hands, throwing them back into the drawer so that neither of them could see the yellow flash on the red background anymore.

“You like the Flash?” Theo asked, but it sounded more like another joke than a genuine question. “Maybe you should wear them for our games for extra speed.”
“Fuck off,” Liam sighed and turned away. Sometimes, he didn’t know why he even bothered. “Pretty sure I’m faster than you.”

Theo stilled and considered it. “Well, actually, maybe I should wear them for our games then.”

Liam grinned to himself. The flash socks were still hidden in the last corner of his drawer, safe from Theo’s judgment, but somehow, the shame about them was completely gone. Liam finished up the laundry, carried the clean clothes upstairs and put them where they belonged, his own as well as Theo’s, although the line between the two had gotten blurry. Actually, he thought about reorganizing everything so that they’d have only one drawer with socks, one for their underwear, one shelf for each kind of clothing in the closet, but in the end, Liam was too lazy to do voluntary work on top of the assigned stuff, and playing a few games on his xbox until Theo would return was far more tempting.

Still, before his boyfriend returned, Liam decided to search for the Flash socks and put them in Theo’s drawer instead. Just to see what would happen.

***

“We should take a picture,” Liam said completely out of context one day as they were in the middle of doing their homework, Liam sitting at the desk with his history book open, Theo lying on his stomach on the bed with Liam’s laptop and a writing document open. Words had a way of finding him when he was home and safe and warm and peaceful and full of love and around Liam.

“A picture of what?” Theo asked. He’d been too focused on his essay to know what Liam was on about.

“Us, you dork,” Liam laughed, as if it was the most obvious thing.

“Us?” Theo repeated. He knew what Liam meant, of course, but it was one of those things that were too normal in the lives of other people and too terrifyingly strange in his own. His own mother had taken photos of him when he’d been a kid, making him look into the camera and scolding him for sticking out his tongue. He’d hated being interrupted in his games, hadn’t understood what all the pictures had been supposed to be good for, had always wondered why Tara had stopped and put on her prettiest smile as soon as a camera had been directed at her.

For many, many years, nobody had taken even a single snap of Theo. He’d made sure to skip every
photo day at every school he’d attended. He’d taken it as a safe sign that it was time to let a lover off the hook when they’d asked him for one. And yet there he was, looking at Liam and his baby blues, wondering whether his hair was looking good enough.

“Yeah, us. I made a thing with pictures of you while you were gone, but I didn’t have any of the two of us,” Liam explained. “Don’t you think that should be fixed?”

“Wait a minute, you made a thing with pictures of me?” Theo wasn’t sure he’d heard that correctly. “There are no pictures of me.”

“Of course there are,” Liam argued, “I can prove it.” He rummaged through the bottom drawer of his desk and pulled out a shiny book. No, an album. Holy shit, he’d made an entire album?

Liam slumped down on the bed right next to Theo, so close that they were touching the entire time as he flipped through the pages. Most of them were still blank, but the ones that had been filled contained so many more memories than Theo could have possibly expected, it almost made him cry. There was him in his lacrosse gear, his arms spread, the stick in one hand, a big smile plastered on his reddened face, sweat sticking his hair to his forehead. The picture must have been taken at one of the first games after he’d joined the team, and Theo was genuinely wondering whether he’d really been as happy as he looked in the photo.

There were many more snaps of him playing lacrosse or discussing something on the field with his arms in a wild gesture. And then there was one of his shirtless back in the locker room.

“You little pervert,” Theo laughed. “I know you mean this whole album thing in a romantic way, but you literally took secret pictures of me undressing.” Not that he really minded. Actually, Theo was pleasantly surprised that Liam had obviously been interested in him from that early on.

“What can I say,” Liam shrugged, although a bright pink blush was well visible on his face, the red in his neck widening and squirming, “I was hooked right from the start.”

There was a picture of Theo looking grimly, tongue poking out in concentration, hands clenched around one of Liam’s controller, the photo taken before Theo had given up on dreaming about beating Liam at a video game one day. There was one of him napping on the couch in the living room, his face so relaxed that he looked younger than he’d felt in a long time.

“Wow,” Theo whispered as he went through maybe twenty or thirty versions of his own face. It
looked strangely different from what he would have expected. Softer, somehow, and it had him wondering when he’d last stood in front of a mirror without trying to avoid a close look at his reflection.

“Do you remember that night?” Liam asked, pointing at a picture where Theo’s eyes were glowing in the half-dark, the moon shining on his pale skin, happiness - unlimited, free and freeing happiness written all over his face.

“How could I not?” he replied. He could almost feel the same rush of adrenaline as back then, back when they’d walked the entire way home from the cinema by foot, when his fingers had been itchy with the urge to reach for Liam’s hand, when his heart had skipped a beat at Liam’s touch on his neck, when he’d silently prayed for Liam to finally kiss him.

“It should have been a real kiss back then,” Liam said quietly. “I wanted it so badly.”

“Me too,” Theo nodded. “But I was perfectly happy that night.”

There was a picture of Theo driving his truck, and one of him wearing Liam’s dark red sweater, and one of him standing in the kitchen next to Jenna, listening attentively to the cooking advice she’d had for him. What Theo absolutely couldn’t get over was how normal all those pictures seemed. Like he was just a boy living a young life, smiling and laughing and learning and having fun.

Tears welled up in Theo’s eyes without his permission. “Thank you,” he pressed out, and then he felt Liam’s hand on his back, and the world was a scary place, but it was right where he wanted to be.

“I don’t know what you’d have to thank me for,” Liam whispered in reply.

“For seeing me this way,” Theo said with a nod towards the album. “For believing that this was the truth even when I didn’t.”


“Yeah, I guess I get that,” Theo responded. “I fell in love too. And that is not exactly anything I would have ever expected to happen to me.”
“Theo,” Liam smiled.

“Yeah?”

“Stop crying, you beautiful idiot.” Liam laughed. “I still want to take that picture.”

“What, now?” Theo asked, his eyes probably puffy and red-rimmed.

“Now,” Liam nodded, taking his phone out of his pocket.

“You’re lucky I can’t say no to you, Captain,” Theo sighed and sat up next to Liam, their shoulders connecting.

“The luckiest dude on earth,” Liam smiled as he brought up the phone in front of their faces.

*The second luckiest one,* Theo thought.

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It had taken Liam weeks to edit the picture he’d taken of him and Theo in the right way to serve his purpose. He wasn’t exactly an expert at photoshop, and for once, Mason was even worse than him at something, which sure, gave him a considerable amount of satisfaction, but wasn’t helpful at all with what he had planned for Theo. After a couple of weeks of making use of the time Theo had spent at lacrosse practice without him, Liam was ready, a borrowed overhead projector sitting in the passenger seat on his way home from school.

He set everything up all by himself, pulled the bed away from the wall and spread old newspapers on the carpeted floor in front of the wall, carried the projector that was slightly heavier than anticipated up the stairs and positioned it in the middle of his bedroom, turned it on with the lights out and put on the slide to have a look at the result on the white wallpaper. He brought out the brushes and cans of paint he’d bought and put on a shirt he wouldn’t have minded ruining. And then he waited for Theo to return home.
There was absolutely no rational reason to jump when the front door was being clicked open, but Liam did so anyway, adrenaline flowing through his veins. He strained his ears to listen to Theo take his shoes off and put his bag and jacket away neatly as always, smiled to himself as he thought about the different ways they had to enter the house, Liam calling after Theo the first thing after coming home, Theo walking up the stairs in silence, wrapping his arms around Liam and holding him for a minute before he’d be ready to see if anybody else would be home as well.

“There you are,” Theo greeted him as he walked through the door, simply swinging it open and entering the room, not like only a few weeks before when he’d always stopped and looked around before coming in. But it wasn’t Liam’s room that they were both sleeping in anymore. It was their room, and it was about to become theirs a little more.

“Here I am,” Liam nodded, “just waiting for you.” He couldn’t contain the smile that spread on his face immediately when he saw Theo smiling as well. It happened every time. He noticed how Theo looked around the changed room with an adorable confused look on his pretty face, but he didn’t say anything until he’d hugged Liam for the apparently required minute.

“What’s happening here?” he then wanted to know.

Liam felt a little bit like a kid on Christmas Eve, except better, because he was giving a present, but since it was Theo he was giving it too, he was kind of getting it too.

“I have something for you,” he declared excitedly, “or rather, for us.”

“What is it?” Theo asked curiously, his eyes wide and green and beautiful.

“Let me show you,” Liam smiled and turned on the projector with a little click, watching Theo watching the wall as the outlines became sharper and the other boy’s jaw dropped.

Right there at the wall, above where their bed would usually stand against it, were both their faces, smiling brightly, looking so damn happy together.

“Wow,” Theo breathed out in awe.

“Don’t give me the wow just yet,” Liam replied with a smirk. “We still have some painting to do.” He offered Theo one of the brushes and opened the cans of different colors. The projection on the
wallpaper was all black outlines, but black and white was not what their life together looked like.

“Are you saying you want *that* -” Theo pointed to the picture, “-on your wall?” Liam couldn’t believe the surprise in his eyes as he gaped at him.

“I’m saying I want it on *our* wall,” he answered simply.

“Why?” Theo asked, his voice weak, almost not even a whisper.

“Because it belongs there,” Liam said, and then he decided he was done explaining, and done letting Theo doubt his whole gesture. He’d had enough time to think about, and he knew what he wanted, which was the boy breathing right next to him, and he knew what he was doing, and so he took the first step and dipped his brush into a rich green and drew the first line, giving the photo-Theo a colorful strand of hair.

Theo blinked twice, once at the drying paint and once at Liam, and Liam almost thought he’d gone a little too far, overstepped a boundary he hadn’t been aware of, but then the other boy grabs one of the pots himself, and a moment later, Liam’s jawline shines from the wallpaper in red.

“This is going to be our ultimate masterpiece,” Liam commented as they were both working in concentration next to each other, passing different colors back and forth, occasionally painting the other’s actual face instead of the wall.

“*You* are my ultimate masterpiece,” Theo mumbled in reply, and Liam laughed at that, and then Theo stilled, as if he hadn’t said it out loud intentionally, but relaxed again just a second later.

Yes, they’d finally gotten to the point where they could simply blurt out all the sappy stuff they would have been embarrassed about in front of their friends, but between the two of them, there was an understanding of what they were talking about, and that sometimes it just needed out, and that even if you were afraid to say *I love you*, sooner or later you couldn’t hold it in anymore, and you had to start somewhere.

“Theo,” Liam said as they looked at their creation. It looked like a simpler version of the photo Liam had taken, no background, no details, just the outlines of two faces, but those outlines appeared in a rainbow, and the smiles on their faces looked even more like love that way.
“Yeah?” Theo answered, his eyes captured by the image, a brush hanging loosely between his fingers.

“Kiss me,” Liam whispered.

In spite of all the softness he had in him, that time, Theo was too overpowered by his emotions to go soft. A storm was dancing in his eyes as he turned to Liam, raised his hands and took Liam’s face between them, pressing their lips together as he smeared paint across his cheeks, pulling Liam closer, breathing him in, licking into his mouth, grabbing his collar, because no closeness is close enough for them.

“I can’t fucking believe you,” Theo pressed out, “you’re not from this world.” He kissed Liam’s neck until the clothes they were both still wearing were offending Liam so much that he decided they had to go.

By the time the overhead projector turned off by itself because it had overheated, Theo was lying on the carpet and Liam was riding his dick. They hadn’t even made it to the bed. The shape of a hand was visible on Theo’s chest, the rest of the paint having been used in the only reasonable way.

***

Liam woke up to an empty bed, stretching his limbs in every direction at first to find the warmth of Theo beside him before he opened his eyes only to find that his boyfriend was gone. He trusted Theo, but there still was a brief moment of fear, a sting in his chest, a tiny little doubt on his mind. He didn’t truly believe that Theo would ever leave him again, but he couldn’t shake the thought either.

Only a few seconds later, though, as soon as all of Liam’s senses had awakened, he noticed the scent of fresh coffee and fried eggs and pancakes and bacon wafting in through the open door of his bedroom. His mother would have made one of those things for breakfast, but all of them together, that was indisputable proof that Theo was the one standing in the kitchen downstairs. Liam was tempted to go and see for himself whether Theo was wearing that damn cooking apron again, the one that David had given his mother for their anniversary a few years earlier, the one that did things to Liam it shouldn’t do when it was bound loosely around Theo’s waist.

Instead of getting up, Liam pulled the blanket up and around his shoulders, savoring the warmth beneath it that was more Theo’s than his, closing his eyes for just five more minutes, a content smile on his lips as he waited. He could hear Theo humming along to the song on the kitchen radio
downstairs and wondered when the other boy had started doing that, which really didn’t matter, as long as only he’d never stop.

“Good morning, Captain,” Theo smiled as he entered the room with a huge tray, piles over piles of food steaming on top of it.

“Morning, Sunshine,” Liam replied as he opened his eyes. It had become their thing.

Theo sat down on the edge of the bed, put the tray next to Liam on the mattress and leaned in to peck him on the lips. Liam groaned in complaint when he pulled away too quickly. “No,” he mumbled, “I’m not done with you. Not when you’re wearing that.” He pointed at Theo’s chest that was hidden behind the apron.

“That?” Theo asked, his eyebrows raised in amused surprise.

Liam blushed and nodded. Maybe he did have a little weird preferences.

“Well,” Theo shrugged with a grin, “I guess that’s a fetish I can live with. Be a good boy and eat your breakfast and I’ll wear it for you.”

“You’re already wearing it,” Liam pointed out.

“Yeah but I mean only that,” Theo winked.

Not that Liam hadn’t been hungry before, but at that prospect he began shoving food into his mouth like he was starving. For Theo, he kind of was. “I fucking love eggs,” he commented. Not even his mother could do them the way Theo did.

“Actually,” Theo said as he watched Liam eat, munching on a slice of bacon himself, but smiling too hard to really get it down. “You should be the one called sunshine. Have you looked at yourself lately?”

Liam froze and followed Theo’s gaze to his bare chest. He watched as Theo raised a hand and dragged his fingers through the soft hair growing there, circling the spot right above his heart. It
was almost not visible with the natural complexion, but where Theo was touching him, a faint, pallidly-yellow semicircle lay beneath his skin, looking like a reflection of the moon.

“Wow,” Liam breathed, “I’ve never seen that before.”

“That’s not even all of it,” Theo replied. “Sometimes when you sleep, there are more stars shining from beneath your skin than from the actual sky. But nothing comes close to when you smile.”

Liam knew the feeling that sometimes washed over him when he watched Theo doing something utterly normal, when completely out of the blue, he was hit with a sudden realization how deeply in love he was with him. How much he loved him. How happy he was. In that moment he wondered if the look on Theo’s face meant that his boyfriend knew the feeling as well.

“What about it?” he wanted to know.

“When you smile,” Theo explained, brushing a strand of hair out of Liam’s face carefully, “the sun literally shines from your cheeks. It’s the most beautiful thing.”

“Nah, it’s not,” Liam simply objected, digging into his breakfast again. “It can’t be.”

“No offense,” Theo laughed, “but you can’t know that. You don’t see yourself the way I do.”

It was Liam’s turn to laugh then. They’d once insulted each other in the high school parking lot. God, how the things had changed since then. “Yeah well, you don’t see yourself the way I do, so I guess we’ll have to agree on disagreeing in this.”

“You dork,” Theo giggled, and yes, Liam could see the love in his eyes when he did.

“How about a kiss for your dorky boyfriend?” Liam suggested as he was swallowing the last bits of his breakfast down. “And about getting naked beneath that thing?” he wiggled his eyebrows at the apron.

“Are you sure?” Theo asked. “Because you do realize we have a lacrosse game in less than two hours.”
“You don’t seriously believe I could have forgotten that,” Liam snorted sarcastically. It was going to be his first game back on the team after his last stay at the hospital. His rib had finally healed, and so had his lung. Jenna would still have preferred for him to wait a little longer, but David had confirmed that there were no medical reasons for it. He could absolutely not wait.

“Remember when you promised me a blowjob for a win? Because I’d like to promise you the same now. Just in case you weren’t properly motivated,” Theo smirked.

“For the record,” Liam replied, putting the tray on the floor to make room and pull Theo closer, “I’m pretty motivated already. It’s been ages since you and me have been on the field together.”

“I know,” Theo sighed. Liam had watched him and the others play the past few games, getting a pretty good impression of what Coach was usually suffering through at the sideline at last.

“Of course,” Liam added smugly, “I’m still not saying no to that offer. Which definitely doesn’t mean I can wait that long.”

The sun was shining through the big window, Liam was engulfed by the warmth of the slept-in bed and the heat of Theo’s body, his belly was filled, a different kind of hunger still unsatisfied.

“Of course not,” Theo smiled and rolled on top of Liam. They smile-kissed for a few minutes, too caught in the happiness of their domestic moment to stop themselves from grinning, and then they started kiss-kissing, lips melting into each other, tongues mixing their distinct tastes into one until they were both left breathless.

***

“Everybody, look who decided to grace us with their presence again,” Coach began his speech that day, looking into Liam’s direction as he continued, “took you long enough to get over with that incredibly selfish recovery time-out. Dumbar.”

Liam couldn’t help but smile. He didn’t even mind the fact that Coach had once again mis-pronounced his name. It might not have sounded like it, but that was Coach’s way of saying we’ve missed you.
“Good to be back,” Liam declared, giving the helmet resting on the bench beside him a little pat. He could feel the excitement tingling up his spine in red. Not being able to help the guys on the field had been torture enough during the previous weeks, but Liam then realized that what he’d missed the most, the feeling right before a game, when they were all together in the locker room as a team, being pressured by Coach not to let him down, knowing that there was nothing else separating them from a victory than the possibility of just one of them not giving their best that day.

But this day was not one of those days. Liam could see it in the looks they kept throwing him as he fastened the gear on his shoulders and pulled his jersey over. He could hear it in the low mumbles as they were all discussing tactics and the particular strengths and weaknesses of the opposing team’s players. He could feel it vibrating through the air as they got ready, could smell it as he stepped onto the grass and suddenly seemed to be home again. He turned his head to Theo, who was right behind him. They shared a smile, but only briefly before Liam took off running. They had to get ready. They had a game to win.

They were still in the middle of their warm-up when Scott, Stiles and Lydia suddenly showed up on the bleachers, apparently sitting down to watch. Liam gave his former captain a nod and received one in return, pride glistening in Scott’s dark eyes. Jenna and David were there as well, and Liam knew that David had switched a shift at the hospital with another doctor to make it possible.

With all those people watching, and Coach certainly expecting the team to get considerably better with the Captain back on board, Liam could feel the pressure on him, but when it came to lacrosse, pressure was good, pressure meant that there was something in for the win, that there was a goal and a way and a team that only had to fight hard enough to get there. Liam was ready.

“Hey,” he said as he grabbed Nolan by the arm. “We’re good, right?” he checked. “No hard feelings?”

It was to imagine Nolan having hard feelings at all with his freckles and the constant smile on his lips, but it was still a relief to see him grin a little wider, throwing a glance at the bleachers and Brett before replying. “Depends. Can I call you Captain too now?”

“No,” Theo growled from somewhere behind them, just casually shifting into possessive boyfriend mode before he moved along and disappeared again.

“Fine,” Nolan sighed, but Liam knew that it had been fine all along. “No hard feelings.”
“Man, you two should have banged earlier,” Corey grinned after the fourth goal Theo scored in that game.

“Excuse you? How do you even... oh no, nevermind, you know because Mason does,” Theo mumbled. He really shouldn’t have been surprised, not that he really minded. So what if Corey knew? Life was amazing, and just as he was thinking that, Liam already hammered the ball into the net again, leaving the poor goalie with a bright red face and pretty nasty words pouring from his mouth to his defenders. To be fair, it wasn’t so much that they were bad as it was that Liam was unstoppable, even without much training, making up for the lack of practice by sheer force of will to win.

“I fucking love you,” Theo whispered to himself, Liam running towards him with the biggest smile shining from underneath his helmet, but still too far away to hear him.

“Oh boy,” Corey commented with a laugh as he walked away, “you two idiots are actually starting to make me feel bad for those poor guys that are getting crushed today.”

Theo shrugged and grinned. “Don’t tell me you don’t want to see Coach freaking out after we win this.”

“Oh, I do,” Corey agreed, “he’s been an extra level of annoying lately.”

They set a new record that day, sending their opponents home with long and grey or dark red faces. “Those guys have to be on some sort of drugs,” one of them mumbled as he left the field, smashing his lacrosse stick into the ground, his helmet following behind.

Theo looked at Liam with his sweaty, messed up hair and the satisfied grin on his face, his chest heaving and sinking heavily, the edges of his red mark appearing in a soft green.

“Fuck,” Liam panted, “just earlier I thought about all the things I’ve missed about this. But what I’ve missed the most is winning.” There was a reason why Liam was captain.

“Fuck,” Theo smiled and hugged him, pressed a quick kiss on his cheek. “I love you.”
And just like that, without Theo even meaning to, it was out. And it had come across his lips so easily. So damn easily. Theo’s heart skipped a beat as Liam gaped at him for a moment.

“Fuck, I love you too,” he said, sending Theo to a very special place in heaven. The one in the corner where the sky was the bluest blue.

“You do?” Theo asked. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe him, it was just that it felt so good. So, so good. Liam loved him. He was loved by the boy who gave life a meaning, and the universe its beauty, and every day the chance to be the best day Theo had ever had.

“So much,” Liam smiled. “So, so much.”

“Can I tell you a secret?” Theo asked.

“You can tell me all of your secrets,” Liam replied with a fond smile.

Theo leaned forward and whispered into Liam’s ear. “I’m only playing this good because I’m Flash underneath.” He grinned and pointed to his feet. The laugh he earned was everything.

***

“Once again, I can see right through you,” Mason smiled as he and Liam were standing at the bar at the Sinema with drinks that Liam had paid for. He was too busy watching Theo dance to think about what Mason could possibly be on about.

“Once again, you’re being too cryptic for your slightly dumber best friend,” Liam slurred in response, eyes focused on the important things.

“You’ve been staying away from him all night because you know you can’t stay away,” Mason grinned. “He’s here looking like an absolute snack after that incredible game you played today and you’re afraid if you get too close you’ve got to have him.”
“Mase, what the fuck?” Liam shouted. “Who gave you permission to talk about my boyfriend like tha-”

He stopped mid-sentence, following Mason’s gaze to the dancefloor, realizing that his best friend wasn’t actually looking at Theo, that maybe he wasn’t really talking about him. And Corey looked over to his boyfriend next to Liam at the bar, and he knew Mason hadn’t only known because he knew him so well, but also because he knew the struggle so well.

“Ugh, you two are disgusting,” Liam commented.

“Yeah, disgusting to the outside, couldn’t care less on the inside,” Mason replied, setting his drink down, “that’s love, Liam.”

As if summoned by the word, Theo turned his head towards Liam and gave him a smile, and then Liam had to smile as well, and as it always was, they were just grinning like idiots at each other, unable to stop, too deliriously happy to keep it in.

“Hey there, Captain,” Theo greeted as he came over and slung an arm around Liam’s hip.

“Hey there, Sunshine,” Liam replied, leaning into his touch.

“See, disgusting,” Mason mumbled as he trolled away, leaving them to each other.

Liam took another sip of his drink and offered it to Theo as well, trying his best to keep a straight face as he watched Theo’s lips sucking on the straw.

“Yeah,” Theo laughed, “I can’t wait either. I figure we should stay until they’re all drunk enough not to remember when exactly we left.” He made a vague gesture towards their teammates and friends drinking and dancing and shouting in each other’s ears.

“Fine,” Liam sighed. He liked the teams’ nights out at the Sinema, didn’t mind them all being around as he and Theo held each other close, he just wanted to have Theo to himself, especially after their confessions after the game. He wanted to say it again, wanted to repeat it over and over, wanted to whisper it in Theo’s ear while making love to him, wanted to scream it out while coming, wanted to hear the same in return, repeated to many times that their voices would be hoarse in the morning.
“They look cute together, don’t they?” Theo commented on Nolan pressing his freckled face into Brett’s neck as they were dancing.

“Pfft, cute,” Liam rolled his eyes. Maybe he was a little drunk. “I’ll show you something that goes far beyond cute.” And with that, he was dragging Theo to the dance floor, whirling him around and pressing their bodies together, his hands placed on Theo’s hips in the most sinfully possessive way imaginable.

Theo knew this wasn’t going to end well, or a little too well, depending on how you looked at it, but there was fuck all he could do against Liam moving his body so damn temptingly, practically grinding against Theo, the music loud in his head, but the beat he was dancing to being the one that Liam’s heart was setting for him.

He remembered fantasizing about this exact thing while sitting at the bar grumpily, months earlier, watching all the other people around him being young and free and themselves, letting their bodies speak when words were drowned by too loud music, being unafraid of being together. He remembered the itchy feeling in his fingers when watching Liam dancing, remembered how he’d wished he’d been allowed to do this. He remembered thinking that Liam would never ever want to, let alone actually give in.

And yet here they were, lost in the moment that didn’t count in a reality where time didn’t exist, or maybe existed, but didn’t matter, couldn’t harm them, couldn’t keep them from going their own, unapologetic pace, setting a new rhythm, one the world had never seen before, falling into each other’s arms, holding another up, moving and catching and breathing, living off of each other in the simplest way, creating a bubble around them that didn’t keep others from staring, but both Liam and Theo from giving a shit, and so after many months of learning and doubting and growing and falling apart and fixing things and changing, after heartbreak and crestfallen misery, they found themselves being content in each other’s arms, needing nothing more than for things to stay the way they were.

Theo could feel Liam growing more impatient by the second. He wasn’t doing much better himself, his body covered in goosebumps, invisible flames licking over his skin where Liam’s hands were touching him through his clothes, his dick uncomfortably hard and straining his pants. “Liam,” he pressed out, not sure whether he was loud enough for Liam to understand him, and not sure whether he was quiet enough for the others not to, but what did it matter anymore?

“Agreed,” Liam nodded eagerly before he could even say anything, and then Liam’s lips were pressed to his own, eyes on them as they kissed and kissed, tongues exploring each other’s mouths that tasted different somehow after the events of the day, warmer and sweeter and more intense.

“You get the truck, I get the jackets,” Liam suggested as he pulled away with heavy breathing and
swollen lips. Theo could have eaten him up right there and then.

***

The person who found Theo outside a few minutes later wasn’t Liam, it was Lydia.

“Hey,” she greeted him, jumping onto the hood of his truck next to him so that Theo had a déjà-vu he didn’t know how to feel about.

“Hey,” he said back, nudging her shoulder lightly. When Lydia came to talk to you, you better listened. He’d learned that the hard way.

“You look happy,” she stated, a smile on her face that looked flushed at first sight, but was actually covered in tiny pink patterns, flowers and ranks and hieroglyphs. Theo wasn’t stupid enough to try to understand any of the marks decorating her skin.

“I am,” he answered truthfully, “happier than ever before.”

“Good,” she replied, “because I was never sure whether I did the right thing bringing you back here. I just hoped getting you back to normal would help you.”

“Oh, I’m not back to normal,” he laughed. The word normal didn’t seem to be a part of his vocabulary, not that he needed it. “I’m back home.”

“Sounds like the right place to be then,” Lydia whispered. They were both looking up to where the stars were twinkling in the dark, clear sky, but what truly had Theo’s attention was the bright pallor of the moon.

“Yeah,” he breathed out. There was only one thing still bothering him and somehow, the situation reminded him of that.

“And yet, there’s something bugging you,” Lydia guessed. Or did she know?
“You were there on my birthday,” Theo started, not knowing what he was going to say next, or how, but still, it needed out, and then there was Lydia, his savior in more than one way, and so he spoke, calmly in spite of his racing heart. “So you’ve seen the colors on me. But that weekend was actually the only time that they were there. And when I took off they were gone, once again, and now I’m here, and I’m with Liam, and if Liam made me show marks back then, what is wrong now?”

His hands were shaking. He’d never consciously realized how much the fact that he’d stayed blank after returning home had been bothering him, but now it was out.

“Please don’t tell Liam I’m freaking out about this,” he pleaded.

Lydia pursed her lips and shook her head lightly. Theo almost didn’t expect her to answer when she suddenly rose her voice to speak, clearly considering her words with great care.

“You know, you might actually not be right about that.”

“About what?” Theo asked. “That Liam was the one who brought back my colors for a weekend? Pretty sure that’s the only explanation.”

“About being blank,” she said simply. Theo genuinely didn’t know what to do with that information, and the confusion must have been written all over his face.

“When I first met you,” Lydia elaborated with a calm and steady voice, “pretty much the first thing I noticed about you was how incredibly pale you were. White even.”

“Yeah,” Theo croaked, clueless about where she was going, “that’s just good old blank Theo for you.”

“White, Theo,” Lydia repeated with emphasis, “not blank. White.”

“I’m not sure I’m following you,” Theo mumbled, “actually, I’m sure I’m not.”

“You do have colors,” she insisted, “you have so much color beneath your skin that all you can do
“White is not a color,” Theo argued. Why was she doing this to him? And why was his heart beating the wild way it was?

“No,” Lydia agreed, “white is not a color. White is all the colors.”

“What?”

“White is all the colors. White is light. And light consists of all colors.”

***

“Hey, boyfriend,” Liam said as they lay in bed that night, their bare chests heaving against each other, Theo’s limbs wrapped around Liam.

“What’s up?” Theo asked drowsily. He’d almost been asleep.

“Nothing,” Liam mumbled, his fingers combing through Theo’s hair gently, “just wanted to call you my boyfriend.”

“Good night, annoying temporary roommate,” Theo laughed.

Liam gasped dramatically. “You take that back immediately, he demanded, poking Theo’s shoulder with one finger.

“Or what?” Theo wanted to know.

“You know damn well I can keep getting you on the nerves for the entire night if I have to,” Liam replied seriously.
“True,” Theo gave in. “I take it back.”

They were silent for a few minutes.

“Hey, boyfriend,” Theo then said.

“Yeah?”

“Do you want to be my annoying roommate forever?” Theo asked.

“Yeah.”

They tightened their grips around each other and Liam pressed a kiss onto Theo’s head. Home. Theo was home.

“Cool,” he said, drifting off.

“Yeah,” Liam agreed.
26/26, or as the saying goes in my beautiful poetic mother tongue, everything has an end, only the sausage has two.

For Sammy, I'd like to say that 3026 days are approximately 8 years and 4 months.

It’s day 3026. Liam is standing in front of a large mirror. He hasn't spent half as much time looking at his own reflection as he used to, not since Theo came barging into his life with mysteries living under his skin and chaos igniting everywhere he went. So much time has passed since back then. Good days, and bad ones, dick-days even, a lot. And Liam wouldn't trade a single one of them.

He takes in the glowing red peeking out from his clean white collar. He almost laughs. It looks just like it always has, broad around his neck, its blurry edges flickering at both sides. He can feel its warmth creeping down all the way along his spine. He used to hate his mark, he remembers, but the memory comes only from his head, not his heart. He used to think it betrayed him by showing his anger to the world, anger he was ashamed of. He knows better now. Red is for many things. Anger, yes, and danger and blood and fire. But also strength, leadership and determination. Courage. Red is for passion, and romance and sensitivity.

Red is for love. There is no way of knowing which exactly it is that Liam’s red is for, but it's not important. Liam has lost many sleepless nights over the question why nature would give humans marks like those, marks that clearly show something, but without an explanation what that something is. It's beautifully frustrating. A perfect metaphor.

As for Liam's mark, it doesn't matter. It hasn't mattered to him in a long time. It's a part of him, and that is all that counts. He buttons up his shirt, hiding not only the red, but a yellow moon across his chest - by now his only other permanent mark - as well as a thousand sprinkles, stars and flower patterns of different shades beneath it. A million different colors linger under his skin, more than ever before, but he guesses that’s only appropriate for the occasion.

“Jesus,” Mason mumbles as he peeks through the door. Liam can see his best friend in the mirror. “Is that how you tie a tie?” Mason comments, pointing at Liam’s reflection. “Looks like you’re still completely and utterly unable to do anything without my help.”
“Mason, my hero,” Liam sighs. Mason isn’t entirely wrong. Well, not as far as the tie is concerned.

***

At the opposite end of the hallway, Corey rolls his eyes when Theo’s hands find their way to his hair again. He's been rearranging strands and throwing unsatisfied looks into the mirror for an eternity now.

“You do realize that this is not the day where you have to convince him of you, right?” Corey asks. “I think you’ve sold yourself.”

“Are you kidding me?” Theo threw him an incredulous look. “This is supposed to be the most important day of our life. I’m not going out there with my hair not in place.”

“Your hair is fine,” Corey sighs. “Everything is perfect. Jenna is taking care of it, remember? That woman knows what she's doing.”

“I know,” Theo shrugs, “it's just…” He doesn't know how to explain it. It's just because it’s Liam. “Do you ever feel like you don't deserve Mason? Like, not in a negative, rejecting-the-happiness-you-were-granted-way, but just… I don't know… Do you ever wonder what it was that you did that made the universe give him to you?” Theo knows he's being crazy again, but if anybody understands, it’s Corey.

“Of course,” Corey says casually, as if it's perfectly normal. “But same as you, I’ll never know.”

Theo slumps down onto the chair standing by the small table beneath the mirror. He looks into his own eyes. On this day more than ever, it's hard not to miss Tara. He's made his peace with her death, somehow. He carries her beneath his skin, right above his heart, and inside. Some days, it doesn't even feel wrong that she isn't around. She would be thirty by now. They would both have a life on their own. Being apart would be normal for them.

Still, on days like this one, Theo knows that they’re apart for all the wrong reasons, and it makes him want to cry like he did when he was a kid and she didn't emerge back from beneath the surface of the river flowing through Beacon Hills’ park.

“Should I leave you alone now?” Corey asks.
Theo nods, glad that his best friend knows exactly when to be there for him and when not to. As soon as the door closes behind Corey’s back, Theo pulls out his phone. He’s so damn nervous that his hands are shaking. This is exactly the kind of thing he used to think was never going to happen, at least not in his life. He turns on the screen, just to see the one face that can calm him down right now, even though it’s the same face that’s causing his nervousness in the first place.

Liam is smiling at him from the little screen in his hand, eyes blue and beautiful as ever. Once again, on top of all the feelings whirling wildly inside him on this warm afternoon on the last day of June, something settles inside him and trickles between the cracks of his soul, fills them up and closes them in a clean, soothing way. Something he can only think of as home.

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Jenna can’t help but be a little nervous. Admittedly, her heart is almost beating out of her chest as she finds David to sit down with him in the first row before the little altar that has been put up on the lawn in the park. She still doesn’t know why it had to be this place, but she knows it isn’t random. It never is with those two boys.

“Hey,” David says with an amused smile as he drags her hand away from the flower decoration she’s trying to fix. He presses a kiss onto her cheek. “Everything is perfect,” he assures her, “now sit back and enjoy your moment.”

“My moment?” she asks. This is hardly her moment.

“Don’t tell me you haven’t been waiting for this since the moment Theo walked through our front door,” David argues with raised eyebrows. He’s got a point.

“I just want them to be happy,” she shrugs.

“Happy together,” David adds.

“Happy together,” she nods.

And then the music starts playing, and all the stress is gone, all the worries about the perfect
flowers, all the things she feared weren’t be taken care of, all the scenarios of what could possibly go wrong. Jenna is many things, but most importantly, she’s a mother, and nothing makes her heart swell like the look on her son’s face as she turns back around to the end of the white carpet. The smile is reflected in Theo’s face right beside him.

_Something in your eyes, makes me wanna lose myself_

_Makes me wanna lose myself in your arms_

_Something in your voice makes my heart beat fast_

_I hope this feeling lasts the rest of my life_

“Happy together,” she whispers to herself and grabs David’s hand to ground her while she watches her two boys walking down the aisle side by side, hands joined between them, eyes always finding each other again.

_If you knew how lonely my life has been_

_And how long I’ve been so alone_

_If you knew how I wanted someone to come along_

_And change my life the way you’ve done_

They look fantastic, their suits matching perfectly, the perfect knot of Liam’s tie screaming Mason to her, their shoulders brushing with every slow step, their eyes watery, but not as much as Jenna’s. They have changed each other’s life indeed, and now they’re home, and she can see it written in their eyes. They’re grinning like idiots. Beautiful, deliriously happy idiots.

_It feels like home to me, feels like home to me_

_Feels like I’m all the way back where I come from_

_It feels like home to me, feels like home to me_

_Feels like I’m all the way back where I belong_

She thinks back to the time when Liam came downstairs in the morning, color patterns blooming everywhere beneath his skin, the red in the middle, but so much more around it since Theo had been in the picture. She remembers sending them to bed when they stayed up all night playing video games. She remembers the first birthday Theo celebrated with them. She remembers Liam’s heartbreak when he had the first dick day since Theo, and the one when Theo was gone for a while. She remembers driving through half the country to get them back together. Her gaze
wanders across the aisle and lands on Lydia Martin, a pink glow on the younger woman’s proud face as she nods lightly.

If you knew how much this moment means to me
And how long I’ve waited for your touch
If you knew how happy you are making me
I never thought that I’d love anyone so much

Jenna remembers the rainbow-colored painting that still covers the wall in the room that used to be Liam’s, and the tons of tons of photo albums he’s made. She remembers lacrosse games and wins and celebrations and smiles brighter than the sun. She remembers their graduation, and the night she got to be a real Mom and take pictures of them in suits before prom. She remembers herself and David helping them carrying out boxes and moving them to their first apartment on their own, remembers the single mattress on the floor at that first night, and how happy they were to get to share it. She remembers the almost inhumane blush on Theo’s cheeks when he paid them a visit a few months earlier, stammering and fumbling with his trembling hands until he finally asked them for their blessing to ask Liam to marry him.

It feels like home to me, feels like home to me
Feels like I’m all the way back where I come from
It feels like home to me, feels like home to me,
Feels like I’m all the way back where I belong

It feels like right where they belong. By each other’s side. They stand at the front for a moment as the music fades, their fingers intertwined, their gazes locked, trying not to cry, trying not to smile too hard.

***

“Theo,” Liam begins with his favorite word in the world. He looks at the man in front of him, at the pale skin glowing from underneath, light shining through from beneath it as brightly as the day they met. He’s so used to Theo’s face by now, but he never tires of looking at it. He discovers a new layer of perfection every time.

“Theo,” he repeats, squeezing his fingers tight around Theo’s. “My Sunshine. The light in my life. I love you. You came into my life when I least expected for everything to change in a heartbeat, and
There you were, and my world was turned upside down, and it took me a while until I was turned upside down as well, and then I discovered that upside down was just a matter of perspective, and that everything was actually just right. Today, and on all days after this one, I promise to be your loving husband, your best friend, your roommate forever. I will love you, and I will smile when you do. I will hold your hand and stand by your side, on the good days and the bad ones. And the really bad ones. And the really, really fucking good ones. I will let you drive me around the world and I will share my socks with you.”

They both laughed. A tear dropped from Theo’s cheek.

“I will spend the rest of my days beating you at every video game there is,” Liam continued. “I will always come home to you again. You own my heart, Theo Raeken, and my body and soul. You own me and I never want it to be any other way. I want to be nothing if not in your loving hands. Forever.”

He exhales deeply, his voice shaky from seeing Theo getting so damn emotional. In the middle of the ceremony, and Liam has no idea if it’s appropriate or allowed or whatever, but he couldn’t care less, they fall into each other’s arms, Theo crying into Liam’s neck, shedding tears out of pure, overflowing happiness, and the world has to wait until they’re ready to let go of each other.

“My Sunshine,” Liam adds, “I’m yours.”

***

“My Captain,” Theo says, his eyes reddened, his voice a little hoarse, his eyes shimmering with so much raw emotion that Liam wants to send all their guests home immediately so that they can cuddle in private.

“I had a whole speech written,” he admitted, holding a crumpled piece of paper in his hand, but not looking at it. “Several, actually. The truth is, no words can express how I feel. How happy you make me. How lucky I am to have found you. How crazy I am over you. How deeply you’ve changed by life.

I was a lost boy before you saved me, Liam. You gave me a home, and it was so overwhelmingly beautiful that I didn’t know how to deal with it for I while, but now I do. And if there’s one thing I want to do in my life, one goal I want to achieve, then it’s being a home to you too, and staying that until our very last day. You are the best thing that’s ever happened to me. You are the color on the canvas that is my life. You are the red that is always there. In the middle and in every corner. You are the blue that flows in waves at the bottom, and the blue that lies above the horizon. You are the yellow that I paint my moon and stars with. Too many of them to keep count. You are the green that grows in on the trees and provides the air I breathe. You are the orange of the sunrise. You are
the deep purple of a warm summer night. You are the pink of the flowers blooming in spring, and
the clean white of snow in the winter. You are every single one of the million shades that my
world consists of.”

Theo looked up and into Liam’s wide and watery eyes. “I love you so fucking much,” he
whispered, only for Liam, not for their audience, and then raised his voice again. “When do I
finally get to kiss my husband?”

***

“Allright, now show me those rings again,” Mason grins as they’re all sitting inside the little
pavilion in the park, half empty glasses of champagne in front on their glowing faces, the sun long
set around them, a small fire keeping them warm.

Most of the guest are gone, but Mason and Corey are still enjoying themselves telling what seems
to be a best of Theo and Liam being idiots. Nolan laughs at every single one of the stupid stories,
leaned back into Brett’s chests, strong arms slung around him, a faint orange shimmer on his
cheeks. David has his arms wrapped around Jenna, who has finally found the time to sit down and
enjoy the day, even if it’s almost over by now.

Lydia is sitting next to Theo, a woollen blanket draped around her. The colors beneath her skin
have changed, gotten more intense, started to move more quickly since she’s pregnant. Stiles has
been smothering her with over-excited attention and dessert all day long.

“Yeah, show them to us,” Scott agrees, and somehow, Liam still feels like if Scott says it, it can
only mean that he has to.

“I want to see them, too,” Hayden declares as she gets up to have a better view as they both place
their hands on top on the round table.

It might have taken a little while, or, well, quite a while, actually, but she and Liam made their
peace eventually. Strangely enough, it was Theo who brought them back together.

“Captain,” he’d declared one day during the summer after graduation, “it seems like I work with
your ex-girlfriend at my summer job. And before you say anything about that, please don’t make
me hate her. Because she’s actually pretty awesome.”
“I know that,” Liam had said.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Hayden had shut him off when they’d met again one day. And so they never had, but it was cool, it is cool now, they’re friends. Hayden has brought her new girlfriend to the wedding.

“Honey, you’re blocking everyone’s view,” Corey says with a light nudge against Mason’s shoulder. “You’re the one who picked the rings, you’ve seen them enough, don’t you think?”

“Absolutely not,” Mason replies and stays where he is.

The rings are two simple bands of a shiny silver, a tiny little stone in the middle at the front, a ruby on Theo’s and a moon stone on Liam’s. To Theo, it still looks strange to see them on their actual fingers, but as he takes Liam’s hand in his own, feeling his warmth and the softness of his skin against his own, Theo thinks he’ll be used to it in no time. Just like it always is with Liam.

***

“Real talk now,” Stiles begins at one point. They’re all a little tipsy, sitting in the dark together and forgetting that there’s going to be another day tomorrow. “Who of you is going to take the other’s name?”

Liam and Theo exchange an amused look.

“Let me tell you a funny story,” Theo smiles. Everybody’s full attention is on him as he begins talking.

“You might remember my wonderful husband here—” he raises their joined hands in the air as if to show who he was talking about. A grown up man now, but still the same dork as ever.

“- talking about beating me at every video game there is.” A few heads are nodded.

“Well, the truth is, we had a long and heated discussion about the name thing,” he continues.
“We all know a long and heated discussion between the two of you means you banged, but continue,” Corey interrupted.

“Whatever,” Theo slurs, “the point is, Liam said he’d take my name if I’d beat him just once. And guess whose great track record isn’t so great anymore now?”

Mason gasps dramatically. “Really, Liam?”

But Liam can only laugh and shrug it off. He remembers the day they sat on their couch, Theo determined to “play this out like men”, his own gaze completely on the living miracle next to him as his avatar died without putting up much of a fight. It was fun to never let Theo win for a long time, but when it comes to this, to taking the name that Theo claims doesn’t mean that much to him, since no other Raeken he knows is still alive, well, when it comes to that, Liam doesn’t want to play around.

He looks at an empty chair in the corner and wishes to have had the chance to meet Tara. He feels like he knows her from all the stories Theo has told him about their childhood shenanigans, but on days like this one, she’s missing even from him, although he’s never met her.

_I’ll take care of him_, he promises her where she isn’t sitting in the empty chair. _I’ll keep him safe. I’ll make him happy._

***

“Hey, husband,” Liam says after he’s waved all the others an extensive goodbye.

“Mister Raeken,” Theo replies, green eyes shimmering, illuminated by the little fire nearby.

“Can I have this dance?” Liam asks and hold his hand out for Theo to take it.

“I thought we had our wedding dance,” Theo jokes, but he still gets up and brings his hands to Liam’s body.
“This is not our wedding dance,” Liam whispers. He clicks play on his phone, then slides it inside his pocket and pulls Theo closer. “This is so much bigger.”

The world is asleep and silent, the music from Liam’s phone so quiet that nobody would understand the words without knowing them, but they live beneath their skin. Liam’s hand touches the small of Theo’s back as it always does when he starts singing it. His voice is barely audible.

_I’ve learned love attracts confusion_

_And confusion is not always getting clear_

_Thoughts tell nothing is as hard as the first time_

_But the first time was hard enough for me_

_Now I’m sweating like the weather on the west coast_

_Thinking should I really bet_

_I’m sure this chain of words I can’t hold back_

Theo knows there’s been a time when these words did nothing but hurt him. They still hold a power over him. His back tingles where the music notes are inked beneath his skin whenever he hears it. Tara was the one who used to sing it to him before a long time of silence inside his soul. But now he has Liam.

Liam who moves his lips against Theo’s neck as he’s singing.

_Compared to the moon_

_That I set up for you_

_Your eyes are so much brighter_

_I need something_

_Give me anything of you_

_Give me something_

_To finally be near to you_

Liam who holds him close in his arms. Liam who is there to be breathed in. Liam who is the
rainbow after the rain in his life. Liam who is everything.

Everything he could have ever asked for.

Everything.

And a little more.

_Compared to the moon_

_That I set up for you_

_Your eyes are so much brighter_

_I need something_

_Give me anything of you_

_Give me something_

_To finally be near to you_

Okay, maybe a lot more.

Chapter End Notes

Congratulations, you made it through my madness!

First of all, thank you so so much for reading!

A few things about the songs:
The wedding song is Feels like Home by Edwina Hayes, which never fails to make me want to cry.
The other song really isn't special. Not at all. Except to Theo and Liam. Please do not look for it on YouTube unless you have a kink for heavy german accents.

And at last, can I get a Hi from everyone who's made it this far please?

Works inspired by this piece: **because it's you and me** by parttimehuman, **Day 26** by parttimehuman, **Compared to the Sun** by parttimehuman
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!