**Enemy Lines**

by ghuinn (tekla)

**Summary**

This is the story of werewolf Derek Hale and human Stiles Stilinski: two people who grew up in the same town but completely different worlds, their realities split by the war between men and wolves.

Years later when Derek returns to Beacon Hills, he does it as Alpha of a military pack on a mission to capture those responsible for the region’s resistance. With his main objective, Sheriff Stilinski, out of sight, he settles for the next best thing: his son, Stiles.

Neither of them suspects they’ll need to trust each other if they want to make it out this alive.

**Notes**
People ask me all the time where did I get the idea for this story and the truth is that, I can't really tell for sure but probably from my obsession with dystopia stories and this incredible pairing that literally changed my life.

Before you read, I want to thank everyone who helped beta reading this story. Harper Belle, Stephanie, Kari and the many others who supported and helped me through the months I worked on Enemy Lines. I'll always be grateful! After their amazing contribution and help, any mistake, typo or grammar error you might find is only my fault. Please be kind enough to point them out so I can fix it.

I'm also humbly honored by the amazing and talented people who have done graphics and fanart based on this story. And I feel it's only right to list them below:

- General fanart by Scherwood.
- General fanart by Juli-Yashka.
- NSFW sketch by Reborn GP.
- Chapter 6 spoiler fanart by Reborn GP.
- Chapter 11 spoiler fanart by Paintingred.
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Thank you so much for sharing your talent and passion with me and my story!

And most importantly, thanks everyone for being here. I hope you enjoy reading as much as I did writing Enemy Lines! :)

Stiles Stilinski is nine years old when the foundations of his world are irrevocably altered.

Back then he was just a kid, and as any kid of his age, his world is small, consisting of his parents and friends or school, video games and unfortunately for him, homework.

He knows there’s something going on in the grown up world, though. He can tell adults seem to be more tense than usual for boring old people. He also notices whenever his mom changes the news channel, like she wouldn’t want him to see something. But Stiles doesn’t really care. He’s more concerned about the latest video game his friend Scott bought than whatever is going on in a world that seems to be miles away from his own.

Only when the terror hits his town directly is he forced to face the truth.

One morning he and Scott are waiting for the school bus with a bunch of other kids from their block, when a man approaches them. At first, Stiles thinks it’s a homeless person, because his clothes are filthy and his hair is a frizzy mess.

But then the man is right in front of them, and his hands are claws. Enormous claws, so big they are almost as long as one of Stiles’ forearms.

And Stiles just freezes, fascinated by what’s unfolding in front of him. He stays there like a fool while the man’s ears elongate, and suddenly there’s fur everywhere as his jaw seems to break and rearrange in an impossible angle, showing big, animalistic fangs.

One of the kids starts to scream, and that seems to make the man react. He darts forward and grabs her whole face with one hand, tossing the kid aside like a rag doll.

And that’s when panic breaks loose.

Everyone starts running, pushing and screaming. Everyone but Stiles, who stays there, completely petrified.

The beast-man seems to notice him and his bright yellow eyes pin him with such pure hatred, even a nine year old who knows nothing about life understands something is terribly wrong with that person.

And as the monster raises his claws and bares his fangs in a deafening roar, a gunshot blasts through the neighborhood and the monster drops dead in front of his feet, splashing blood on Stiles’ face.

Hours later, he is in a hospital room surrounded by strangers who want to know how he is feeling, but Stiles honestly has no idea. His mind goes over and over the way that man’s body convulsed and changed right in front of his eyes and somehow he’s disconnected from the terror. All he feels is an odd fascination for what he saw.

He can hear his mom arguing with the doctors, though. And after a moment, he realizes his dad doesn’t seem to be agreeing with her, which is the first thing that truly scares him that day.

“Lycanthropy is not passed along like that,” she is saying. “My son is fine, he’s not infected!”

“Honey, let them run some tests, just in case,” his dad is trying to reason with her.
“There’s no need for that,” she insists. “That werewolf was a mere Omega; he didn’t have enough power to turn someone, even if he wanted to. He was lost and alone. He panicked, that’s why he attacked!”

And that’s when everyone starts talking at once and Stiles can’t understand what they are saying anymore.

A couple of days later, after the doctors finally ran some tests on him, they go back home and his mom has the talk with him.

For any other kid, the talk would consist of flowers and bees and how when dad and mom love each other very much... But not for Stiles. His talk is about lycanthropy, pack dynamics, wolfsbane and the moon’s cycles.

And after that, Stiles’ world expands.

He no longer lives blindly in his small world and starts seeing what is really happening around him.

For starters, he notices the werewolf family living outside town in a big house lost in the woods. The Hales have always lived in Beacon Hills, but Stiles never connected them to werewolves until now. His mother explains how she’s recently started working with the Alpha of their pack, trying to create a peaceful atmosphere in their town. She praises them constantly; their control, their kindness, their loyalty. And Stiles can’t help but like them, because it’s obvious his mother does, too.

Stiles never accompanies her when she visits the Hale house, though. She says it’s too dangerous, because there are too many cubs and inexperienced teen wolves living there. Dealing with a few at a time is usually harmless, she says, but going into their territory can be tricky sometimes. And bringing more humans than necessary could be considered a challenge anyway.

But that doesn’t prevent him from observing the younger Hales at school, wondering what it is like to live like they do. He knows they all live together; aunts, nieces, siblings, couples, grandfathers and cousins. There are even rumors that some of them are humans, but no one knows for sure.

When he’s twelve, things quickly change for the worse.

His parents start to fight more. Or maybe Stiles is old enough now to notice; he doesn’t really know. He believes his parents love each other, but they have very different visions of what’s happening and how it affects them.

His father doesn’t want his wife taking any part in protests or support groups for werewolves. And his mother doesn’t understand how her husband can be okay with the negation of human rights werewolves are receiving.

That’s when the Argent family moves next door.

His friend Scott instantly picks up an interest in the younger daughter, a cool looking girl called Allison and soon they are dating, turning Stiles’ friend duo into a trio.

Allison doesn’t seem to know what her family is a part of. Stiles tries to explain about the council meetings his dad attends with her father and grandfather, and how her family is trying to ban all werewolves from Beacon Hills. But Allison doesn’t seem interested. Or maybe she is, and she just doesn’t agree with Stiles’ opinions that take a little bit too much after his mother’s.

Stiles knows they are friends only because of Scott, anyway. But not everything is so bad. Hanging out with Allison also means hanging out with her best friend and Stiles’ first love, Lydia Martin. So,
all things considered, Allison is cool.

His father is promoted to Sheriff then.

His mother is very excited, thinking he’ll fight for the human rights for everyone. But soon she and Stiles realize that his father only accepted the promotion to make sure their town was a safer place without the threat of werewolves. And so he starts working with Gerard Argent, Allison’s scary grandfather and the biggest promoter of the anti-wolf bill.

At first no one knows about the ghettos the government opens all over the country but soon, enough families have disappeared for the public eye to develop an interest. And that’s when the news starts encouraging people to inform the authorities of any neighbor, acquaintance, family member or friend who might be infected.

It’s for safety reasons, they say. They just want to keep the werewolves in reclusive, safe places for everyone’s sake. There’s even a campaign where national TV cameras visit the camps and show smiling children and content adults.

Some people compare the situation with Germany many years ago, but that discussion never goes far because people are too scared, simple as that. They want their families to be safe. There have been too many attacks, so of course werewolves are considered a threat.

Stiles accompanies his father to one of his meetings and hears Gerard Argent speaking against the ghettos. He believes they will only cost money to the state. The solution is not containing the epidemic, he says vehemently, but eradicating it.

The Hale kids stop going to school abruptly after this. One day they just stop going and no one seems to care or wonder why. The rumor says they are home schooled now and that’s enough to calm the people who had protested about were-kids attending the public school.

Stiles asks his mother about them now and then, but as time goes by and the situation gets worse, she shares less and less with him.

She’s the main voice of America's biggest Humans-Wolves integration group. At some point, she starts receiving threats through mail and voicemail, which makes her paranoid about Stiles accompanying her.

His parents have a big argument when the Senate starts working on a new law to ban any kind of aid for werewolves. His father wants his mother to stop before she’s sent to jail.

Stiles observes him kneeling in front of her, hugging her waist as he cries and begs her to stop. But Stiles knows nothing can change his mother’s mind. She believes in what she’s doing.

After that night, his parents stop fighting. Stiles can’t really understand what happened, but they seem to reach some kind of mutual understanding, turning the Stilinski house into a neutral place from then on.

Stiles is fourteen and even he’s aware the situation can’t last much longer in the country.

The Argents create a neighborhood group to establish the security on the streets. They call themselves the Hunters, although it’s just a bunch of people carrying rifles and guns, who go around killing werewolves in what they call self-defense, which is now registered as legal by the law in thirty two states.

No one has seen the Hale family in almost a year, since the ghettos went public. Some people believe
they left town, but Stiles suspects his mom is still visiting them now and then. He can tell because, sometimes when she comes back home there’s a certain frown in her face, like the frustration she is feeling is too overwhelming somehow.

He goes with her to a pro-wolf protest where she is supposed to read a speech, and he discovers there’s a new group of people attending the protests now: humans with signs saying ‘furry lovers go to hell’ or ‘don't be surprised when the big bad wolf kills you.’

His mother doesn’t seem surprised, though. And when things start heating up between the two groups, she immediately tells him to run away. He doesn’t understand at first until he sees the police marching against them.

So he runs, and when he’s blocks away, Stiles turns around and sees uniformed men beating on his mother’s colleagues indiscriminately while the other group cheers from across the street.

That's when his mom’s approach to the situation changes. First, she forbids Stiles from accompanying her anymore, and then she begins to be more secretive about her activities.

On TV they start showing the disturbances in Chicago.

No one can predict what ends up happening in that city, though. What starts as a simple pro-wolf protest escalates to riots, where a young were-kid is murdered, turning the events into a civil war that changes the country forever.

The government sends military forces to the area but they misjudge the situation. There are too many well organized wolves and humans working together and in the end, they besiege the city.

A lot of people die, and when the city turns into a Wolf City, the first of many, a massive exodus of humans are allowed to leave to safer places.

Soon after that, there’s a massive attack against the ghettos. After several break-ins, the places are officially closed. The government is too busy fighting the wolves outside to keep the ones inside.

Soon the news talks about other cities like Chicago and things escalate from that pretty quickly.

That's when Gerard Argent starts acting crazy, too.

He speaks of war before anybody else dares to. He terrorizes everyone who listens to him with stories of humans being ruled by monsters if they don’t do something about it soon.

Stiles’ mother keeps fighting, though. She loses a lot of people along the way, but that never stops her. She believes humans pushed werewolves to this situation, and that both parties still have time to fix this. But no one seems to listen to her anymore.

Stiles is fifteen and co-founder of the pro-wolf group in his school. One day, he arrives to their usual meeting class and finds it trashed and filled with offensive graffiti. He thinks he’s angry, until one of the girls from the group appears with a broken nose, and then he understands what rage is.

He goes straight back home to tell his mom, but she doesn't react as he expected. He’s suspected for a long time now that there’s something going on his mother won't tell him, but this is the last straw. When he explains about the attack and she doesn’t even bother to reply, he decides to take matters into his own hands.

That night, when she sneaks out of the house, Stiles follows her all the way downtown to a dark alley, where she meets up with a stranger.
His mother exchanges envelopes with a man driving a big truck. And when the man seems to be content, she makes a gesture to the shadows and two teens are suddenly coming out of the darkness.

They look like siblings. Both tall, with dark hair, pale eyes and matching broody expressions on their dirty faces. The sister, who looks older, hugs Stiles’ mom in a tight embrace while the boy stands there.

It takes Stiles a while to recognize them. After all, it’s been almost two years since he last saw Laura and Derek Hale.

He observes Derek, the way he fists his hands and clenches his jaw when Stiles’ mom pats his back and he understands Derek hates humans.

He turns around and Stiles can see he has a big bruise on the side of his face. Immediately, he understands something awful must have happened, and the uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach makes him sick.

Stiles’ mom cups Derek’s cheek, speaking something Stiles can’t hear and then the siblings are climbing inside the truck without a glance back.

Stiles understands his mother has paid that driver to take them out of Beacon Hills, but why? And more importantly, where are the other members of their family?

When the truck leaves, he decides to come out of his hiding spot to confront his mother, tired of all the secrets she’s obviously been keeping from him and his father.

"Stiles, you shouldn’t be here!” She freaks out when she sees him, rushing to his side. “It’s not safe.”

Stiles has never seen her like this.

"Mom, it's not safe anywhere," he exclaims, pointing around them.

"It's even less here," she cups his face with both her hands and looks him straight in the eye.

"I knew you’d end up following me one day," she whispers. “But why did you have to pick today of all days?”

She smiles sadly, and takes a deep breath.

“I made a mistake when I kept you out of this,” she starts explaining resolutely. “I thought you could have a normal life, but how could you, when we’re heading into a war? There’s a lot I want to tell you about, but this is not the place. We have to go back home. We need to-”

There’s a sound in the alley that makes his mother freeze.

"Hide," she hisses, pushing him back between the big garbage cans he had been hiding a moment ago. "No matter what, don't come out."

He tries to protest but she's shoving him down so hard he stumbles back.

“I love you,” she whispers. And then she’s turning around and rushing away.

Stiles stays there completely petrified. He can barely breathe. It's too dark to see them but at least he can hear his mother’s voice.

And when she says Gerard's name, Stiles' heart makes a double flip in his throat.
"You shouldn't have done that," the man purrs.

"You won't be able to hurt them now," his mom replies in a defiant tone Stiles knows well.

"Don't be silly. I always finish what I start," Gerard threatens. "And I don't like it when people insist on standing in my way, you should know that."

“Cry me a river, why don’t you?” his mother snaps back.

Gerard sighs. “I’m so tired of dealing with you, darling.”

Following up, a shotgun blasts through the darkness.

And Stiles is suddenly screaming, deafening himself with the intensity of his own raw voice. He darts forward and palms the filthy ground until he finds his mom.

He finds her lying in a pool of her own blood, and as Stiles holds her to his chest, he realizes it's too late. She’s gone.

"You shouldn't be here, boy," Gerard startles him.

Stiles makes a move to attack him but the older man is faster, pressing the barrel of his gun against his temple.

"Don't even think about it," the man hisses.

"You think I enjoyed killing your mother?" he continues. "It pains me to sacrifice a fellow human being, but she had lost her way. Those who run with wolves end up badly. Remember that, kid."

Stiles feels the tears running down his face as he clenches his jaw. He's never felt such hatred before. His whole body shakes as he clutches his mother closer to him.

"I'm letting you live so you can do something for me," Gerard says casually.

"Dream on," Stiles spits the words out.

"Feisty," Gerard sounds amused. "But what if I said it's actually something for your father? How feisty would you be then?"

Stiles raises his face and stares at his mother’s killer straight in the eye.

"Your dad's fate is in your hands." Gerard runs the barrel of his gun down Stiles’ cheek. "You see, if he ever finds out the truth of what just happened tonight, I will have to kill him."

“Do you understand what I’m saying?” Gerard insists when Stiles doesn’t even flinch. “I don't want to. Your father is a good man, but I will if I have to.”

Stiles’ mind is a frantic mess, but somewhere in the deepest part of his rational consciousness, he understands what Gerard is implying. So he nods slowly, feeling the gun caressing his skull as he does.

"Your mother was killed by one of her beloved werewolves," Gerard informs him. And Stiles immediately understands his plan.

"And how are you going to make a shotgun look like claw marks, halfwit?" He grits through his teeth.
He can't even look down at his mother. If he does, the reality that she's dead and he’s talking with her killer will finally hit him. And he can’t lose it, not yet when he’s still negotiating for his father’s life.

"Do not worry about it," Gerard smiles. "All you have to worry about is your father believing this was the werewolves' fault. Which is true in a way, if you think about it."

Later that night, Stiles can’t remember how he went from the alley to the hospital, where he’s now with his father.

A doctor explains how it's not a good idea to see his mother’s corpse because of the terrible claw marks, and Stiles collapses in a chair.

He has his first panic attack, although he doesn't know that back then. All he knows is that his mother is dead. Murdered by a psycho who didn’t have enough with killing her and blackmailing Stiles to lie about her death, but who also dared to manipulate her body.

And he can't breathe, he can’t see; he's going to break into a million pieces.

During the next days, he's tempted to tell his father the truth so many times he loses count. As they get his mother ready for a closed casket funeral, all he can think about is going to the secret wolf commune downtown and spread the news, knowing someone would go to the Argent house to pay his mother tribute. But he's scared for his dad, and there are innocent people living in that house, anyway. Like Allison. He can’t do that to Scott.

After the funeral, he finds out what Gerard had done that night before he killed his mom.

He went to the Hale house and burnt it with everyone inside. Humans and werewolves alike died, even the children and toddlers. Stiles doesn't know how the older siblings escaped but there’s no sense in wondering now.

He learns from Scott, who heard from Allison, that Lydia met this snobby looking guy called Jackson and they are leaving town, heading south where it seems things are safer. Stiles supposes he should care more, but he can’t feel anything right now. So he just lets it go.

As the years go by, his father gets more and more involved in the war that finally breaks loose in the country. He fervently blames the wolves for what happened to his wife, and Stiles just lets him do so.

He keeps the lie during the years, keeping the guilt locked inside as he supports his dad in his crusade, because he doesn't want to lose the only family he has left. And because he can no longer support what supposedly killed his mother, right? It’s like the lie he created took over his life, and he can’t escape.

Until one point, where he begins to see the werewolves differently. At first, he feels he’s betraying his mother’s memory, but after a while, that’s not even enough to make him stop caring.

The guilt roots and twists inside of him and he no longer wants to tell his father, not because he wants to protect him, but because he thinks his father will blame him. Because it was Stiles’ fault. All of it. And he knows. So how couldn’t his dad if he knew the truth, too?

He's eighteen now, and humans still resist in Beacon Hills.

The country has been divided, the borders forged by humans’ and wolves’ blood alike. And they are technically not in America anymore.
The north is Wolf Nation, where humans are either used as slaves or killed. The south is for the humans, where werewolves are killed on sight or used to experiment on.

Even while Beacon Hills is as safe a place for humans as any can be in that region, accidents still happen. That’s the reason why they find half the body of a girl in the woods one day.

And when his father insists, he calls Scott and they join the search parties to find the other half. That’s how Scott ends up being bitten and all hell breaks loose all over again.

Allison’s family chases him through the woods, no matter how she and Stiles try to reason with them. And so Stiles does something he thought he’d never do again.

He helps a werewolf.

He can’t stop thinking of his mother as he guides Scott to the safe house she used in the past. He hasn’t visited the place in years. And for a moment, he allows himself to hope the building won’t be there anymore and he won’t have to face it after all.

But when they turn right at the end of the deserted street, he sees the building still looks exactly the same as he remembered.

He leaves Scott there and promises him they will fix this. But on the next full moon, when Scott loses control and nearly kills Stiles, he realizes he can’t do this alone.

He remembers the secret nest of people helping werewolves cross borders that his mother was in contact with, and Stiles starts plotting a plan.

But it doesn’t matter. Because the next time he goes to the safe house, Scott has disappeared. He just runs away one day without even saying goodbye and he never comes back.

Stiles feels tempted to burn the safe house, to make everything disappear. But in the end, he just goes home to find Allison waiting with a note Scott gave her for him before running away.

He takes the note in a trance and thanks her before going inside his place. But he never reads it. He can’t handle it. The fact that he lost yet another person is too much. He’s made of anger and resentment. He no longer cares like he used to. So he tears the letter apart and tromps all over it.

After that, he loses touch with Allison. She tries to visit a couple of times, but he never answers. And a few months later, the Argents leave Beacon Hills.

He runs into his father talking with Chris Argent, and hears him explain they are going north to the wolf territories to participate in the war. They secured this town and now it’s his father’s responsibility, but there are still many places where hunters are needed, Chris informs him proudly.

Allison tries to say goodbye before they leave, but Stiles hides in his room and refuses to see her. He’s not proud of it, but he had enough goodbyes for a lifetime.

After that, he just lets the days go by as he turns twenty in a world where people die every day defending their territory against monsters.

But Stiles doesn’t know who the monsters are supposed to be, anymore.
Derek Hale grows up in the woods.

His first memory is of chasing his older sister through the little clearing behind their house. He shows his little fangs, and when Laura finally wolfs out and roars back at him, Derek squeals in delight, playing under the amused surveillance of their parents.

He understands he’s different for the first time when he’s six years old.

He’s in kindergarten and a kid steals his toy. Derek can’t help it; he growls his fierce cub roar and his eyes turn bright blue, startling the kid so much he sobs uncontrollably for almost an hour.

That night his parents give him the talk.

They had hoped to have more time for this, that he’d be older so he could understand better. But Derek never went with the rest of the pack’s pace.

Like when he hears his father explaining to Laura how to control the wolf, and somehow something clicks in his young brain and by the time the cubs are still learning to show their claws at will, Derek is already able to wolf out without losing control.

He’s still too young to understand what his anchor is, though. Back then, he believes it’s the woods. And when he’s old enough to understand it is the feeling he had when he was in the wood with his pack, it’s too late and his anchor is something completely different.

His talk is about his family.

His parents explain their property is off limits for strangers, and he should never bring anyone over, because their territory is the most important thing for a pack. They built theirs from scratch when his father’s grandfather moved his family to Beacon Hills years ago.

So Derek grows up in a house lost in the woods, away from the world that is changing.

He had human friends back then. Not just his cousins, who were born without the lycanthrope gene, but regular humans not related to his family. His parents are wary about it, but Derek likes the human kids. They are fun to play with; it amuses him how different they are.

But things change when he’s thirteen and a rogue omega trespasses onto their territory.

For most of them, it’s the first time they meet a wolf from outside their pack. The omega doesn’t get close to their house, as a show of respect, but his father and uncles chase him off anyway. They don’t want outsiders in their family.

A couple of days later, they hear the omega attacked a bunch of kids at the school’s bus stop and his father leaves to deal with the situation.

That’s the first time Mrs. Stilinski visits their property.

He doesn’t think much of her at first. He goes to school with humans every day, after all. But for some of the younger cubs, she’s the most exciting thing to ever happen. They cling to her and demand to play hide and seek, and the woman indulges them so much, Derek finds himself getting closer. He has never seen an outsider acting like pack before, and as he watches, they all squeal and
run around, showing their little claws and roaring louder when she dares them to.

Things change in school after that.

Someone spreads rumors about his family being like the monster that attacked those kids, and soon it’s considered brave among the students to whisper werewolf when one of them passes by.

At first it’s only odd glares that turn into openly hostile stares over time. It takes longer for the physical violence to happen, and Derek spends more time preventing the hits than throwing them. There’s no sport in beating a bunch of kids senseless.

He stops hanging out with his human friends, too. They don’t really say anything but he can feel their qualms whenever he’s around. What they don’t seem to understand is that he can sense their fear and anger, so there’s no need for words when you want to stop hanging out with your werewolf friend.

He used to love how easy it was to read humans, but now he despises it. He doesn’t want to know what they feel, because no one knows how he feels in return.

So he starts skipping class. It’s only a class now and then at first. But soon he spends more time roaming the woods than in school.

He likes the calmness in the forest, the feeling of the earth beneath his feet. Here he doesn’t have to deal with the bitterness in the back of his throat whenever someone feels fear, or the burning on the back of his neck when someone is angry.

He expects the principal to call his parents, but it never happens. And Derek realizes no one is going to complain, because no one wants him there.

At some point he stops wolfing out, too.

He doesn’t know why, he just does. He stops turning altogether and that’s it. He doesn’t think it’s that important but his father tries to talk to him about it anyway. And when he refuses to discuss it, his uncle Peter tries it, too.

He snoops on the group of adults talking about him soon after that. They are worried something may be wrong with him, that maybe he can’t turn anymore for whatever reason.

So the next full moon he accompanies his family to the woods and turns with them, roaming together through their territory as one pack. He runs with the younger cubs, indulging in their games as he stubbornly hides his smile whenever his mother approaches him.

The only person who ends up confronting him in the end is Laura.

She used to be the best student in her year, until the bullying started and her teachers lowered her grades on purpose. But she doesn’t say anything; she just works harder to make it impossible for them to drop her average score too much.

Derek has always admired her for all the things she is and he will never be. So when she orders him to go back to school and face the problem instead of hiding like a weak omega without a pack would do, Derek obeys.

He realizes he’s been denying his pack, hiding from the things that defined him but the world hated, ignoring the news about riots and werewolves murdered with impunity. And that has made him weak. So he makes a decision; he will never deny his wolf again, even if that means being an outcast.
He’s sixteen when they lose contact with the packs in the adjacent wolf territories and they realize something must be terribly wrong.

Around that time, they start getting randomly attacked. Silver arrows, small traps, nothing they can’t fight back. They don’t know who is behind this until one night when they meet the Argent family, a bunch of crazy humans with crossbows and guns fond of terrorizing werewolves for no good reason. And they understand the attacks won’t stop.

So they start patrolling their territory to prevent them from finding their house and after a while, the cubs grow wary of everyone outside the pack.

Whenever Mrs. Stilinski visits, they don't run to her like they used to. Derek sees the hurt in her face every time she comes back and less and less of his family members go outside to meet her. She never stops asking about the cubs, though, or waving with a smile whenever someone leans out of the window.

And then the ghettos go public.

That’s when things get real for them. Suddenly, they understand where those missing packs are and they stop considering the Argent family random lunatics. Things are seriously going wrong in the country.

One evening shortly after that, his father comes home smelling of fresh blood. He orders a pack meeting and announces he had a little chat with Gerard Argent.

He informs the pack that the Argents want the werewolves out of school, or else they’ll be hunted. His father holds his side and says everyone will be homeschooled from then on, and Derek wonders what he must be really thinking.

Laura is the only one who protests. She insists and pesters their father for days. She is about to graduate in less than a month and she’s not letting the matter go without a fight. In the end, their father gives in, but he establishes strict norms she’ll have to follow if she really wants to go to school.

Derek knows she’s capable of protecting herself, but he wants to accompany Laura anyway. He just doesn’t like the idea of his sister alone and surrounded by humans. He explains to their father and he agrees, believing it’s a good idea.

None of them can predict what happens next.

Derek doesn’t see the cars blocking the road until he turns in the curve. He brakes and swerves his car to prevent the collision, and when he jumps out, he instantly knows he is in trouble.

"Your father and I had an interesting chat yesterday," Chris Argent says. "He says you want to keep attending school," the man explains with a big smile. “And I say that can’t be true. I mean, a teenager wanting to go to class? Come on, am I right guys?"

All his men laugh at the lame joke and Derek grows tense.

"What do you want?" He frowns.

"What I want," Chris smirks, "is for monsters like you to disappear. But since I can't have what I want, let's aim for the next best thing, don’t you think?"

He steps closer, pulling out an electric baton so fast Derek can’t react before the first blow hits him.
He feels the electric current fraying his insides, running up and down his spine as the blows keep coming at him, hurting him in a way he’s never experienced before.

And as he shakes out of control and his jaw clenches so hard he thinks he’s going to break his teeth and bite his own tongue, Derek hears someone scream.

"Chris! Stop it!" A girl yells. "You're going to kill him!"

"You say that like it’s a bad thing, sister," Chris mocks.

"I'm being serious," she insists. "We don't want the Hales going after us because you killed one of their cubs."

"This can’t be considered a cub anymore; look at him all wolfed out."

Derek is kicked away by the girl and he's suddenly out of the reach of that electric baton.

"Whatever he is," the girl says, "we are not here to kill him."

"You're right, Kate," he nods, mocking seriousness. "Let's make sure his father can tell we paid him a visit, though."

His men step up and start kicking him then. One of them aims at his face, making Derek dizzy with each new blow. After a while, they seem to grow bored and stop, going back to their cars as they congratulate each other on the good job.

The girl kneels in front of him and Derek can't help but flinch away.

"I hope you heal as fast as they say you can," she smiles and before she gets up, she winks at him. Derek stays there, completely stunned by her behavior as he watches her rush to Chris’ car before they leave the place in a cloud of dust.

It takes him awhile but he ends up getting back in the car and driving home. He doesn't even notice the side of his face is covered in blood until his mother howls when she sees him.

They have a pack reunion, and his father orders everyone to stay home for the time being, forbidding any contact with humans from then on. He tells the younger members to run at the sight of any Argent and he tells the adults to attack if they cross paths with them. He then roars that they are going to be homeschooled from then on, and no one protests this time.

He’s eighteen and the pack lives in front of the TV as they follow the disturbances in Chicago. They watch people fighting in the streets, and how protests turn into uproars.

But everything changes when a young cub is murdered by the police. Then, the city literally turns into a war zone.

Later, when Chicago becomes the first Wolf City, some people in his family cheer, but his father only frowns before leaving the room. And somehow that scares him more than anything up until then.

He's a difficult teenager. He knows now. He can list all his mistakes, all the times he hurt his mother, disappointed his father or betrayed his pack’s trust.

But his biggest mistake is Kate Argent.

After the ambush, he can’t take her out of his mind. She’s older, she’s forbidden and above it all,
she’s dangerous and very beautiful. Derek has never felt anything like this before.

He starts playing with the idea of meeting her again. He fantasizes about it and keeps her locked in his mind, knowing it could never happen. Until one day, when he is running some errands downtown and they cross paths again.

As a greeting, she shows him the glock she’s packing under her jacket, and Derek knows she has to be his. He grins at the gun and she laughs very loudly, a rich sound that makes his whole body tingle.

He’s never done this before, the whole flirting thing. But somehow she makes things easy on him.

“My car is right across the street,” she offers with a grin and Derek only nods, following her.

He has a moment to think of his father, of what he’d say if he saw him right now. Of how he’s disobeying a direct order from his Alpha. But then Kate’s hand is squeezing his tight, moving slowly up the inside of his leg, and he knows she won’t hurt him.

“I know what you might be thinking,” she comments. “What is a werewolf hunter doing with a werewolf, right?”

She cups him over his pants, making him groan.

“But honey,” she leans over and licks the corner of his mouth. “You’ve grown up just fine. Werewolf or not, I can’t decline.”

And she squeezes his crotch, and maybe it’s a little bit too hard but it doesn’t stop Derek from growling and pouncing on her.

There’s nothing romantic in what they do that first time. Kate knows what she wants and Derek just allows her to take it, because he has no idea what to do when a beautiful girl drives you to some remote place and takes her clothes off.

Later, he runs through the woods back home to lose the scent of human on his skin, and he thinks of Kate marked by his own scent, knowing he’s seeing her again.

Over the next months, he spends more and more time with her, finding excuses to sneak around without raising suspicion.

And maybe Kate shows a little bit too much interest about his family sometimes, but when he confronts her about it, she always asks him what kind of interest she could have in a beta like him. And Derek believes her, because she makes perfect sense. He’s no one in the pack’s status. There’s nothing she can use against his family through him.

This is his first intimate experience, too. So he doesn’t know if what they do could be considered abusive, or if the way she caresses him sometimes is a bit more harsh than necessary, or whether he should worry when he tries to kiss her sometimes and she turns her face away.

All he knows is that she seems to want him as much as he wants her. He’s obsessed. When they are not together, all he can think about is the next time they will be. And when they are finally together, he can’t stop touching her.

Years later, Derek remembers how tragic and romantic he used to consider their situation. How he thought they were in love. Right, he was a hopeless romantic. But Kate made sure to take that away from him, among many other things.
He receives a message from her at four in the morning one day, and he doesn’t doubt for a second to sneak out of the house to meet up with her.

“Hey,” Kate greets when he arrives, and Derek knows something is wrong immediately. Her heartbeat is off, so frantic it’s kind of deafening.

“What's wrong?” He frowns, instantly worried about her.

"I shouldn't have called you,” she shrugs.

“What happened?” He insists.

"Nothing, but something is about to,” she says oddly.

"What…” He falters on his gait, stopping a few feet away from her.

"Your family," she murmurs.

“Kate..." he warns, unsure of what’s happening yet.

"I had to get you out of there; I couldn't let you die with the rest."

“What do you mean die?” Derek roars. “What have you done, Kate?”

"Oh honey,” she mocks a pity face. “I knew you were naive but this... Do I really have to spell it out for you?” She cocks her head to the side.

"I really like you," she says. "I really do, even if you're a monster. You're going to grow up into a fine piece of hot candy man. It's a pity I'll have to miss it."

She grows serious when he turns around to his car.

“Don't rush back home or you might come across my father,” she deadpans. “And trust me, you don't want that.”

Derek is suddenly roaring, wolfing out in a second. He feels his hands turning into claws and his jaw breaking and transforming, but she doesn’t even flinch.

“I guess I grew fond of you after all,” she shrugs it off. “Call me sentimental, sue me. I blame those puppy eyes of yours.”

She laughs and Derek sees her for what she really is for the first time: a lunatic. A cold, manipulative person. A werewolf hunter.

He finally understands, and the truth is worse than anything he could have ever imagined.

“Since when?” He whispers.

She throws her head back as she keeps laughing. “Oh my god, Derek.”

She suddenly pulls out the electric baton Derek knows so well from when they made acquaintances months ago.

“Remember this? The baton my brother beat you with? It’s mine. In fact, it’s my favorite weapon to torture sick creatures like you.”
Derek observes her moving the baton back and forth slowly and he realizes he’s scared of it.

“You see, my father and I, we like to plot,” she comments animatedly. “We knew we could never beat you in your natural territory, the woods. So we planned this. Well,” she pulls a face, “not everything, of course.” She indicates between them. “He doesn’t know about you and me… you know.” She grins.

“But really, Derek,” she grows serious. “It was so easy taking the information out of you. So easy. Sometimes I wanted to make you shut up so we could have a bit more time together. I really grew fond of your body and what I taught you to do with it.”

“But you know, your family had to die,” She fakes a pout.

Derek roars and darts forward but Kate has obviously been waiting for this. She throws the baton back and hits him straight in the face, making him fall and lose consciousness when the bolts fry his brain.

And that’s the last time he sees her.

When he wakes up, he can smell the fire in the dawn, and as he darts back home, ignoring the throb in his face, he wolfs out and howls, calling for his pack.

Before he reaches the clearing around their house, Laura stops him. She probably saves his life when she pushes him into the bushes.

Derek stares at their house burning, feels the ashes covering him slowly, and with every breath he takes, he smells the charred remains of his pack.

He observes as the small group of humans in the clearing cheer when part of their house collapses, and Laura starts crying quietly next to him.

He wishes he could cry too, but he can't feel anything. He's numb.

The Sheriff arrives hours later, when the fire has started to die down and the humans are long gone. Derek knows he’s Mrs. Stilinski’s husband, but neither his sister nor he approach him.

The Sheriff observes the house with utter horror and rushes to use his police radio to call a fire truck and an ambulance and Derek understands he wasn’t part of it.

The human tries to go inside but the entrance is a charred mess. And when the operatives finally arrive, it takes them an hour to be able to retrieve the bodily remains.

They pull out his younger cousins from the basement, and Derek sees their small burned bodies disappear into bags and tossed inside a truck.

And then Laura is shaking and stumbling away, running deep into the woods, where she wolfs out and turns into the most beautiful wolf Derek has ever seen. And when he chases her, he sees her eyes turning red and he understands what’s happening.

Derek presses her to his chest as the wolf whines, letting the transition take place and turning her into the new Alpha of what’s left of the Hale pack.

Later that day, after hours of walking through the woods without a direction, Laura makes a phone call. She takes Derek to a shady part of town, where they hide in a dirty alley until Mrs. Stilinski appears.
He can’t take it when she cups his cheek and says everything will be alright. He can’t stand the touch of a human, not now. He can’t accept comfort and understanding from one of them.

They get in that truck that takes them to New York, where they meet up with some relatives. He doesn’t know the moment he starts hating humans. He suspects it’s a progressive thing. But one day he wakes up and realizes he despises them.

He and Laura talk about it and both get a triskelion tattooed on their back to commemorate the first anniversary since the murder of their family. They pick the spiral because it means revenge, but also because it represents the dynamic of the pack. And somehow it makes them feel less alone without theirs.

Derek is twenty two when the rumors of new werewolves in Beacon Hills start. Laura decides to go back to investigate and orders him to stay back, making sure he stays safe. Derek hates the idea of being separated, but he can’t go against his Alpha’s direct orders. He knows what happens when a beta does that from his own experience.

When he stops hearing from her, though, he knows something went wrong.

He leaves New York behind and travels through wolf territory back to the hell hole he promised never to go back to.

He roams the woods of his family's property like he used to, scenting any clue about his sister and ignoring the pangs of physical pain he's suffering from being there.

Soon he finds her body. Or what's left of her. Derek buries her under a wolfsbane spiral and when she turns into her wolf, he pets her fur once before covering her completely.

He thought losing his family was the worse he’d go through, but somehow Laura's murder hits him harder.

He knows werewolves are being enlisted in Capital Wolf City. He’s running out of his family’s property, planning to go to what used to be Chicago to join them when he smells him: a newly bitten human.

Humans can’t even start comprehending the mechanics of the bite. Only an Alpha, a powerful one, could bite a human and turn them. Werewolves are born, simple as that. Alphas don’t give the bite to anyone that easily, because it has big consequences. And most of the werewolf community respects that. The human body is not ready for such a tremendous change. Most of them die, or turn into other things.

Derek curses, stopping in his tracks. He has a moment of internal turmoil trying to decide what to do. He knows what he wants to do, but he also knows what his sister or his father would do. That’s why he turns around and chases Scott to the safe place a young human is taking him.

Somehow he looks at the human and he knows he’s Mrs. Stilinski’s son. The similarity is uncanny. He perceives the sour smell of loss coming off him, though, and he suspects she’s most probably dead.

He visits Scott after the human leaves. He wants to take him to Chicago, but Scott doesn’t trust him. It’s been a long time since Derek had to deal with anyone that wasn’t his sister. He’s rusty in his social skills. So maybe his approach isn’t the smartest one, and when he shoves Scott face first against a wall and threatens him, of course the new werewolf grows wary.

He only has to wait until the next full moon, though, when Scott almost kills his human friend.
At first, Derek has to admit the boy has balls, visiting a newly transitioned werewolf the days before the full moon. But when he sees him appearing that night, he knows he’s either plain insane or has a death wish.

Derek manages to contain Scott without the human knowing he’s there and hours later, they pack their things and leave Beacon Hills.

And a big surprise awaits him in Chicago when they arrive.

He finds his uncle Peter running the resistance. And when he asks stunned what happened, his uncle explains he was in a coma for years until he healed enough to wake up and escape.

Derek takes a big breath of relief. He thought he was alone. He was so utterly alone. But he is not anymore. He’s got a pack now, and he’s never letting anything happen to this one. He is not going back to hiding and being afraid of everything. He’s not being alone ever again. And he will do whatever it takes to prevent it from happening, too.

That’s why he enlists in the war. He doesn’t even think about it. He does what he has to do for his pack, for his uncle and to honor his family.

Soon after that, he’s promoted to Captain and moved to the section responsible for capturing and interrogating humans, where he devotes his life to finding the Argents and investigating his sister’s death.

He soon gains a reputation among the humans and his comrades for being ruthless, but he doesn’t care. He has his own military pack, three young werewolves he picked himself. And as he trains them, he keeps doing his job, surrounding himself with the humans he despises so much, seeking the answers he so desperately needs to stop blaming himself.

He let his guard down and ended up betraying his pack. He knows it was his fault, no matter what he finds. But he can’t stop searching for the truth anyway. Maybe he’s a masochist, or maybe he just needs closure. All he knows is that he can’t imagine his life any other way.

Derek doesn’t realize how utterly lost he is until he meets the human boy years later.
Stiles is not having a particularly good day, but everything sure goes to utter shit-town when he gets home to find a bunch of werewolves camping in his living room.

They are on the couch with their muddy shoes over the coffee table, using his grandmother’s silverware to eat the steaks Stiles had bought for his father’s birthday raw, dripping cow blood everywhere.

They have also taken the frost cake he had secretly bought out of the fridge and some of them are eating it with their bare, dirty hands.

He has half a second to think oh no you didn’t bitch when he sees an especially filthy wolfman covering his dad’s favorite chair with mud and cake before they notice him.

There’s a moment of utter stillness, and then he’s backing away frantically.

There’s laughter and cat calls coming from the living room as two werewolves, presumably from the lower rank since they are sitting in the floor, get up and go after him.

They don’t even have to chase him, he does all the work. Stiles trips over the side table in the hall and lands on his ass. He tries to back away, half crawling half jumping toward the main door. But they get him before he reaches the handle.

He’s easily manhandled back to the living room, where he sees one of the wet dogs pulling out a cell phone to make a call.

That’s when Stiles understands he’s most probably fucked.

He knows about the human slaves in wolf territory, the sudden disappearances, the lack of any trace after every missing person. His father has investigated a couple of cases over the years, and he suspects there’s a secret human slavery system moving people out of human territory into wolf cities.

If they are calling someone, it means they are not mere burglars and he’s most probably about to disappear.

He pictures his father trying to find him, seeking any kind of lead and eventually getting nowhere. He knows he’d never stop searching for him, though. He pictures him drinking like he did for a while after his mom died. And this time Stiles won’t be there to help him stop.

“Look,” he licks his lips nervously. “Whatever you want, just- just take it, okay? I mean you’re already doing that, but like, you got my blessing? Just- uh-” He stops talking when he realizes no one is paying attention.

“Hey Boyd?” the man greets someone on the other end of the line. “We got him. Yeah, all we had to do was wait at his place and he showed up. Yeah... okay, we’ll keep him secure for you. Right.”

The man hangs up and gives Stiles a smile full of teeth.

“Well, little man,” he cocks his head. “We’ve been searching for you all over town. I must say I pictured you differently, though.”

And that’s when Stiles understands.
These are not slave dealers. These are mercenaries. And they must be after his father. There’s no other explanation. Why would a bunch of rude werewolves be searching for him? But his dad... Lots of werewolves want the Sheriff of Beacon Hills gone.

He has to warn him before he gets home.

He glares around, checking the time on the wall clock and mentally calculating how long he has before his dad's shift ends.

“I- I need to pee,” he blurs out after making a decision.

There’s a second of pause and then all the werewolves are laughing.

"I'm serious," he insists.

"Your carpet isn’t good enough for you?" One of the werewolves barks and they all laugh even louder.

"Are you afraid I'll escape if you let me use the bathroom at the end of the hall?" Stiles asks, knowing he's most probably pushing his luck.

The leader smirks and it's the most menacing thing Stiles has seen so far.

"Take him to the porcelain," he commands with amusement. "It may be the last time he sees one in a long time."

Stiles is being shoved out of the living room when he hears someone calling "present your farewells!" and they all burst into laughter again.

The guy accompanying him opens the bathroom door with a kick and pushes Stiles inside, following after him.

The bathroom is fairly small, and the werewolf is mighty big.

“Man, I could use some privacy,” he starts saying. “And some space,” he ends up murmuring.

The guy shoves him against the tiled wall, hard enough to bang his head against it. And when Stiles complains, he shoves him again.

“Shut up and do it already,” the beast grunts.

Change of planes. Stiles hopes he doesn’t have a concussion because he really needs all his wits to be able to pull this one off.

He unzips his pants and waits, concentrated for a couple of endless minutes until he finally starts to pee, to slide his hand inside his pocket and type a text to his father.

He had no idea how hard it is to type without looking at the screen, though. His fingers fumble over the tactile screen, and he hopes whatever he’s typing makes sense because-

“Hey!” the werewolf barks.

Stiles has only a second to hit send before he’s being thrown against the wall. And the werewolf must have been holding back the first time, because now he shoves Stiles so hard, he breaks one tile with his head, dropping to the floor where the werewolf hovers over him, growling and dripping spit everywhere.
“You thought I wouldn’t notice?” he growls and his voice sounds so animalistic, Stiles snaps his head back to look at him, regretting it instantly. The guy doesn’t look human anymore.

Stiles cringes when the werewolf snarls. He stretches his arm and offers his cellphone in an attempt to make the werewolf stop drooling and snapping his jaws.

A clawed hand grabs his phone and crushes it in a single, easy movement. And then he’s being pulled back on his feet and all he can think is clawsclawsclaws as the werewolf shoves him back to the living room.

“This little shit was trying to use his phone!” the werewolf growls.

“Step away from him, you dumbass,” the guy that made the phone call tells him. And he’s suddenly there, pushing the werewolf away so hard he lands in the hall, toppling over the side table.

The other guy grabs Stiles and inspects him. “He didn’t draw blood with his claws, right?”

Stiles is so stunned he can only shake his head.

“Good,” the man sighs. “If something happened to you on my watch, I’d be in trouble.”

He then smirks and when Stiles is starting to relax, the guy slaps him so hard he turns halfway from the impact.

“That said, if you ever try that again I’ll kill you myself.”

Stiles can feel his jaw on fire. He’s never felt anything like it before. He tries to move it, afraid it could be broken, but it seems to still be in its place.

“Tie and secure him,” the guy in charge barks and there are two werewolves suddenly manhandling him away and tying his hands painfully tight on behind.

“Hey, look at me man, I’m not breaking these ropes, you can loosen them up a little bit.”

“Not a chance, monkey,” one of them says.

They leave him in the closet where his father and he store old jackets and shoes near the entrance. Stiles wrinkles his nose and pulls a face at the funny smell, making a quick mental note to clean it, or just torch the whole thing away.

He tries to push against the door, but of course it’s no use. His head is hurting so much he is afraid he’s going to pass out or even puke, and the smell is not making things any better. So after a couple more tries, he curls against the fishing parkas and stops fighting the tiredness, either falling asleep or fainting, he’s not sure.

Stiles has no idea how long he’s been sleeping, but when he wakes up, his head is throbbing and there’s a weird taste in the back of his throat. He can’t inspect his head with his hands tied behind, but he can feel his skin pulling, like there were dried blood or werewolf drool, maybe both, on the side of his head.

He hears people yelling and understands that’s what woke him up.

“What did the message say?” Someone is demanding in a terrifying voice. And Stiles is suddenly glad he’s hidden in the closet. He is in no hurry to meet whoever is speaking.

“We- We don’t know, sir,” Stiles recognizes the guy in charge saying.
“You don’t know,” the new person sounds unimpressed.

“I wasn’t there when he tried it, sir,” the guy insists. “He was alone with one of my betas.”

“I see,” the new guy comments.

Stiles realizes they have started to speak in a regular tone and he can’t hear them that well anymore, so he moves and presses his ear against the door, trying to hear better.

“I assume your beta is going to receive some sort of retribution for his mistake, am I right?”

“Of- of course, sir.”

Stiles is suddenly imagining some sort of Bogey Wolf. He thinks again of the human slaves and all the mystery surrounding them, and he squeezes his eyes shut, praying not to find out the truth anytime soon, pretty please. He’s man enough to admit to himself he’s scared shitless. He’s never been beaten like this before, and the prospect of these bastards going after his father gives him the creeps.

“Well, what are you waiting for, then?” A new feminine voice interferes.

“But sir-“

“I think Erica asked you a question?” the scary guy cuts him off.

There’s an odd pause where Stiles squirms against the wooden door, trying to press harder against it. He’s starting to suspect they moved away when someone lets out a high whine, raising the hair on the back of his neck.

Stiles backs away so hard he hits the back wall with a thud, and suddenly someone is opening the closet’s door and he’s being pulled out so hard, he’s afraid they’ll pull his shoulder out of its socket.

He has half a second to notice the girl hurting him is actually really hot, before he’s shoved back in the living room.

He stands on his feet, hands still tied behind him. He looks nervously around and instantly notices the new werewolves. His eyes find the dark figure in the middle of the room and they widen in surprise.

“Oh my god,” he breathes out.

He recognizes Derek Hale the moment he sees him.

The memory of the last time he saw him is like a punch in the stomach. Stiles has spent years trying to forget about that night. And seeing one of the last people who saw his mother alive is more than he can handle right now after being battered around by werewolves who are after his father.

Stiles starts shaking all over; he can barely breathe. He recognizes the beginning of a panic attack and tries to take a step back, almost losing his balance before the hot chick holds him.

And before he can even react, Derek is suddenly stalking forward, getting a hold of his chin and turning his face right and left a couple of times while the frown on his face deepens.

The contact is so unexpected he holds his breath and stops struggling. And even he can sense the sudden nervous mood in the room. It’s like all the werewolves are ready to flee or maybe just drop on their knees and bare their throats; Stiles isn’t sure.
Derek tightens his hold on his chin and the pressure in his already sore jaw makes Stiles see stars. He flinches as Derek pushes him down so hard his knees buckle and he’s suddenly hitting the floor.

“You got the wrong human,” Derek grunts, turning around and facing the obviously terrified werewolves.

Derek is having an awful day by default, but things take a turn for the worse when he arrives at the target’s house to find out the muscle guys Boyd hired captured the wrong human.

It’s a bad day because he’s back in Beacon Hills, the hell hole he promised years ago never to go back to. But his uncle, Alpha of the strongest pack, commanded him to go back and capture Sheriff Stilinski, and Derek couldn’t refuse a direct order from his superior. He has a history with disobeying orders and awful things happening as a direct consequence, after all.

“Boyd,” he warns, and his beta is suddenly there, ready for his command.

“Get rid of them,” he orders.

Boyd nods once and then he’s grabbing the rogue pack’s leader from the neck and getting him out of the house, followed by the rest of his wolves.

“Up,” he grunts pointing at the human, and Erica moves fast under his command.

She grabs the human and pulls him roughly back on his feet.

Derek studies him as Erica toys a bit with the boy, shoving him back and forth a couple of times until he loses his footing and falls again, screaming in pain when Erica keeps her grip on his tied, and now twisted, arms.

The first thing he notices is the blood beat beneath the human's pale skin. The stressful position Erica has him in is making his blood rush to the surface, giving the boy an intense blush.

But what catches his attention is the sour smell. It's so strong he can sense Erica squirming. Derek suspects she doesn't understand why she feels so uncomfortable, but her instinct is reacting nonetheless.

This human has been bathing in regrets and mourning for a long time. It should be easy to break him in order to gather information.

"The dog breath will kill me first if you guys take too much longer," the human huffs in a show of exasperation.

And that's when Derek recognizes him.

It's been years since he last saw Mrs. Stilinski’s son, but Derek can still see her in this gawky boy—especially her defiant nature.

“What’s your name?” Derek’s second in command, Isaac, asks him.

“Stiles-oh crap,” the boy curses.

"Jackpot," Isaac grins back at Derek, seeking his approval.

“Your father is Sheriff Stilinski,” Derek interferes.
“What if he is?” Stiles asks in defiance.

Erica grabs him by the collar of his shirt and shakes him up a couple of times.

“What is he?” She growls right in front of his face.

“Good luck with that,” Stiles grunts out.

He reeks of terror, being this close to peeing himself. And yet, he’s still putting on a front.

Derek turns to Isaac and nods. “We’re bringing him with us.”

He looks down at the boy and gives him a predatory smile.

“Thank you,” he mocks. “Finding you here confirms our main target must be around. And we’re not going to stop until we find him.”

Stiles thrashes on the floor under Erica’s stronger hold. He bares his teeth and screams nonsense like a little cub would do.

It actually amuses Derek.

“Cute,” Isaac smirks.

Boyd gets back and nods as indicative that the job was done.

“Let’s go,” Derek commands.

“Shouldn’t we wait in case his father shows up?” Isaac asks.

“He warned him. Staying here is just a waste of time,” Boyd replies before Derek can even bother to.

Derek can sense Stiles getting tense all over. His reaction is so strong his three betas laugh and shake their heads in amusement, which seems to make him get even worse.

“If you dare touch my father, I swear to God,” Stiles finally yells. “I’m not afraid of you!” He looks Derek straight in the eye when he says that.

Derek arches an eyebrow and stares at him until Stiles loses his bravado.

“W-well,” he stutters. “Maybe I am, but I’m still being serious, leave my father alone!”

None of them answer him. Isaac and Boyd go to explore the house and Erica pats the injured side of Stiles’ head a couple of times. They are light touches, but Derek senses it’s making Stiles retch.

“Holy God, woman,” Stiles groans. “You want me to paint your shoes a new color? Stop doing that,” he barfs as he speaks.

“Erica,” Derek warns when he senses her level of enjoyment.

The girl pouts at him first and when he doesn’t give in, she ends up pushing Stiles away, like a little kid discarding a toy, and the boy drops to the carpet where he curls and stays quiet.

His other two betas appear then bringing some papers.

“There wasn’t anything useful,” Isaac complains, handing over a bunch of papers to Derek.
He checks them and finds nothing of interest. He disregards the bills, throwing them away, until he finds a picture in the middle of all the random pieces of paper and stops.

It’s obvious the picture has been handled a lot. The photographic paper is worn out in some parts and the color looks funny. The picture is nothing special, just a slightly out of focus pregnant and younger version of Mrs. Stilinski leaning against a shiny, new bright blue jeep.

Derek studies her and tries to find the fighter he knew in life, but somehow he can’t connect them.

He lowers the hand holding the picture and his eyes find Stiles on the floor. His hands are starting to have a light purple shade, and his profile is astonishingly similar to his mother’s.

Derek drops the rest of the papers and decides to keep the picture for no good reason, sliding it in the hidden pocket of the leather jacket he’s wearing.

“I think it’s time to pay a visit to his father’s workplace,” he finally says, studying Stiles’ reaction.

Stiles lifts his head and looks at him in surprise and Derek knows he picked the right place to start searching.

“You want to visit a police station like it’s no biggie?” Stiles bursts into babbles again. “Are you out of your mind? They will capture you, they will chase you, holy God you werewolves are arrogant assholes if you truly believe you can-”

“Can we gag him?” Isaac speaks over him.

“Please,” Erica agrees.

Derek nods, casting his face down as the corner of his mouth lifts involuntarily in amusement at Stiles’ indignant reaction.

Once they arrive to the police station, they park and Derek orders Isaac to go first and test the waters.

“A woman in reception said he had an emergency call out of town,” Isaac informs him.

“And?”

“She was lying,” Isaac confirms what he already suspected.

“Alright,” Derek grunts.

He goes to the truck and gets Stiles out, cutting the ties holding his arms on his back with a single claw and removing the gag around his mouth.

“You’re coming with me,” Derek informs him, as Stiles holds his wrists and moves his shoulders around, making annoying noises as he opens and closes his mouth exaggeratedly.

“What’s the plan?” Stiles starts speaking instantly, and Derek suspects that what he usually does. “Showing my face to see if they suddenly feel like telling you shit?”

“No,” Derek grins. “I’m gonna threaten them with killing the Sheriff’s son if they don’t cooperate.”
Stiles falters and turns around to look at him in disbelief. After a second of holding his stare, he pulls a face and starts flailing his arms around.

“I can’t believe this,” he starts complaining. “Could things get any worse? Where are the Argents when you need them, for the love of God?”

At the mention of that family name, Derek’s whole body tenses like a wire.

Isaac is suddenly there, right next to him in a protective stance, fingers slightly holding his sleeve. And Derek remembers the night he found him inside that freezer in his father’s basement. He still can't explain what got into him to go against everything his family had taught him and offer the bite to a human, but he doesn't regret it.

Boyd and Erica move closer, and his three betas are surrounding him, awaiting orders.

Stiles must have noticed something, because he stops spazzing and babbling and looks worriedly at them.

“Change of plans,” Derek manages to croak out. “In the car. Now,” he barks, and his voice sounds less human than he intended.

Boyd grabs Stiles and manhandles him back into the truck with a total lack of consideration of his several injuries, making him whine and protest as he ties him again.

Derek has a moment of internal meltdown, where an unreal train of thought crosses his mind, wondering if this human never shuts up and how did he manage to stay alive all this time, thinking he should ask Scott once they’re back.

Then he sobers up, feeling the wolf inside wanting desperately out. And his mind goes inevitably back to her.

It’s the first time someone has spoken willingly of that family in front of him. And suddenly Stiles Stilinski seems a lot more promising than his father.

Any little bump in the road is like a stab in Stiles’ stiff body. His wrists are burning and his shoulders feel numb. But that’s the least of his concerns at the moment.

There’s a very big, very pissed werewolf in the car with him, apart from the other three. And Stiles has no idea what set him off to begin with, or what could get him to lose the little control he has left while they are together in such reduced space.

Stiles tries to distract himself. Now that they tied his hands in the front, he decides to do a damage control. He notices the weird color they are turning and honestly, he was less worried when he couldn’t see them. He has lost track of the hours he’s been tied, but he’s pretty sure he’s fairly close to losing a couple of fingers from lack of blood circulation.

He’s stuffed in the trunk. The hot chick and the psycho guy are sitting right in front of him, the zen wolf is driving and Derek is sitting next to him, quietly throwing orders now and then, as he clenches and unclenches his jaw in a display of grumpiness not seen before.

“We’re leaving Beacon Hills?” Isaac, the freakishly tall and psycho werewolf asks.

“The Sheriff is no longer in the city,” Derek comments while keeping his eyes on the road. “He must
have gone into hiding, using the old net system to get people out of the city.”

“What if he decided to stay for his son?” Erica, aka hot psycho chick, asks.

“I’m assuming that was his plan,” Derek grunts, looking up at the rear mirror and finding Stiles’ reflection there. “But I’m sure his people made sure he left town no matter what.”

“Most probably they believe he’s a slave by now,” Boyd, the massive black dude, interfered.

“Makes sense,” Derek shrugs and Stiles grows tense.

“Why-” he croaks out. “Why do you want my dad?”

“Why do you think?” Isaac asks him, turning around to look at him with an amused expression.

“But why now?” Stiles insists. His father taught him to stay positive and focused under any kind of situation, so his objective is to gather as much information as possible for when they meet up again. Because Stiles isn’t dying today. Not like this.

“He must have pissed someone off very much, huh?” Isaac teases him.

Derek makes a small growling noise in the front seat and Isaac is suddenly turning away from him, facing the front and shrugging his shoulders.

Stiles frowns. What the hell just happened?

“Pull over,” Derek says after a while.

They drag Stiles out and make him walk into the woods, still tied up. So of course he trips over a couple of times and ends up bleeding in several new places. No problem, more scars to his badassery collection. Chicks dig that.

“Alright,” Isaac shoves him down on his knees. “Let’s have a little chat.”


Isaac kicks him in the stomach, making Stiles double over, clutching his abdomen while groaning. Derek pats Isaac’s shoulder slightly and moves closer.

“I’m going to ask you a simple question,” he speaks directly to Stiles. “I’ll know if you lie, and if you do, one of them will hurt you. Until you tell the truth.”

“I sure as hell hope you don’t make me solve a math equation,” Stiles groans, still holding his tender abdomen. He needs to shut up. This is the worst moment to have no brain-to-mouth filter.

And Derek is suddenly pulling him back on his feet and throwing him against the nearest tree, pressing him against the trunk with his forearms.

“Shut up,” Derek hisses right in front of his face. “This is no longer about your father. Your life depends on what you say, so think carefully.”

Stiles is no longer touching the ground with his feet and Derek’s arms are like an iron grip on his ribcage. He nods a couple of times, trying to breathe.

“The Argents,” Derek says very carefully. “Do you know them?”
Stiles has a moment of confusion, completely thrown back by the unexpected question. And then he’s seeing black spots dancing in Derek’s face as he nods frantically.

“When was the last time you saw them?” Derek growls, tightening his hold and making Stiles whine and struggle.

He presses his tied hands against Derek’s chest and tries to push him away, his fingers gripping Derek’s shirt and pulling frantically, trying to make him see he’s this close to being suffocated to death.

Derek snarls and then he’s dropping Stiles, who falls to the ground and leans against the tree, rubbing his chest while trying to get big gulps of air.

When he is finally able to focus, he realizes Derek is flashing some scary-ass red eyes and some impressive, massive claws. Stiles has seen werewolves before, but never something like this. He wonders idly if he’s an Alpha before Derek shifts back to his human form.

“Answer the question,” he grunts out, slightly panting as if suppressing the change caused him physical pain.

“The Argents, right,” Stiles licks his lips nervously. “We used to be neighbors. Their daughter dated my best friend. Her grandfather worked with my father occasionally.”

Stiles tries not to say too much, but of course he ends up babbling. Seriously, he needs to start thinking before he speaks.

“Where are they now?” Boyd suddenly interferes.

“T-they left Beacon Hills years ago,” Stiles frowns.

“We know that, we want to know where they are now.”

“Uh well,” Stiles shrugs. “My father kept in touch with them, but they have been moving around a lot, I think they fancy the nomad life-”

“Where!” Derek howls; there’s no other way to express it. His eyes are bright red and Isaac and Erica are suddenly in front of him. They are not touching him, not trying to hold him back. But he’s not trying to move, either. So Stiles hopes they will stop him if he decides it’s time to rip throats out.

“A deal!” Stiles suddenly yells. “I want a deal!”

“What are you talking about?” Isaac frowns, looking at him in disbelief.

“I want to make a bargain,” Stiles stutters, losing the possible impact of his words along the way. “If you want to know where the Argents are, I have my conditions!”

Erica lets out a mean laugh and Boyd actually snorts.

Derek is huffing so loud Stiles is afraid he will turn into a wolf and jump over his betas straight to him at any second.

“What do you want?” Isaac is the one who finally speaks.

“Deal,” Derek growls.

The other three werewolves look at him stunned, but none of them dares to say anything.

“And- and you let me live,” Stiles continues, still surprised Derek agreed so quickly.

“Alright,” Derek nods.

“I mean it.” Stiles insists. “You will stop hurting me, you will get these off,” he shows his tied hands. “And you won’t kill me, even when I tell you all I know.”

Derek smirks and Stiles can see his elongated fangs showing in a menacing way. And somehow he knows he must have phrased something wrong, because Derek looks too satisfied.

“You have my word,” Derek nods. “I won’t kill you.”

“Or your betas!” Stiles squeaks.

“None of us will kill you,” Derek insists.

“O-okay,” Stiles nods unsure.

“Now my conditions,” Derek grins.

“What?!” Stiles protests.

“We’re just negotiating terms,” Derek shrugs.

Stiles’ jaw drops open and he stares at the four in utter shock. Seriously man, motherfucking werewolves.

“We won’t hurt you, as long as you don’t try to escape, lie or try anything weird,” Derek starts enunciating. “We won’t kill you, and since you seem to have valuable information about the Argents, I’m willing to offer total protection as long as you’re worth it.”

Stiles arches an eyebrow, or he tries to at least. He was never very good at it, but this is the best occasion for some brow action ever.

“About your father, I can only promise to stop looking for him now, but if we ever cross paths in the future, I’ll have to finish my job.”

Stiles cocks his head; that’s actually reasonable for a vicious beast, all things considered.

“My only condition to leave Beacon Hills right now is taking you with us, though.”

“What?! No way,” Stiles flails around as much as his tied hands allow him.

“I knew your mother,” Derek deadpans, making Stiles grow silent instantly. “I knew her husband collaborated with the Argents. I can imagine all the intel you can provide us. I’m not letting you go anytime soon. So you can either come willingly, which means no more ties or hits, or you can resist; in which case my betas will gag you again on top of everything else.”

Stiles widens his eyes. Shit, son.

“Go with you where?” he breathes out.
“Does it really matter?” Derek shrugs and Isaac is suddenly stepping up, dropping on his right knee and cutting Stiles’ ties with his bare hands like the cords were made of paper.

“How do you plan on taking him with us without getting him killed?” Erica frowns.

“Did I ever tell you my uncle has been insisting I take a human slave lately?” Derek looks down at Stiles and smirks. “I think I just found myself one.”
Stiles is in the backseat of a stolen van, cramped between two werewolves. He knows how that sounds; it could be the beginning of a joke. And maybe in another time, the thought would have even made him laugh. But not now.

They have been on the road all night, leaving Beacon Hills behind as fast as the new vehicle they stole allows it. And Stiles is finally starting to catch onto his situation.

He’s been running on adrenaline since he found those werewolves in his living room, but now that he’s been sitting still for a while, trying not to breathe too loudly just in case the two unpredictable weres next to him decide to rearrange his face, it’s starting to get to him just how utterly screwed he is.

Okay, so he’s a human slave now. Whatever the hell that even means, because Derek dropped the bomb, but no one bothered to elaborate. Not even when he asked. And he did. Several times until Derek growled and looked like he wanted to tear off his limbs. So Stiles stopped asking and just decided to check off the list one of his worst fears and have an internal meltdown instead.

So far, they haven’t asked him to clean their clothes or shine their boots, so Stiles is trying to stay positive. But seeing how they don’t spare on kicks and shoves, it’s actually hard to.

He’s also having a hard time being around Derek Hale.

Stiles has always been a fan of ignoring the problem until eventually it goes away. He’s spent years suppressing certain memories that Derek’s presence is forcing him to deal with, and his discomfort is starting to get the best of him.

Also, it turns out the destination does indeed matter, after all.

It’s some unholy hour in the early morning and Stiles is trying not to fall asleep, afraid he’ll bump or lean on a pissy werewolf, when he notices where they are.

“We should stop,” he comments, wincing when his voice sounds too loud in the silence.

Erica and Isaac, the psycho werewolves currently sitting at each side of him, turn and look at him with similar skeptical looks.

"Uh, there's a road control up ahead," he explains, pointing out with his hand.

Boyd looks at him through the rearview mirror. Even Derek looks at him for a moment. He has definitely caught their attention.

“How do you know that?” Isaac finally asks, still looking at him like Stiles had sprouted a second head.

“Because I live here?” he rolls his eyes. “And my dad has taken me a couple of tim—” He stops abruptly, realizing too late he has named his father in front of the werewolves who wanted to capture him no so long ago.

“How far ahead?” Derek asks then.

“I don’t know, couple of miles maybe?” Stiles shrugs, feeling all the joints in his body protesting.
“We’re close to no man’s land. How did you cross the first time?” he asks after a moment, when he realizes they had no idea they were going straight toward a death sentence.

Isaac shrugs next to him. "We weren't driving." He doesn't elaborate more, though. Just looks outside the window, letting Stiles puzzle it out however he wants.

"Oh," he slaps his own forehead. “Right, wolves.*Duh.*That explains why you don’t control the roads, I guess.”

"We can't do that with you now, can we?” Erica asks in a tone that makes Stiles’ testicles curl up. He’s never been very good at dealing with girls, especially the hot ones; that’s why he feels the most awkward around Erica and her intimidating cleavage.

"Wait," He suddenly realizes something. "What were you going to do with my dad then?"

A long silence follows his question. It’s not even uncomfortable; they just don’t bother to answer.

“Pull over,” Derek suddenly grunts.

Boyd parks on the side of the road, and Derek is jumping out before the car has stopped, quickly followed by the rest.

Except Stiles. He stays in the backseat, letting the fact that they weren’t capturing his father sink in. He needs to remember this. No matter what they do or say, he needs to remember this until the end.

They haven’t explained where exactly they’re going yet, but Stiles suspects it’s the small wolf base just past no man’s land. Since the war started, there’s this stretch of land between the two borders left to ensure some sort of security and control. That’s why the humans have road controls, and why on the other side, the wolves do the same. You can usually cross to leave, but coming back is the tricky part.

Stiles knows it’ll be nearly impossible to come back once he’s crossed, and he shouldn’t even consider this, but the faster they get to wherever they want to take him, the sooner their deal will be over and he’ll be free again. And the sooner that happens, the easier it’ll be for him to track his father back to wherever he went into hiding.

Stiles takes a deep breath and gets out. He moves around the van to the back, where Boyd and Erica are pulling out some bags. He has no idea what they shoved in there when they stole the vehicle, but he suspects they picked this one especially for the tinted windows in the back.

"Get ready," Derek orders, pulling out a gun from one of the bags.

Stiles’ panic reaction is instant. He knows how those controls look like, he’s been in a few of them himself, and his father has explained enough to know even four supernatural beings armed to the teeth won’t be enough.

"W-wait, wait," he stutters, moving closer. "What are you going to do?"

They glance quickly over him and turn their attention back to the bags apparently full of ammo.

“Wait—I said *wait*, dammit!” he insists. “What if instead of fighting, we try to just... oh, I don’t know, cross like everyone else does?” He finished with an exasperated gesture.

They stop moving and glare at him.
“I could—you know, I could drive.” Stiles makes a flourish with his hand, like he was stating the obvious.

Instantly, everyone looks at Derek, who stares at him with an unreadable expression for a long moment.

"No," he finally says.

"No? That's all you have to say?" Stiles flails his arms. "Oh my god, I can't believe this—"

Derek growls, making Stiles actually take a step back.

“No,” he shakes his head after a moment. “Y—you still scare me, no need to use your hocus pocus lie detector, I can tell you myself. But I won’t let you guys intimidate me. I know we can do this.”

He takes that step again, noticing the betas’ reaction. Even while he knows more about pack dynamics than most humans, Stiles has no idea what’s up with that. They don’t seem angry at Stiles for disobeying their Alpha. They look more… intrigued, if that’s even possible.

“They outnumber you, there’s no way you have a chance,” he resumes saying when no one bites his head off. “I’ve seen those places from the inside, the way they operate, and I’m telling you, you’re dead wolf.”

Derek cocks his head to the side, regarding him.

“Let me do this, I’m human, they won’t suspect a thing,” he insists.

"I don’t trust you," Derek says, and Stiles knows that's just the only way Derek sees humans. Seriously, fucking werewolves. They are so unreasonable.

"I know," he tries again. "I don't like you either but I want to survive. And if I let you guys handle this, I'll end up dead."

Derek turns around, glaring sideways at his betas as he lets go a big, resigned huff. And then he nods.

“Yeah?” Stiles asks hopefully.

“But if you try anything—” Derek starts threatening.

“I won’t,” Stiles interrupts him, showing his hands in surrender.

Derek scowls, his whole body language screaming he doesn’t like this.

"I'll drive," Stiles says, determined. "You will hide in the back and, since they don’t have super noses, it'll be fine."

"It's not that easy," Isaac suddenly speaks up.

"Look, I don't care," Stiles says exasperated, turning to the beta. “All I care about is crossing that control and finishing this... ‘thing’ the sooner the better,” he quotes with his hands.

“Well, you should care if that means getting your insides—” Isaac tries to threaten.

"Enough," Derek barks, interrupting their discussion. He huffs, pinching the bridge of his nose, like a kindergarten teacher having to deal with unruly and unreasonable kids.
"I'll drive in the front with you," he affirms then.

"What?! No," Stiles protests, negating with his arms.

"It's not open for discussion," Derek says stubbornly.

"But they will know—"

"They won't," Derek dismisses him, opening the back of the truck.

Stiles groans, throwing his hands and pulling a face. They will.

"Alright," he looks at him and grimaces. "Lose the leather jacket, at least."

Derek turns around, looking confused.

"Trust me," Stiles explains. "That's like a werewolf trademark; you look too menacing."

Derek scowls but takes his jacket off, handing it over to Isaac, who looks back and forth between him and Derek. Stiles notices some odd looks from the other betas, too, but they are getting in the back without any complain so whatever is going on, it can't be that bad.

Once the betas are hidden in the back, they get in the front and Stiles fumbles with the keys a little, having to try it twice before he can start the engine.

Derek just sighs and puts on the seat belt, which gives Stiles some pause. Does he usually buckle in, or is this because Stiles is driving? And why does Stiles care?

“Okay— okay,” Stiles takes a deep breath, realizing he’s starting to freak the fuck out. “Okay, it’ll be fine. All I have to do is drive this damn truck over there and be all casual and shit, all ‘howdy,’ and they will let us pass.”

Derek makes no sound next to him. For all Stiles knows, he’s not even breathing.

He turns in the next curve of the road and sees the control for the first time. It’s still far away, but the distant dot already haunts him.

“Oh god,” he groans. “I had forgotten I don’t work well under pressure and this is definitely pressure and me currently working under it and I—”

“Hey!” Derek shouts, snapping him out of it.

Stiles looks at him for a moment before turning his attention back to the road, taking a deep, calming breath. Alright, maybe the asshole approach works sometimes.

“By the way,” Derek comments casually. “Try not to show your right side, that bruise looks pretty bad.”

Stiles goes still for a moment and then he’s staring at Derek in utter shock. He tries to articulate his thoughts, to say something, anything, preferably something along the lines of you asshole, you decide to tell me now? but he can't. For once in his life, Stiles is speechless. He had forgotten about his face, about the blood in the collar of his shirt. Mother. Fucker.

Derek shrugs and gives him this kind of mocking half smile that, on such a stoic face, looks so out of place. And as Stiles widens his eyes, he notices something for the first time.
"Your shirt!" he cries. "It's stained with... Is that my blood?! Oh my god."

Derek looks down and huffs, like he was annoyed the shirt dared to do that.

"We can't go in like that," Stiles raises his voice a few octaves. "They will notice my face, and then they will notice you, and— oh my god!"

Stiles groans, starting to slow down when Derek barks "don't stop!" and Stiles realizes whoever is in the control can see them too, and if they suspect anything, they are done for. So he keeps going.

"Alright, quickly take it off!" he squeals.

"What about your face?" Derek asks back.

"I can't take my face off," Stiles freaks out. "And no," he denies, finger pointed at Derek when he notices the werewolf is about to reply. "Don't answer to that. Just lose the gory memento, will you?"

"This wouldn't have happened if you didn't insist I take my jacket off," Derek growls.

"Who cares?! We're almost there, holy god, just take it off!" Stiles reaches with his hand, eyes still on the road, and more importantly on the control, and grabs Derek's shirt.

His eyes flicker once at Derek and he notices the werewolf looking back and forth between him and his hand.

"Oh crap," he mutters. "I— I'm taking my hand off now."

He hurries to move it back to the wheel, squeezing it tightly as he tries to think. After a moment, Derek huffs.

"And what do you want me to wear?" he asks.

"I don't know! Oh my god... we're going to die," he laments. "Wait, I got it!"

Stiles keeps driving as he struggles to take off the plaid shirt he's wearing over his t-shirt.

"Here," he shoves it against Derek without looking. "Put this on."

Derek doesn't make any move to grab it, making Stiles look at him in panic. He finally scowls, taking off the badly stained shirt he's wearing and hiding it under the seat.

It's not really that Stiles wants to look. But when someone takes their clothes off, it's just natural to stare a bit, right? Besides, he has never seen someone that buff before. He's pretty sure Derek has muscles regular humans can't have. It's not that Stiles is all skin and bones, he has muscles, mostly where it matters. But he's more the lean, gawky type, while Derek is obviously more the beefy, strong type, and Stiles can't help but compare a little.

Derek lifts the shirt he just gave him and studies it with a frown. "This won't fit," he comments.

"Try it," Stiles grunts out, paying attention back to the road.

They arrive to the control and Stiles slows down. That's when he sees the guard on duty and he makes a small fist pump.

"What," Derek asks as he keeps trying to make the shirt go past his impressive bicep.
"I know that guy," Stiles whispers like someone could hear them. "Follow my lead, okay?"

"Why are you talking like that?" Derek asks unimpressed, as he pulls one more time at the shirt and the fabric tears loudly.

"My shirt!" Stiles exclaims.

Derek groans and it seems he had enough of that shit, because he decides to put the open shirt over his shoulders, crossing his arms to hide as much as a huge guy like him can.

Stiles’ jaw drops open. He’s about to make a remark of how ridiculous it is to use a shirt as a shawl, when they reach the barrier.

He rolls down the window, ignoring Derek, his current state of undress and his growling, and waves at the guard approaching them.

"Hey man," Danny greets back.

They clasp hands and Stiles suspects he's smiling a little bit too much but he can't really control the jumping muscles in his face.

He’s trying to give Danny his profile only, and if he’s acting a bit weird, well, to be honest it wouldn’t be the first time Danny sees him acting like that.

"Going north?" Danny asks.

"Ugh, yeah," Stiles fakes an exasperated groan. "You know my dad; he's always sending me out to do his job."

"He didn't come with you?" Danny looks past him and straight to Derek, widening his eyes when he notices him for the first time.

"He was called out of town for some emergency thing," Stiles shrugs.

"It's only the two of you then?" Danny flicks back and forth between them, but ends up staring at Derek again.

"Yup," Stiles blatantly lies, grateful Danny can't hear the irregular blip of his heart.

"And who is he?" Danny asks, curious eyes studying Derek.

"This is," Stiles falters a moment. "My cousin... Uh, Miguel."

"Your cousin?" Danny repeats, frowning slightly.

"Yeah, he moved here to help my father and his friends," Stiles lies, and as he speaks, he catches the way Danny looks at Derek.

Meanwhile, Derek is casually sitting there, naked from the waist up, wearing a plaid shirt that resembles more of a scarf, and acting like it was perfectly normal.

He gives them an annoyed glare and crosses his arms over his chest, accentuating his muscles.

Stiles is man enough to admit when another dude is hot. And Derek is. Very hot in an intense, sort of scary way. Which Danny obviously digs.
“Why is he shirtless?” Danny asks, looking finally back at Stiles.

“Oh well,” Stiles comes up with something as fast as possible. “My cousin... Miguel, he suffers these horrible nose bleeds, you know? We had to stop before when I thought he was going to drown me,” he points at his shirt vaguely. “It was really gross. And he has no shirt to wear now... He tried my own but... I mean, look at him, he looks ridiculous with my shirt on,” and he quotes the last part with his hands.

“Oh yeah, I guess...” Danny can’t stop staring at Derek. It’s obvious he doesn’t think Derek looks ridiculous, at all.

Stiles leans out of the window. "Look, it's really important we stay on time. My dad will kill me if I mess this one up."

"Wouldn't be the first time," Danny adds.

"Uh right," Stiles gives him a stinky look. "Anyway, is there a way we could go through quickly? We're already late," he scratches the back of his neck apologetically.

"I don't know man," Danny says uncomfortable. "You know I can't do that, there's a protocol for a reason."

"I know, I don't want to cause you trouble." He smiles at Danny and then he fakes a change of thoughts.

He clasps his shoulder, giving his old schoolmate a knowing smile. “I was thinking, maybe you could take Miguel out someday, show him around. He’s been pestering me about it, but you know me, man, I don’t have time for that. Maybe you could take him out, I don’t know, tomorrow night?”

He looks at Danny with a hopeful smile, as he secretly crosses his fingers, hoping Derek won’t rip his insides out for daring say something like that.

Danny looks past him to Derek and then he’s slowly nodding.

“Hey Greenberg,” he calls back to the guy inside the little gate man’s box. “Lift the barrier,” he indicates with his hands

“Thank you man,” Stiles beams.

“Hope you make it in time, be careful out there,” Danny says as he rubs the back of his neck.

“Will do,” Stiles beams. “We’ll be back soon anyway."

Stiles waves him goodbye and then they are moving.

The moment they cross, Derek throws Stiles’ shirt to the back seat and puts his own back on in a quick movement.

They remain in silence until they are out of view of the control.

“Pull over,” Derek growls.

Stiles parks without much consideration. He’s started to shake so badly he can barely hold the wheel.

“I did it,” he manages. “We passed.”
He can feel Derek’s stare on him, slowly drilling him with this weird intensity, making him grow uncomfortable. Of course he didn’t believe Stiles could make it, but there’s no need for this now. That’s right, asshole, he’s dying to say.

“We barely made it,” Derek protests, finally looking away.

“But we did,” Stiles looks at him then. He still can’t believe it went that well.

Derek shrugs and then he slams Stiles’ face hard against the wheel.

“Oh, god!” Stiles groans, holding the side of his face. “What the hell was—”

“You know what that was for,” Derek growls, pointing at him with his finger. “Now go. Get. Out!”

Stiles scrambles out, still holding the side of his head and groaning. Damn it, he had to hit him where he already had a bruise.

Derek gets out and moves to the back, where he opens the doors for the three betas.

“That went better than expected,” Isaac says the second he is out. He actually stares at Stiles oddly as he says that.

Stiles is still holding his head, pressing his palm against the throbbing side of his face. But he manages to notice the way the three betas are studying him, and it feels different somehow.

“That’s right,” he brags. “I did it.”

He is making this triumphant move, when he notices they’re exchanging glares and regarding Derek weirdly, and Stiles falters. Werewolves are so hard to understand.

Suddenly tired, Stiles shakes his head, which only makes him feel dizzy, and decides he’s had enough werewolf bullshit for one night. He goes back inside the van and presses himself against the door in the back seat, crossing his arms and closing his eyes, letting the big, bad wolves deal with whatever is happening next.

—

Derek is pissed off.

Why did he think it was a good idea to let a human deal with a problem? Sure, he managed to help them cross the border. But the way he did it? Completely unacceptable.

He’s sound asleep now, oblivious to the danger around him. And what is Derek supposed to do? Make sure he stays safe? This is exactly why he didn’t want a human slave, no matter how much his uncle Peter pestered him about family pride and how Alphas have slaves as a display of their power. He just didn’t want to have any kind of responsibility towards a human.

He doesn’t think he’s ready to take responsibility for Stiles even now, after he helped them, even after knowing he has information on the Argents. And that pisses him off. The way he can’t control this situation and how it’s going to get out of hand no matter what. Because it will, he just knows. All you have to do is look at the gangling boy snoring with his face pressed comically against the window, completely unprotected as he’s surrounded by four werewolves, to know this can’t end
He doesn’t want to owe a human anything. That’s the real problem. And seeing how Stiles took a chance for him, for his betas, when he could have asked that Danny guy for help, makes Derek uncomfortable. Because people don’t do that. No one helps you after you kidnap, threaten and beat them.

He’s a puzzle Derek can’t solve. It’s completely unnerving. Especially the way he gets to him. Derek has never felt this annoyed by anyone else before, has never lost his cool with anyone so much. And maybe, just maybe, what’s really nagging at him is how probably at some point, if Derek is being honest, he even enjoyed it. Which is a clear indication of how deep in shit he is at the moment.

He let his guard drop for less than thirteen seconds, and Stiles managed to manipulate him into getting shirtless and use him to convince that guard to let them pass.

It’s not that Derek isn’t aware of his body. He works out very hard to look like he does. But he doesn’t do it to show off. He needs a competent body to be able to outmatch anyone. He’s an Alpha, he needs power to survive; he seeks it.

He’s actually proud of his self-control. He never turns unless he wants to, and that’s the only reason why this plan worked out. Any other Alpha would have created a massacre.

Worst of all, Stiles believes he did great.

“What’s the matter?” Isaac asks all of a sudden, leaning over the front seats and looking at him.

“Why do you ask?” Derek grunts.

“You keep huffing,” Isaac explains. “I know you well enough to know something’s wrong.”

Derek shrugs, dismissing it.

“Is it the boy?” Erica interferes.

“He got us through the control,” Isaac explains in some sort of pleading tone. Derek knows that tone. It’s the tone Isaac uses when Derek is being unreasonable.

He knows he’s their Alpha, and they can feel whenever he’s unsettled. But he’s not having this conversation.

“Forget it,” he scowls. “We have more pressing matters at hand.”

He can sense Erica and Isaac exchanging knowing glares, but he ignores it.

“We’re here,” Boyd suddenly comments.

“Alright, park as close as possible to the building.”

“Are you going to—” Boyd starts speaking.

“No,” Derek cuts in. “I’m not.”

“Are you sure about that?” Boyd insists. “There has never been a human in this place before, slave or not.”

“I’m aware of that,” Derek growls in annoyance.
“All I’m saying is that it’d help if you marked him,” Boyd shrugs.

“Well, I’m not,” Derek stares at him, showing his Alpha red eyes to make his point clear. “We will deal with the possible problem when it happens. So keep your eyes open, alright?”

Boyd nods, avoiding his stare as he cast his head down.

“Sure, Derek,” Isaac pats his shoulder briefly and then he’s shaking Stiles awake.

—

Stiles groans, stretching and wincing when he rubs his face over the bruise.

“Aw, crap,” he complains, sitting up and looking around. His whole body is sore, he’s starting to smell, and the little nap he took was not enough to help that headache go away.

“Where are we?” he croaks out. God, he’s thirsty.

“First stop,” Erica winks animatedly at him before getting out.

They have spent the night driving inside a smelly van, and Stiles is the only one who looks like he hasn’t slept or showered in a month. Werewolves and their ridiculous genes.

Once outside he stretches his legs and his arms, feeling how his joints pop.

He is still waking up, when they are suddenly surrounded by a pack of werewolves.

Erica shoves him hard against the truck, placing herself between them and him. And before he can even protest, Isaac and Boyd are there, too. There’s literally a werewolf wall protecting him. So much he can’t even see the strangers.

Derek moves forward, and Stiles can barely see his back in between the betas. But the way he moves and stands is intimidating enough for Stiles to notice.

Definitely not friendly werewolves. Oh crap.

“We need a place to rest for the day,” Derek orders.

Stiles isn’t sure that’s the best approach when you’re outnumbered and the other dudes seem to be pissed. But maybe he knows nothing about werewolves after all, because they are suddenly dropping their heads; some are even getting on their knees. And that’s when Stiles manages to see Derek is holding something out to show the pack.

He can’t make out what it is from there, but it seems some sort of round object, reflecting the artificial light surrounding the base.

“Sir,” one of the werewolves steps forward.

He seems to be in charge. While everyone else is nearly bent over for Derek, this guy is standing up. They shake hands, and some sort of exchange happens between them that Stiles can’t understand.

“You brought your betas,” the leader of this pack says.
“We will only stay long enough to get some rest,” Derek explains.

“And the human?” The other werewolf wrinkles his nose.

“That’s my slave,” Derek says in his neutral tone.

“And the collar?” the leader asks.

“New slave,” Derek emphasizes.

The betas all lift their head at that and howl, making some kind of war roar. Stiles suspects that’s the way they celebrate when they capture humans. Charming.

Fifteen minutes later, they are inside the small building.

The first stop is the communal room, where they seem to eat and spend time together. Stiles knows enough about pack dynamics to understand this is where they bond.

Once inside, Derek goes away with the guy in charge, and Boyd accompanies him.

Stiles sits between Isaac and Erica at their command. They are a bit cramped, sitting shoulder to shoulder on the bench, as they are served some kind of meaty soup.

The moment the smell hits him, Stiles realizes he’s starving. He isn’t sure if, even when cooked, he can eat the same food as werewolves. But he doesn’t care; he eats the soup without even asking what the meat is. What you don’t know won’t hurt you, after all.

The rest of the werewolves eat with them, and Stiles suspects this is some kind of were protocol. Isaac and Erica are definitely friendlier but they still keep their distance, and soon everyone is finished and leaving the room, leaving them alone.

“I’m going to go check on Derek,” Isaac says after a while when the room is almost empty. “Keep an eye while I’m out,” he nods toward Stiles as he gets up and leaves.

It’s been only a couple of minutes, but Stiles is starting to grow uncomfortable sitting alone with Erica, when a random werewolf shows up. And just the way he stands right in the entrance is enough to catch their attention.

Erica gets up and takes a step closer, and she’s suddenly hissing, flashing yellow eyes. Stiles has never seen a female werewolf, and the sight is terrifying.

“What— What’s going on?” he stutters out.

“Run,” Erica growls.

It takes Stiles a moment to realize she meant him. He has no idea how, but somehow she can sense the werewolf is a threat. And she wants him to leave, wants to keep him safe.

“What about you?” Stiles asks instead.

Erica groans, exasperated, and she’s going to say something when the werewolf interferes.

“Step back, puppy,” he smirks, tilting his head and giving Erica a naughty smile.

“No can do, asshole,” Erica spits back.
And then they’re jumping at the same time and colliding in midair. Stiles hears jaws snapping, hissing, and growls. Until Erica whines, hitting the wall hard enough to pass out.

Stiles’ whole body is like a living wire. He looks back and forth between her and the werewolf. He wants to go to her, to make sure she’s still breathing, when she moans and Stiles realizes he had been holding his breath.

As he lets out a long sigh, the werewolf focuses back on him, and a terrifying chill runs down Stiles’ spine.

“How don’t you go away?” he asks anyway, trying to hide how scared shitless he really is.

The guy smiles then, showing more teeth than humanly possible. "We are going to have so much fun."

And he slaps his hand away so hard, Stiles drops the spoon. 

Cursing, he scrambles away, tripping over the bench and falling butt first.

The man is completely wolfed out when he follows him. Stiles see with horror how he leaps to pound him when Derek appears out of nowhere and tosses the werewolf aside like he weighed nothing.

The werewolf whimpers as he crashes against several tables, dropping to the floor.

"I'm sorry," he whines pitifully. "I'm sorry sir, I didn't know— he doesn't smell— I mean you can't really blame me... How could I know?"

Stiles is behind the bench, pressed against the wall. He sees the scene unfold in front of him with a mixture of disbelief and fascination.

Derek roars, showing his fangs and flashing eyes as red as blood, and the beta turns back into human form.

"Disappear," Derek grunts, voice sounding nothing like it normally does.

When the were scrambles away, Stiles sits up and regards Derek with pause.

“How did you do that?” he breathes out, licking his lips nervously.

Derek turns around to look at him, and Stiles can see his eyes going from red to his usual light color.

“I’m the Alpha,” Derek says as the corner of his mouth lift slightly.

And Stiles is so stunned, he can’t even react.
“Get him out of here,” Derek barks after a moment, before leaving the room.

That’s when Stiles notices Erica. She’s back on her feet and looking like nothing ever happened. She and Isaac approach him and literally drag him out of the communal place straight to the room where they are all spending the day in.

He’s still so confused by what just happened, he doesn’t even ask them. He has no idea what that werewolf wanted, or why. But he’s not sure he’s anywhere near ready to know.

Isaac drops him on a small mattress and moves away, sitting on a bigger one with Erica.

Stiles sits up and regards his surroundings. There’s no sign of Derek or Boyd, so he suspects they must still be doing something wolf related together.

“How are you feeling?” Stiles hears Isaac asking.

“I’m fine,” Erica protests when Isaac tries to inspect her already healed head.

“Did you see his reaction?” she asks in a barely inaudible whisper.

“Yeah, that surprised me, too,” Isaac replies, and his grave tone is easier to hear in the silence.

“There’s something going on, right?”

Stiles leans against the wall next to the mattress and observes them as quietly as possible. He can make out their profiles, and how closely they are sitting together, legs tangled, and hands interlocked.

They lean on and press their foreheads together as they whisper in conversation, and Stiles understands this is probably something they do every so other night.

“I don’t know,” Isaac shakes his head a little.

“I’ve never seen him acting like that,” Erica says in surprise. “Have you?”

“Hmm,” Isaac takes a while to answer that. “No…”he trails off, and they are suddenly cuddling, getting more comfortable in the improvised bed, and Stiles supposes that’s all the gossip for the night.

"Why do you think he hasn't done it yet?" Erica suddenly asks.

"I don't know, Erica," Isaac sighs. “Maybe he doesn't want to?"

"But the kid won't survive without it," Erica lifts her head to look down at him.

"Maybe he thinks he can handle the situation," Isaac shrugs.

"Please," Erica snorts. “You know that as long as he doesn't mark him, he is only a mere piece of ass waiting to be claimed.”

Stiles’ heart skips a beat and then starts beating frantically when he hears that.

"Who cares," Isaac says, disinterested.

"I do," Erica says vehemently. “I don't want Derek having to fight off all those Alphas to keep a human who,” she pauses, making a face, “may or may not know shit about the Argents.”

Stiles’ ears are roaring with the intensity of his pulse. He’s trying to breathe normally, when he
realizes they have stopped speaking.

"No more eavesdropping," Isaac says, suddenly in front of him.

Stiles tries to protest, tries to explain that no, he was not eavesdropping— when Isaac knocks him out.

When he wakes up again, it's morning and Derek is barking orders to his three men. Wolves. Whatever.

Stiles' head feels like it's going to split in half.

"Do you werewolves get headaches?" he slurs as he rubs his temple.

Boyd throws him a bottle of pills without a word and, after checking what they are, Stiles swallows two aspirins dry.

"Next time, please don't hit me in the temple," he groans when he touches a big bump on his head. "Or better yet, don't knock me out, period. I wasn't eavesdropping, I can't help listening if you sit next to me to gossip, smarty pants," he points at Isaac who growls and moves toward him.

Stiles backs off, pressing against the wall and flinching when his head bumps against it.

"Isaac," Derek barks and Isaac is suddenly in front of him, lowering his head like he was trying to apologize in some weird wolfy way.

Before Stiles can dig the last inch of his grave by pointing out what a spoiled brat Isaac is, a werewolf he doesn't know barges in.

"Sir, before you leave," he bows, offering something. "Take this as our apology for what happened early today."

Those words peak Stiles' interest. He's wondering if they're talking about that beta who tried to kill him, when he sees the collar.

It's nothing fancy, just a thin black leather strap with a silver clasp. But it's enough to make Stiles unable to swallow the sudden lump in his throat. He has a bad feeling about it.

Derek groans in a clear show of annoyance, grabbing the offered collar with resignation.

"I'm so sorry sir, we don't have a leash to match it." The werewolf bows ridiculously low.

"There's no need for one," Derek turns to look Stiles straight in the eye. "He's not going anywhere."

Stiles is pretty sure he must be looking like a deer caught in the headlights. He curses inwardly as he feels the heat creeping up his neck to his face.


Stiles falters; he takes a tentative step closer, and then another, and when he's starting to actually walk, Isaac pats his shoulder, Erica pinches his side, and Boyd grins at him like he knew something Stiles didn't. And he stops moving, utterly petrified.

The three betas shove him forward until he's in front of Derek, who has this unreadable expression Stiles is starting to hate so much.
“Is the collar— uh,” Stiles licks his lips nervously. “Is it payback for all the jokes you guys went through over the years?”

Derek actually smirks at that, a cold and menacing grin, and Stiles swallows soundly.

“These are the rules,” Derek shrugs.

And his hands place the collar around Stiles’ neck, fingers strong and warm against Stiles’ frantic pulse as he fastens the clasp. He lingers a second too long, intense green eyes studying the dark leather around his pale skin.

“Welcome to the pack.”
Rogue Shifter

Stiles feels oddly exposed as they walk back to their car, fighting the urge to tug at the collar as everyone stares. He tries to ignore the snarls that turn into smirks as he walks with Derek’s betas. He’s so tense he can barely keep their pace. That’s when he sees the werewolf that attacked him last night in the crowd, and he stiffens all over.

Isaac places a hand on his shoulder, and Stiles cringes away. But Isaac squeezes slightly in what feels like a reassuring gesture, and Stiles pauses in confusion. He doesn’t have time to wonder what that was before they reach the car.

“Did you go to the bathroom?” Erica teases him as Stiles gets in the van. “It’s the last one you’ll see for a while.”

“How long is that?” he asks with curiosity. He’s been camping before, he knows what to expect from a situation like that, at least.

“With Boyd driving?” She grins. “Couple of days, top.”

Boyd is buckling in when he hears that and turns around, smirking back at her. And the way they look at each other...

“Okay, wow, werewolf pheromones,” Stiles blurts out before he can activate his by-nature defective brain-to-mouth filter.

Erica seems ready to say something, but Isaac huffs out a laugh as he sits next to Stiles, ignoring her. “I’m starting to enjoy having you here.”

Erica scowls and sits, glancing one last time at Boyd, who seems nonchalant as he starts the car.

“Yeah? Well I wish I could say the same, buddy,” Stiles mocks.

He feels the rough material of the collar around the tender skin of his neck as he speaks, and it makes him falter. He really shouldn’t be annoying werewolves. Also, he’s going to end up with a rash, he can already tell.

Derek is the last to get in his seat. He nods at Boyd and they start driving away. Stiles turns around, observing the wolf base slowly disappearing through the window, and he suddenly feels the uncertainty pressing in on him. He’s alone in enemy territory and he doesn’t even know where he’s being taken.

His head is throbbing, and his right side still feels tender where the bruises are. Closing his eyes, he rests his head on the window and tries to soothe the headache away.

A bump in the road wakes him up later, startling him for a moment. He didn’t even realize he had fallen asleep. He straightens up, stretching his sore muscles in the little space he has.

“Soooo,” he tries casually. “Where are we going?”

Erica snorts two seats to his right, breaking his hopes of getting this information the easy way.

“No, seriously,” he insists as he yawns. “Why didn’t you just ask me whatever you wanted to know about the Argents right in Beacon Hills?”
“Guys,” he huffs. “Where are you taking me?”

Silence.

“Hey!” he raises his voice, suddenly very awake and alert as he looks around at the bunch of unreasonable werewolves. “We have a deal, come on, don’t be douche wolves!”

“I liked him better when he was gagged,” Boyd suddenly says, making Erica and Isaac laugh.

“Oh my god,” Stiles widens his eyes. “He speaks!”

His comment gains a snort from Boyd and more laughter from the other two betas. Derek, however, huffs, pinching his nose in a clear show of exasperation.

“We couldn’t waste more time in Beacon Hills,” Derek grunts, and Stiles suspects he’s just trying to make everyone be quiet.

“More time? You weren’t there even a day!” Stiles whines. He could still be in his hometown with the rest of the humans, instead of on enemy land with a bunch of werewolves.

“That you know of,” Isaac grins, still half laughing.

“Okay,” Stiles says slowly. “So you had to leave. Why?”

“Do you always have so many questions?” Erica asks him, leaning forward and looking at him over Isaac.

“Usually,” he shrugs.

“Great,” she says sarcastically as she leans back against the seat.

“So?” Stiles asks after a moment.

“We took a detour before visiting your town,” Isaac explains, making Derek growl. “What? He’s clearly not going to shut up,” Isaac shrugs.

“So, what? Another mission?” Stiles asks in confusion, ignoring Derek as long as Isaac does the same.

“You could say that, I guess,” Isaac pulls a face in wonder.

“Okay, look, you’re currently my favorite because, contrary to them you’re talking. But dude, drop the mysterious pose, it gets old very fast,” Stiles gesticulates wildly as he speaks.

“Your favorite, huh?” Erica appears again in his visual camp.

“Derek?” Isaac asks, ignoring the side conversation going on where Erica grins and Stiles scowls back.

Derek sighs, nodding without looking back.

“We were sent to Beacon Hills, but we took advantage of it to search for the Argents on our own.”

“You all want to find them?” Stiles raises his eyebrows in surprise. He thought the only one
interested was Derek, for obvious reasons he’s not supposed to know, anyway.

“We’re a pack,” Boyd surprises him again when he speaks for the second time.


“That’s cute,” Erica comments distractedly, her eyes focused on the landscape.

“Wait, so you need permission to like, hunt people?” Stiles shakes his head, frowning as he realizes what all this implies.

“Don’t you humans do the same when you enlist?” Isaac inquires.

“Huh,” Stiles huffs. “I guess we do.”

“We’re a military pack; we get assigned missions, we don’t pick them,” Isaac keeps talking.

Stiles wasn’t kidding when he said Isaac was his favorite right now. Punch in the head aside, he is being the nicest. Although Boyd gave him the aspirins, but he doesn’t talk... Who of these werewolves suck the least? Tough decision.

“My spidey senses tell me you don’t have permission to hunt the Argents, then?”

“Shrewd,” Erica snorts.

“Okay, what’s wrong with you?” Stiles snaps back.

Erica leans forward and looks at him with her eyebrows raised up.

“Or you know, uh, I take it back?” he deflates quickly.

“You’re lucky I had my period last week,” she points out, cocking her head sassily before turning back to look through the window.

The other three werewolves groan at that. Stiles is positive he caught Derek rolling his eyes. Okay, so maybe this is normal for her? Stiles is too useless around any kind of female to be able to know. He’s suddenly so awkward he stops talking and they travel in silence.

His legs start jumping up and down in fast, short movements. He usually can’t stay still, but this is so much worse. He’s drumming his fingers over his knees when he realizes he has no idea of the time, or how long they have been on the road. He’s regretting not wearing a watch; that was a stupid decision. And his stomach takes that moment to growl.

“Do we have any food?” he adventures to ask.

“We travel light,” Isaac smirks.

“Are you serious?” he squeaks.

He hears several snorts and realizes they must be traveling without provisions. That makes him think automatically of sleeping bags and the rest of necessary camping items. Suddenly the next two days don’t seem as easy to handle as before.

“How are we going to eat?” he insists. “Oh my god, don’t tell me you’re going to chase rabbits and make me eat them raw? At least cook them in a little werewolf oven?”
“We’ll feed you,” Derek growls. “Now shut up.”

“I’m hungry now,” Stiles scowls. “And I don’t see anyone stopping the car to go grocery shopping for me in the woods.”

Boyd throws a small Doritos bag back at him without turning his eyes from the road.

Stiles fumbles with his arms, trying to catch the bag for a moment until he finally rips it open, almost spilling Doritos all over him. The moment the smell hits him, he groans and closes his eyes.

“Man, I think I love you,” he sniffs the bag. “You’re my new favorite.” And he proceeds to stuff his mouth.

“You change your mind easily,” Isaac teases.

“Dude, you never gave me food. Food wins against practically everything. The only way you’d recover your status is by having curly fries hidden in that leather jacket.”

Isaac snorts. “I’m afraid I don’t give enough of a shit for that,” he shrugs in a fake apology.

Stiles shoves the last Doritos in his mouth, licking his fingers clean before he clenches his shirt over his chest and fakes pain. “Harsh,” he mocks, still chewing.

The betas seem to be amused by him, and Stiles decides that’s better than being amused by shoving his face into places instead.

There has been a change in their attitude. He’s still wary around them even when, technically, he’s part of the pack now. He had no idea humans could be part of a pack to begin with. Or that slaves were considered more than just... well, slaves. He decided to cooperate because he knew there was no way he could outrun or escape from a werewolf. So if the werewolves decide to play nice, he’s surely not going to complain.

He’s still not sure about Derek. He’s been remembering things his mother used to tell him about werewolves when he was a kid, things he had forgotten. And he’s still not sure if he wants to keep remembering or if he’s angry with Derek for triggering this.

“So!” he decides to keep the ball rolling. “Military pack. That’s cool. Interesting. How does it work, anyway?”

Derek surprises him by answering this time. “I’m the Alpha. I have a pack, they respond to me, I respond to my superiors.”

“Superiors? Like Super Alphas?” Stiles widens his eyes.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Derek sounds close to rolling his eyes.

“They are all Alphas, but that doesn’t mean they have the same power or status,” Isaac adds.

“Oh,” Stiles points at Derek. “That’s what happened back there, right? They were nearly peeing themselves when you flashed that- that thingie, that round thing!” He gesticulates with his hands.

“Yes,” Erica snaps, leaning over Isaac to look at him. “Derek is a very powerful Alpha, you should be proud to be his slave, so why don’t you show your respect by shutting up?”

“Yeah, about that,” Stiles points vaguely at her, ignoring her suggestion. “What’s that all about being your slave? You were kidding, right? We- uh, we have a deal.” He stutters the last part out.
“You want to live?” Derek glances at him over his shoulder.


“Then, that’s the only way to take you with us without getting you killed,” Derek tilts his head slightly back, looking at Stiles.

“Right, so wait,” Stiles rubs his temple. “Why aren’t you breaking my limbs and threatening me to cooperate instead of accepting the deal? And before you answer, I want to point out I’m not complaining, at all. Not at all. I’m just... curious.”

Stiles groans, covering his eyes with his palm. Stupid defective brain-to-mouth filter.

“It’s easier if you cooperate, especially once we arrive in Wolf City,” Derek comments as he looks at the road in front of him.

“Wolf City?” Stiles breaths out.

“Surprise,” Isaac fakes a cheer.

“Oh my god, *I’m going to die,*” Stiles freaks out.

*Chicago.* Where the war started, where apparently it’s like a fricking apocalyptic movie even now, if all the rumors Stiles heard are true.

“You’ll be fine,” Isaac says. “That’s why you’re Derek’s slave now.”

“Dude, don’t-” Stiles shakes his head. “Don’t say that like it’s something *good.*”

“It’ll keep you alive, moron,” Isaac shrugs.

"But-why? Why slaves? Are werewolves lazy by nature?" Stiles babbles as he starts freaking out. Boyd and Erica snort at the same time, which makes him giggle a little, because come on, that’s funny. Yeah, he’s definitely freaking out.

“What’s the secret? Come on, you can tell me, I’m technically part of the family.”

“It’s a matter of status,” Derek says nonchalantly. “Only Alphas have slaves. It shows their power.”

“So I’m like a trophy wife?” Stiles asks horrified. And why would he even go there? His brain is a weird place sometimes.

“You wish,” Erica snorts.

“Hey, *rude!*” Stiles admonishes.

“Our turn,” Derek says, startling him as he pulls the sunshade down and angles it to look at Stiles through the little mirror.

“Uh,” Stiles falters, leaning against his seat.

“The Argents,” Derek arches an eyebrow.

“S-sure,” Stiles gapes. He isn’t a werewolf but he can feel the sudden change of mood in the car.
“You said they were your neighbors,” Derek says. “How many of them were living together?”

Stiles frowns, threw back by the unexpected question. That’s the kind of information they want?

“Uh, six people?” he says, unsure.

“Are you asking me?” Derek cocks his head.

“No, no of course not,” Stiles snorts, trying to sound carefree. “There were six people living in the house. But they worked with a lot more hunters. They weren’t Argents, though. I think Allison had some cousins who accompanied her father and the rest when they were out in the woods, but I never met them.”

Derek nods. “Weapons?” he asks next.

“I guess they were especially fond of crossbows,” Stiles speaks without thinking. “I know Allison was very good with one. I remember because at first I thought it was lame until I saw the arrows with exploding heads and all the ammo they had designed and created. Man, that room was out of a Terminator movie. It was nearly indecent the amount of wolfsbane they used.”

“Did you ever go with them?” Isaac asks after an odd pause.

“What?” Stiles asks indignantly. “Are you out of your fricking mind?”

He has no idea why he’s taking the question so badly, it’s not like he cares what any of them think, although the thought of being associated with the Argents is unbearable.

“Alright,” Derek nods. “You passed.”

“Passed? What? You decided to test me after we crossed the border?” Stiles squeals.

“It wouldn’t matter which side of the border you were on if I determined you were of no help,” Derek smirks.

“Dude, there’s no need for a display of threatening skills,” Stiles complains. “I said I knew them because I do.”

“Cocky, I like that Derek,” Erica suddenly says naughtily.

Ignoring it, Stiles asks the question before he even knows he’s thinking it. “Are you trying to find Gerard?”

“We want them all,” Derek arches an eyebrow; he looks surprised for a second, even.

And Stiles nods. Good, that’s good. He has no idea where that came from, he doesn’t even want to think about it. But if they are after the Argents, and they deal with Gerard... He sags against the seat. During the five years since his mother died, Stiles has been carefully raising barriers around his memories, blocking certain ideas, denying certain emotions. But now that he slipped and thought of Gerard, and god just thinking of that name makes him choke, now all his thoughtful work is slowly crumbling down around him.

Stiles notices Derek regarding him oddly, his intense gaze studying him, and Stiles can’t suddenly breathe. He grabs his knees and squeezes, trying to hide how badly he’s started to shake.

“Derek,” Boyd warns.
Derek looks at him a moment longer and Stiles can feel his stare tearing slowly away as they discover the road ahead has been blocked.

“Shit,” Derek mutters, and suddenly the car is filled with a vibrating feeling, a mix between anticipation and excitement.

“Stop the car,” Derek orders. “Erica, with me.”

They are out in a flash, both rushing to the pile of trunks and wild undergrowth blocking the road. They’ve started to push away some of it, when they tense.

“Rogue!” Erica warns. She looks scared, which worries Stiles instantly.

Isaac is suddenly pushing him, opening the door and shoving him out.

“What are you doing?” Stiles protests as he nearly drops to his knees on the ground. Boyd is there, too. They circle him and move together to where Erica and Derek are.

“I thought we were in a safe zone for you guys,” Stiles sounds frantic to his own ears as he speaks.

“The fact that it’s werewolf territory doesn’t mean there’s no danger,” Isaac growls, yellow eyes inspecting around them.

“So what? Is this a trap?” Stiles asks as he looks around, too.

They widen the circle, all the werewolves sniff and study their surroundings. And Stiles has never felt more impotent in his life. He can’t see or hear anything.

“No,” Derek said. “This thing saw the opportunity in a neglected road and decided to lurk.”

“Thing?” Stiles hisses. That doesn’t sound good.

“Rogue shifter,” Isaac explains. He must have been silently assigned to protect Stiles because he’s not leaving his side. “They don’t care about the war, they don’t have a pack; we aren’t even sure if they are more than animals. But if he senses we’re here, he’ll try to kill us.”

“Holy God,” Stiles breathes out. “And I thought you were the worst bunch I could have had the bad luck of stumbling into.”

“Turns out you were wrong,” Erica winks, quickly turning away to keep inspecting around.

“It’s moving, we need to get out of here,” Derek growls.

“What about the car?” Stiles frowns.

“Staying in the open isn’t safe,” Isaac grabs his arm and pulls him forward.

“No more talking,” Derek says pointing at Stiles before he starts jogging toward the line of trees on their right.

They leave the road behind, going after Derek. Isaac walks before him, and Boyd behind. Stiles tries to keep their pace quietly, but in his defense they are running pretty fast and it’s hard to see where his feet are stepping now that it’s getting dark. That’s why he fumbles and nearly falls a couple of times. So not his fault.

Boyd huffs behind him and a moment later he’s being thrown over his shoulder. Stiles tries not to
squeal as he shoves back, trying to get back on his feet.

“Don’t be stubborn,” Boyd admonishes as he pats his butt a couple of times, like you do with babies to calm them down.

“This is the most humiliating thing that’s ever happened to me, just so you know. Just so you remember you’re the one responsible for this permanent trauma,” Stiles murmurs frantically. He can hear chuckles ahead and that’s it, he’s officially flushing.

They move uphill until Derek orders them to stop, and Boyd drops him.

“Thanks for the ride, I delegate you to the favorite position by the way,” Stiles huffs.

“Quiet,” Derek snaps.

That’s when Stiles realizes they moved up to find an advantageous position.

“You expect that thing to attack?” Stiles asks.

“I know he will,” Derek scowls.

That’s when a shadow jumps from behind them and kicks Erica to the ground, impressive claws tearing her jacket apart on the back.

Boyd is moving before Stiles can even blink. He kneels next to her, defensive stance ready as he tucks her immobile body in his arms.

“Boyd!” Isaac yells when he sees he left his protective position.

“What’s wrong with her?” Stiles freaks out. “What was that?”

He can’t even explain what he saw. It was so fast and it’s so dark in the forest, Stiles only got a glimpse of scales and a long tail, like a reptile. Definitely not a werewolf.

“She’s paralyzed – don’t let it scratch you,” Isaac explains, manhandling him closer to where Boyd and Erica are.

Isaac and Derek stand in front of them, claws out and ready. Stiles crouches next to Boyd; he takes a look at Erica and instantly regrets it. She looks dead, unmoving eyes open to the night, head craned oddly to one side, tangled legs folded under her. A second inspection reveals she’s breathing, at least.

They hear a screeching to their left and Isaac is suddenly on the move. He jumps, crashing against the thing midair.

“I’m taking Erica out of here,” Boyd yells, rushing into the woods and disappearing.

Derek growls, and Stiles notices for the first time he’s wolfed out. Even the second time, it’s still as impressive as the first. He runs to help Isaac, and together they try to immobilize the creature.

It’s starting to look good. Well, Stiles can’t really see how it looks exactly, they move too fast and it’s practically night already. But it seems they can contain it, until the creature uses its tail and whips them away, sending them flying against the nearby trees.

Stiles gapes. He holds his breath, praying Derek and Isaac will get up. If they are out, Stiles is screwed.
That’s when he feels reptilian eyes on him. Stiles looks around nervously. He can’t see anything, but he decides to scramble away.

Isaac is still on the ground, groaning. He’s holding his side where a branch stabbed him. Derek seems to be fine, though. He gets back on his feet and stares at his beta for a second before moving.

The creature screeches closer to him than before and Stiles panics.

“Derek!” he yells without thinking.

He stumbles and nearly falls down, and that’s when he sees it. The reptilian shifter is perched on a tree, yellow eyes fixed on him.

“Stiles!” Derek barks, but it’s too late. The shifter has leaped down to the ground and is now right in front of Stiles, showing his grotesque teeth and hissing. “Stiles, run!” Derek insists, his voice low and animalistic.

Stiles sees him leaping onto the creature’s back and he turns around, seizing the moment to run into the woods without a look back.

Running downhill helps him to move faster, but it also complicates things. One bad step and he’ll start rolling! Stiles runs through the forest as fast as he can anyway. It’s so dark he can barely see anything. His feet step on something slippery and he loses his balance, the rugged ground making him fall forward.

He crashes against a tree, uncoordinated limbs trying to cushion the impact without success. He feels the bark scratching his face and then he’s hitting the ground.

Stiles groans, knocked breathless by the impact. His right shoulder took the worst of the damage. He holds it with his hand before he spins around, trying to determine if there’s someone near.

Back against the tree, he tries to slow his breath. That’s when he sees it. A shadow that wasn’t there before. It moves slowly toward him and Stiles scrambles away, wincing as his sore shoulder bumps against the tree again.

He’s using his hands and heels to crawl backwards when the creature jumps forward and lands on his feet. Stiles gapes; he’s never seen anything like it. He’s never heard of anything like it, either.

The creature observes him, his reptilian eyes fixed on him as it tilts its face, making Stiles frown. He has a strange feeling, like he was being recognized. But that’s crazy.

He hears a growl at his back and Stiles sags in relief. He throws his head back to look and sees Derek crouched, face completely wolfed out, red eyes flashing in the night. And Stiles feels strangely comforted. That’s a creature he knows, at least.

"Get out of the way," Derek growls, eyes flickering over him a moment before concentrating on the threat again.

Stiles rolls to the right, trying to move as fast as he can away from them. He crouches and starts running.

He runs without direction. He’s already out of breath and completely lost when he hears something that makes him stop in his tracks.

He must be hallucinating. What he just heard is not possible. Maybe the several hits to the head he’s
received in the last couple of days are catching up to him? But he’d swear he just heard Lydia Martin.

He shakes his head, resuming the march when he hears her again. And she is calling someone. In fact, he hears her twice more. He’s sure of it.

“Uh, Lydia?” he whispers, because alright, he may be going along with an hallucination but there’s still a dangerous creature out there, so he’s not going to yell, just in case.

Turning around, he sees a shadow approaching. For a second he thinks it’s Lydia, but the shadow is all wrong for her. Stiles panics until he sees red eyes and sighs in relief.

“Derek,” he calls.

Derek is there in a second, grabbing his wrist and pulling him to the left. He stumbles trying to keep his pace, his free hand clenched around Derek’s forearm to get some support.

Derek pushes him against a tree, placing his hands on the bark on either side of him, using his body as a shield.

“What’s going on?” he breathes out.

“Shut up,” Derek mouths, his hand curling around Stiles’ neck, right over his collar.

Stiles startles, growing suddenly still. He can feel the rough material burning his skin raw as Derek’s hand moves, rubbing it around his neck, pressing slightly harder.

“W-what?” Stiles stutters out. But Derek growls right next to his ear, low and rough, and that’s enough warning to make Stiles stop.

After a while, the adrenaline starts wearing off. It’s the tension, the waiting for the next horrible thing to happen, that finally breaks him. His body starts to hurt and ache everywhere. He can barely feel his legs, his shoulder is throbbing where he hit that tree, the side of his face is burning and he can feel the blood pooling in the crook of his neck cooling down. His stomach picks up that moment to growl again, and Stiles sags, breath catching in his throat as he tries to hold back a sob. This is starting to be a little bit too much.

Derek surprises him, moving his hand away from the tree and circling Stiles’ shoulders. “Hold on a little longer,” he whispers against his head.

Stiles nods, suppressing a groan when Derek tightens his hold and his shoulder protests.

“That’s it, she contained it,” Derek sighs, stepping back.

Stiles leans against the tree, knees suddenly too weak. “What did you say?”

“We need to go back to the car,” Derek says, ignoring him.

“Derek,” Stiles insists.

“Let’s go,” Derek grabs his wrist and pulls him forward, indicating he should follow.

“What about the others?” Stiles whispers as they move through the forest.

“They’ll be there,” Derek replies, already ahead of him.
“And that thing?” Stiles finally asks.

“Gone,” Derek says without looking back.

“That’s good, right?” Stiles says, his teeth chattering.

It’s not that he’s cold; he supposes it’s more of a post traumatic effect. He can’t stop seeing those inhuman eyes and shivering

“Careful,” Derek turns, stretching his arm to offer his palm. It’s so dark Stiles can’t really see what’s on the ground, but he hears the water and imagines they’re crossing a brook.

He clasps Derek’s hand and accepts his help to jump over it. He fumbles forward when he lands, colliding against Derek who just holds him steady.

“Keep moving,” Derek says after a moment, dropping his hand and letting him go as he resumes walking.

Stiles falters less than a second before he’s going after him.

When he sees the road through the tree line, Stiles sighs in relief. He’s never been so happy with the prospect of going back to a stolen car.

Isaac appears all of a sudden, rushing toward Derek and giving him a quick hug. He doesn’t stop asking if he’s alright until Derek grunts affirmatively, pushing him toward Stiles. Isaac seems satisfied after a couple more minutes and he moves to Stiles.

Stiles will never admit how grateful he is to see this werewolf, but when Isaac holds him and helps him the rest of the way out of the woods and into the car, he almost thanks him.

Stiles drops onto the seat and closes his eyes a moment, still unable to understand what the hell just happened. He looks to his right and sees Erica next to him, body slack and awkwardly placed.

“You’re bleeding,” she says through her teeth, and Stiles suspects she can’t even move her jaw.

“You look great,” he replies, sighing tiredly.

Erica chuckles, or so Stiles believes, because the sound comes out weird.

Looking through the front window, Stiles sees the three werewolves moving tree trunks away from the road. They move so fast, Stiles can barely see them in the night.

“How long are you going to stay like that?” he asks, deciding that learning about shifters can’t be bad.

“Depends on how much poison I got into my system,” Erica grunts. “Boyd pulled out a lot, so I should be fine soon. I can already feel my toes.”

“That’s... good, I guess,” Stiles frowns. “Wait, how did Boyd- No, never mind.”

Erica snorts again. She’s starting to sound a bit more normal, Stiles realizes.

Once they have cleaned a path big enough for the van, they get back. Isaac gets inside through the other door, moving Erica to his lap, carefully placing her dead limbs in a comfortable position.

Boyd looks back at them once, and then he starts the car and they rush away from there.
“How is she?” Derek asks from the front seat.

“I’ll be fine,” Erica says weakly. “I’m starting to feel my limbs.”

“Alright,” Derek sighs, rubbing his face.

Isaac pulls the hair away from her face, kissing her forehead as she closes her eyes. Stiles looks away, suddenly uncomfortable. There is nothing sexual between them, but their level of intimacy is perhaps worse for him than if they were just making out. He’s never let anyone in like that since... Yeah, not going there.

"Is anyone going to explain what just happened?" he bursts out, wanting a distraction.

"We told you," Isaac sighs. He looks tired. Stiles had no idea werewolves could look anything but menacing and perfectly groomed. "Another kind of shifter."

"You mean he's someone like you," Stiles corrects.

"No, not like us; this kind of shifter, they reflect what they are inside, it’s not right, they are..."

"Abominations," Stiles murmurs, receiving an intense stare from Derek, who nods after a moment.

Stiles can't stop thinking of his mother. Did she know? What did she think? Did she ever see one? Would she have defended that reptile, too? It's been a long time since he allowed himself to have this kind of thought. Wondering about the things she did, the things she liked, the things she knew.

His heart clenches painfully and Stiles curls instinctively.

"Hey, you alright?" Isaac asks, his hand on Stiles' sore shoulder.

"What's wrong with him, his heart beat went suddenly insane," Erica says, gazing sideways at him from her position in Isaac’s lap.

"I don’t know, he's injured but I don't think that's it," Isaac wonders, fingers inspecting Stiles carefully.

Stiles tries to push him away, tries to get some space to breathe. He's suffocating, the pain in his chest blinding him.

"Don't touch him," Derek says.

Isaac looks back and forth in confusion but moves his hands away, leaning against the door and bringing Erica with him.

"Take this," Derek hands him a bag.

Stiles lifts a shaking arm and grabs it. It's a big bag. His fingers fumble as he rolls it into a smaller space and places it around his mouth, breathing inside.

He’s had worse attacks, before. He keeps thinking this is mild, this is nothing. He rolls his shoulder to feel the pang of pain in his right arm and he thinks of that, tries to rationalize his body’s response. As he keeps breathing, his eyes find Derek's and they stare at each other.

Something happened in that forest. When Derek saved him, risking his own life, something changed between them. And Stiles can't help but remember those years of school when he used to observe the Hales from a distance. He sees the broody, wide-shouldered kid Derek used to be. A lot of people in
his grade had a crush on him. At least before everyone knew he was a werewolf.

He reasons with himself that Derek saved him because he needs him. And that's probably the truth. But Stiles is too shaken, memories of his mother currently branded on his thoughts, and he doesn't care about Derek's reasons. He's grateful. He's alive because of it. He owes Derek.

And as he thinks all this and looks at him, the oddest look crosses Derek's face and, for a silly moment, Stiles thinks he read his mind.

He feels suddenly sick, a wave of nausea rock him forward, gagging inside the bag.

“Stop the car,” Derek orders.

And a second later he’s opening Stiles’ door, guiding him out, where Stiles bends over and dry heaves, his whole body clenching and unclenching as it tries to empty his already empty stomach.

“There goes my Doritos,” he hears Boyd saying, and it almost makes him chuckle.

When the nausea is over, he stays there–hands on his knees, head bent down. He feels the tears in his eyes as he takes deep breaths.

“Come on,” Derek rubs his back once, twice, three times and then he’s moving away, back to the front seat, leaving him behind.

Stiles scrubs his face clean with the sleeve of his shirt and he goes back to his seat, curling against the window and away from all of them.

It had been a long time since he had a panic attack. He feels mortified and infuriated. His mouth tastes awful, and he’s thirsty and hungry. He’s mad he threw up the Doritos. He decides to close his eyes and try to forget.

- 

Derek hears Stiles as he falls slowly asleep.

“He’s hiding something.” Derek finally says when he knows Stiles won’t hear them. He sighs, rubbing his eyes as he leans his head back.

“What do you mean?” Isaac asks in a low tone.

“I still don’t know but I can feel it,” Derek is suddenly very tired.

“We’ll find out for you,” Boyd says, eyes still on the road.

“About that,” Derek turns his head to the left, facing his betas. “You’re doing a good job, keep doing exactly what you’re doing, especially you Isaac.”

Derek can feel his beta’s satisfaction.

“Don’t be so proud because your Alpha complimented you,” Erica murmurs. “This kid is easy to manipulate.”
“Not true,” Derek huffs, closing his eyes. “Be careful.”

“Yeah,” Isaac nods. He still has Erica on his lap, constantly petting her hair. When Derek turned them he never thought they’d get along so well, and now they are like Siamese siblings.

“I’m kind of liking him,” Boyd startles them with the comment.

Derek opens one eye and looks at him sideways.

“He’s funny,” Boyd shrugs.

“I guess he’s making things easy for us,” Isaac agrees.

Erica snorts. “It’s so easy to win you two over. I still think he’s a loser.”

“No, you don’t,” Derek shakes his head, frowning as he studies the road ahead.


“Sue me,” Derek says distractedly, body bent forward as he looks through the front window.

“Something wrong?” Boyd asks, body already taut and ready.

“There’s an abandoned farm ahead,” Derek comments.

“I–” Boyd falters. “I can’t see it.”

“Trust me, it’s there. Turn to your left and follow the path.”

“Are we stopping?” Isaac asks.

“We need to rest,” Derek answer after a moment.

“But we’d arrive tonight if we–” Isaac tries to complain.

“Not open for discussion,” Derek says sharply.

They may endure more than humans, but they still need a break. He has to look after his betas, and this is exactly what they need, even if they still don’t know. Also, now that Derek is sure this human could bring him to the Argents, he doesn’t want to lose Stiles. And Stiles needs a break more than anything.

He still doesn’t understand what triggered the panic attack, but he supposes that finding out you live in a world where creatures like that exist is enough reason. Even then, he can’t help but feel there’s something more. Something he’s not telling them. It could be anything, but Derek’s instinct is telling him Stiles’ secrets concern him.

“By the way,” Erica murmurs. “Did you hear the girl tonight?”

“What girl?” Isaac sounds confused.

Boyd doesn’t reply, but his skeptical look through the rearview mirror is indicative enough that he knows nothing about a girl.

“Derek?” Erica asks.

“No,” Derek lies. Lying to your own betas is not really that hard. He’s not sure of what he heard
tonight, but there was definitely someone else out there. It doesn’t matter, though. They left the
shifter and whoever was with him behind. It doesn’t concern them anymore.

Once in the farm, Isaac brings Erica inside a little barn and stays with her while Boyd goes to bring a
meal.

Derek circles the car, going to Stiles’ door. His idea was to shake him awake, but when he sees him
deeply asleep, something stops him.

Cursing, he grabs the boy around the shoulders and under the knees and lifts him. Stiles is not small;
his limbs are long and gawky, he’s as tall as Derek, but Derek could lift the car with one hand, so it’s
not really that difficult for him to carry a human.

Stiles is so out he doesn’t even wake up. He mumbles something against Derek’s shoulder when
Derek lays him down in a pile of dry straw and then he’s curling in on himself, oblivious to the
world.

Derek hesitates a moment. He’s taken a step away when he curses and takes his jacket off, dropping
it over Stiles. He’s wearing his collar; Derek has a responsibility for him now. And that’s exactly
what Derek wanted to avoid.

He leaves his two betas with Stiles in the barn and goes out, getting the empty bottles from the car
and going to find the stream he heard when they arrived.

As he hikes through the camp, he remembers this morning when he ordered his betas to get closer to
Stiles as part of his plan to get the information on the Argents. It feels like it happened years ago. Not
because today was a long day, but also because they progressed so quickly.

Derek can tell in the way Stiles has started to relax around the betas. Even when still guarded, Stiles
is starting to be more himself around them. And he can tell his betas are starting to accept him into
the pack. It could be troublesome; Derek is not sure of Stiles’ fate in all this, and he doesn’t want his
betas to grow fond of a human. Humans tend to die easily. But for now, he decides to let it go.
Because that way he has mediators dealing with his supposedly new slave.

He has no idea what he was thinking when he had the idea of bringing Stiles as his slave.

_Revenge_, says a small voice in the back of his mind.

And it’s true. Derek would do anything to avenge his family. Even torturing himself, doing things,
going places he doesn’t want to. Revenge is his main drive. If someone discovered he’s using time
out of his missions for his own personal vendetta, he and his pack would be in trouble. He cares
about his betas, he turned them himself under certain circumstances that bonded them together, but
he couldn’t stop even for them. Even if that meant putting them in danger. He just can’t forget, can’t
move on. He needs to find the Argents and kill them with his own hands.

Inside the barn, Boyd is using a corner where the ceiling is missing to cook the game he hunted.
Meanwhile, Stiles is awake, sitting next to Erica as they seem to talk about something.
Derek pauses, observing them.

“I love that issue of Batman,” she says animatedly. And Stiles beams, he smiles openly at her,
without any reserve.
Derek frowns.

“Want help?” Isaac is suddenly there, taking a few bottles away from his hands.
Derek shakes his head slightly, looking away from Erica and Stiles to regard his other beta. “Yeah,” he murmurs.

“You okay?” Isaac frowns.

“Fine,” Derek moves away to where Boyd is cooking.

“Lots of rabbits in this area,” the boy comments cheerfully.

Isaac snorts. “You mean you didn’t hunt only rabbits on purpose to spurn Stiles on, huh?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Boyd grins, turning the rabbits over the fire.

“Bring them over,” Derek tells Isaac, when the dinner is ready.

“Hey, Boyd,” Stiles calls when he arrives. “You like Batman, too?”

“No,” Boyd comments, deadpan.

Stiles looks surprised. He looks back at Erica, who is slowly walking on her own, and back at Boyd, like something wasn’t right. Shrugging, he sits down on the floor and crosses his legs.

“How are you feeling?” Derek asks him.

Stiles seems startled for a moment. “Better, I’m... yeah, better.” He rubs the back of his neck. “Uh, I wanted to thank you for-”

“No need,” Derek interrupts him. He doesn’t want to hear it.

“No, but I wanted to,” Stiles emphasizes.

They stare at each other and Derek wonders when the last time that someone met him halfway like this was. It’s not that Stiles is reckless, or fearless. He still reeks of terror from before, and Derek knows he has scared him on other occasions. He knows he’s wary of werewolves, and yet he doesn’t seem able to hold back whatever he thinks. It’s actually kind of amusing, if you ignore how annoying it is.

“Here you go,” Isaac hands Stiles a whole roasted rabbit.

Stiles looks at the meat with horror on his face and then he looks up at Boyd. “Very funny.”

“I cooked it, didn’t I?” Boyd grins and Stiles surprises them when he starts laughing.

They all observe him laughing for a while, until Stiles calms down and wipes his eyes. He bites straight from the rabbit’s leg and groans in appreciation.

“Man, this is great,” he says through a mouth full of meat.

“You’re feeling better,” Isaac grins as he gorges his rabbit.

Stiles only shrugs, too busy eating to speak. After that they all devour their food in silence.

“There are things we need to discuss before we arrive in the city tomorrow,” Derek says a while later, when he senses Stiles is getting sleepy again.

Stiles doesn’t even react. He looks at him from his position on the floor, hands over his stomach.
“They’ll want to know about your father,” Derek decides to explain, hoping to catch his attention.

“My father,” Stiles sits up. “What about him?”

“I’m going to report we killed him,” Derek looks him straight in the eye.

“O-okay,” Stiles stutters. “That’s good, right? That means no other werewolf will go after him, right?”

Derek senses Isaac nodding next to him. He knows that the moment Stiles realizes that because of that lie, Derek will have to kill Sheriff Stilinski the next time he gets the chance, the fragile peace they have will come crumbling down. But he hopes that by then it won’t matter anymore.

“No one else will search for him,” Derek nods, too.

Stiles sags, his arms giving in as he lies back down on the floor. He sighs, deep and slow. And Derek knows that feeling, like he’s had a weight lifted off of his shoulders.

“There’s something else,” Derek adds.

Stiles lifts his head to look at him, expectant.

“We will have to pretend in front of everyone,” Derek continues. “And we better do a good job, because the moment someone suspects anything, we’re in trouble.”

“I don’t even know what you’re talking about,” Stiles sounds confused.

“It means you will have to look like his slave for real,” Isaac adds.

“Uh okay, creepers,” Stiles stutters slightly, licking his lips in a nervous gesture Derek is starting to know. “What does that involve exactly?”

“For starters,” Boyd explains as he studies his nails, “you have to show respect.”

“I’m a very respectful—” Stiles starts to complain until he sees Boyd bring out his claws.

Derek has to duck his head down to hide the smirk when Stiles gets startled and looks at Boyd in horror.

“Never talk back,” Boyd growls. “Especially not to Derek; he’s your Alpha.”

“In fact,” Erica adds. “Never talk, period.”

“What?!” Stiles squeals. “No talking?”

“Not unless another Alpha or Derek gives you permission,” Isaac shrugs.

Stiles looks at them in disbelief and Derek just waits. This is a decision Stiles needs to make alone. If they go into the city and Stiles does something stupid because he wasn’t sure, they will be screwed.

“This is the last time we discuss this,” Derek adds. “We’re giving you one last warning. Once we’re in the city, there won’t be more discussions. I’ll have to report about the capture we made, about you,” he continues. “You will be my slave to everyone else’s eyes, and we’ll work on the Argents in secret, is that clear?”

“And then you will let me go?” he asks tentatively.
Derek pauses a moment. “I gave you my word.”

“I know,” Stiles shrugs. “I’m just making sure. I’ll stay with you while I help you find the Argents, and then I’ll be free to go. Right?”

Derek nods, not wanting to get into more details. He wonders if Stiles will grow warier when he sees the city and where they are staying. It won’t be as easy as free to go, but that’s something Derek doesn’t care about right now.

“Once we know where to go, I’ll fill out a request for permission to chase,” Derek decides to explain, to keep him as willing as possible. “That’s when you’re free to go.”

“Okay. Okay, that sounds good,” Stiles nods a couple of times.

“My uncle will be interested in my sudden change of mind when he hears I came back with a human slave,” Derek adds. “He will want to meet you, and that’s going to be tricky.”

Derek feels his three betas moving uncomfortably in their spots, clearly uneasy about the idea of his uncle.

“We’ll help you,” Derek says to reassure them more than Stiles.

“Right, you mean you’ll help me as long as that helps you,” Stiles snaps.

Derek arches an eyebrow, not even bothering to answer that.

“Stupid question, of course you will,” Stiles shrugs.

“Stiles,” Isaac jumps in. “We all need each other; you’re pack now. Even if we’re pretending, it’s very real out there. We’re not going to abandon you, and you won’t betray us, either.”

“Uh...” Stiles rubs his neck. “I’ll take that as a vote of confidence instead of the veiled threat-”

“Stiles,” Derek catches his attention. “This is important. We won’t get in the city if you’re not sure about this.”

“You decide,” Erica winks.

Stiles takes a deep breath and Derek hears his heart beating double time.


“You think?” Derek arches an eyebrow.

“I know,” Stiles emphasizes.

“Good,” Derek nods. “Then let’s try to sleep, we’re leaving at first light.”

As everyone gets up to find a comfortable place to lie down, Derek notices Isaac and Erica passing Boyd a couple of crumpled bills. And he realizes this is going to be a lot more complicated than he anticipated.
Scent-Marking

Chicago is like a fricking apocalyptic movie when they arrive. Stiles kind of expects Will Smith to come running around the next corner, or maybe a horde of zombies to start chasing their car as they drive through ruined streets, past smashed shop windows and burned cars.

“This is Wolf City?” he wonders, nose plastered against the car window. “More like Ghost City, don’t you think? Where is everyone?”

“This is a war zone, moron,” Erica complains. “What did you expect?”

He turns to look at her and shrugs. “You got a point there.”

They park in front of one of the tallest buildings Stiles has ever seen, and the moment Boyd kills the engine, a massive dude opens the lobby’s double doors and waits for them.

Derek is the first to get out and greet the stranger, who bows slightly to him.

“What?” Stiles asks as he studies the two werewolves outside.

“Home,” Isaac grins.

“What?” Stiles looks at him in surprise. “You live in this place?”

“All packs do,” Isaac nods. “It’s like a big nest, keeps us safe.”

“Dude, you werewolves are fucking weirdos,” Stiles grins.

“Shut up,” Isaac grins right back before they get out and follow Derek and the stranger inside.

The hospitality in this place is certainly rough-cut; it’s not that Stiles expected a Martha Stewart welcome, but this is austere for sure. Their escort says nothing as he guides them through the trashed lobby to the elevators. He gets one ready for them and, when Derek gets inside and none of the betas follow him, Stiles decides to wait as well.

“You’re coming with me,” Derek nods to indicate he should get inside.

Stiles falters a moment and then Isaac is pushing him inside. “We’ll be right behind you,” he says playfully.

Once inside he moves to the back, pressing his back against the elevator’s wall. “What’s going to happen now?”

“Now?” Derek turns to look at him over his shoulder. “You’re going to be in a room full of werewolves, and you’re going to remain calm and follow me.”

Derek gives him a stare, like he’s inviting him to dare disobey him. But Stiles just nods and shows his palms.

“Whatever you say,” he licks his lips nervously. “Just don’t let any of them give me a radical makeover, uh, okay?”

Derek arches an eyebrow, like that is actually an interesting idea. And then he’s looking back toward the front, and Stiles decides to think of anything but how many werewolves there are in the building.
They go up at least thirty floors until the elevator door opens to what looks like a social meeting.

The room is incredibly spacious; it looks like they pulled down all the walls on the floor, so all you see now is endless carpeted surface with a few columns here and there until you reach the building’s four viewpoints.

Derek starts walking without pause, and Stiles has to hurry to follow him after the initial shock. He was trying not to think of the number of werewolves currently surrounding him and the first room he enters turns out to be packed with them. Great.

Right and left there are groups of werewolves, some on their feet, some sitting at tables, some on couches. They are just spending time together, bonding most likely. For a second he remembers what his mother used to say about their need to create ties and spend time together, but Stiles dismisses the thoughts as quickly as he can. He’s nowhere ready to think of her today.

The three betas are suddenly right there with him, escorting him through the crowd, and Stiles breathes in relief. That’s when he notices something.

The place is packed with werewolves, but also humans.

Stiles sees all the humans wearing collars, each different from another; some are wearing collars made of what he suspects are diamonds even, and some have leashes attached to it. It's like the slave is an extension of the Alpha, like a fashion statement.

As he walks behind Derek, he notices the eyes of slaves and Alphas alike following him. Some are clearly hostile, some just curious, but what strikes him the most is the jealousy he finds in some of the stares. He just can’t wrap his mind around why a human who was turned into a slave against their will would be jealous of Stiles, of the Alpha he's supposedly a slave of.

He then pays attention to the Alphas, noticing how they regard Derek, and Stiles starts to understand what's probably going on; the more powerful the Alpha, the better off the slave.

Derek goes straight to the back where a bunch of Alphas are gathered together on a big couch, their slaves literally sitting at their feet as they converse animatedly.

Stiles observes, awestruck, how a pretty girl leans her head over her Alpha’s knee, rubbing her face playfully as she stares up at him. The Alpha, who was explaining something to another werewolf, loses his line of thought and looks down at her, smiling fondly.

The moment they see Derek, though, everyone rises and salutes him.

Stiles frowns. He still doesn’t know how werewolf ranks work, or what rank Derek is to begin with. But somehow it feels like he’s on the top of the food chain in this place, and isn’t that just ironic? Because Derek looks so uncomfortable it's cringe worthy.

Stiles knows awkward and Derek is a whole new level of it. He's never seen anything like it. Derek is lucky he's so hot, to be honest. Stiles knows from personal experience. No one puts up with incompetent social skills if you don’t look like Derek does. And it’s clear these Alphas are making an effort. They pamper him with questions and kind words as Derek’s frown deepens, and Stiles has to bite his lip to hold in the laugh that threatens to bubble up.

The betas hold him back from Derek and the Alphas, maintaining a certain distance. As he observes the scene, Stiles keeps tugging at his collar, skin itching because of the prolonged contact with the rough leather.
"Don't do that," Isaac hisses right behind him.

"It hurts, man," Stiles complains, scratching his neck.

"I don't care," Isaac growls. "Stay quiet and stand straight."

Stiles turns around to look at him. "What the-

"Stiles?" Someone calls his name.

Stiles turns in surprise, searching for the source, knowing who it is before he can even find him. And when he does, he can only look at who was his best friend for the most part of his life in astonishment.

Scott smiles and wraps his arms around him, hugging Stiles so tightly it nearly hurts. When he finally lets him go, Scott regards him with one of his trademark silly smiles that used to make Stiles smile, too.

"Stiles, it's you!" Scott says in delight. "I can't believe you are here, it's-" And then Stiles moves without thinking.

He hooks his arm back and hits Scott's unnerving jawline as hard as he can. Scott's head snaps back and there are suddenly three pair of hands holding Stiles, like he would have any chance against a werewolf, even Scott.

It feels like he hit a brick wall and broke his hand, too. He winces and holds his throbbing knuckles, but it’s totally worth it to see Scott’s face.

"What's gotten into you?" Erica demands. But Stiles doesn't reply. He doesn't even flinch when she shakes him.

Derek is suddenly there, right next to Scott, hand on his back as he inspects him. Stiles understands immediately: they know each other. And why does it hurt like a betrayal? It’s ridiculous.

"Scott," Derek murmurs. "You okay?"

"Yeah, it's okay, I'm fine," he smiles as he rubs his jaw.

"You deserve worse," Stiles spits out.

That's when he notices the group of werewolves around them, the way the Alphas look disapprovingly at Derek. And he suspects he went too far. There goes their plan to pretend and be smarter than anyone else. Typical Stiles blunder.

"Stiles," Derek says. His tone is low and cautious and that’s the reason it gives Stiles pause. He looks at Derek, really looks at him for the first time, and sees the warning clear and plain in his eyes.

"Get him out of here," Derek orders as he keeps staring at him and Stiles just lets Erica and Isaac grab each one of his arms and carry him out of there, back to the elevators.

He doesn’t even question it when Boyd stays behind with Derek. Somehow, Stiles was expecting that.

"Are you out of your mind?" Isaac asks the moment they are alone. But Stiles doesn’t react.

"Hey," Erica shoves him. "Don't you have anything to say?"
"Not really," Stiles murmurs.

"Not really. Do you have any idea of the consequences this will cause for Derek?" Isaac asks unnerved.

"Not really," Stiles repeats, shrugging.

The doors open and he walks out on autopilot. He feels numb, can’t feel his legs as he moves. He goes over and over the image of Scott right in front of him after all these years, still not being able to process what just happened. Did he seriously just punch his best friend, who also happens to be a werewolf?

Suddenly, he notices they are not following him and Stiles looks back to find Isaac holding Erica back from what he assumes is her intent to break a few of his limbs, at least.

"What? I hurt your pack feelings?" He snorts.

Isaac growls over Erica, flashing yellow eyes. "Don't tempt your luck."

“You know what? I’m real tired of the whole threatening routine. In the last week I’ve been kidnapped, beaten, almost killed by a werewolf, and then by a creature I didn’t even know existed until it tried to kill me! Meanwhile no one thought the human would need real food so there was only badly cooked rabbits and, I must add, things are so fucked up in my life I’m actually grateful they were cooked at all! And now I’m here in like the iron tower of wolftown, and I see my fucking best friend, who, by the way, tried to *kill* me and left without even an explanation, and he dares to *hug* me? I’ve just had enough bullshit. I’m tired. I want a bath, and real food and-” Stiles pauses, suddenly aware of all the verbal diarrhea that just came out of his mouth.

“You done?” Erica smirks, showing her fangs.

Stiles crosses his arms over his chest, defiant. "And since when do you know Scott anyway?" And there must be something in the way he asks that, or maybe in the way his heart thuds against his chest, because their stance changes."What?" he asks defensively.

"Is it true? You know Scott then?" Isaac asks.

"I- I asked first," he says, losing the bravado and realizing what an utter ass of himself he’s been making.

"And I'm asking now," Isaac flashes his menacing yellow eyes again.

"Okay," Stiles shows the palms of his hands. "Yes, you could say I do know him. For the past twelve years or so," he shrugs. "No biggie."

Isaac's eyes widen and Erica looks at him with concern.

"What?" he asks.

"Derek saved him when he was newly turned," Erica explains. "He's been here since then but he refuses to join Derek's pack."

"Any pack," Isaac adds, giving Erica a weird glare.

"You mean he sucks at being a werewolf?" Stiles smirks, because that's so Scott.

"I don't know why Derek insists so much on wanting him in the pack," Erica adds with a disgusted
"He's like a brother to him," Isaac says in a tone that indicates he has said this a million times before.

"Scott? Like a brother to Derek?" Stiles asks in confusion. "Are we talking about the same sour alpha?"

"Shut up," Erica growls.

"Get in there and wait for Derek," Isaac points at the door behind him.

Stiles looks back and forth a couple of times. "What's in there?"

"Derek's room," Erica rolls her eyes.

"De-Derek's room?" Stiles squeals. "Why do I have to go in there?"

"That's your new room," Isaac crosses his arms. "Slaves sleep with their Alphas."

"Together?!" Stiles nearly yelled.

"That's up to the Alpha," Erica smirks mischievously. "Now get in so we can leave. And stay there."

Stiles is too perturbed to say anything. He just turns around and opens the door cautiously, going inside slowly as he fears the worst.

Actually, he has no idea what he expected but it definitely isn’t what he’s seeing.

Derek’s room doesn’t really look very Alpha-like. It’s not that Stiles knows how an Alpha room should look like, but somehow in his mind it involved darkness and menacing corners and maybe blood and dead animals, too. But Derek’s room is nothing like that. In fact, it’s actually kind of soothing, with its monochromatic colors full of ochre and earthy tones. Like a chic forest out of a decoration magazine.

There is also nothing that proves it’s Derek's room, either. No pictures, books, or even clothes. It's like a generic, classy, and unoccupied room.

Frowning, Stiles goes to investigate. He passes the living room with the gray drapes and big couch into what seems to be the main bedroom, with a big king size bed.

Stiles pauses, taking note of the indecent number of pillows and reconsidering the Martha Stewart comment. Perhaps werewolves dig exclusive designs. It sure looks like it by sparing a glance at the beige matching covers on the bed.

The next room is a bathroom. Stiles eyes the shower with desire but he holds back, wanting to see what else is there, mostly hoping to find his room.

It turns out there are no more rooms. Just the living room, bedroom and bathroom. **Fantastic.**

He's starting to freak out when he hears the door.

He rushes to the entrance, heart in his throat thinking it’s Derek and anticipating his fury for what he did in front of all his Alpha buddies, when he discovers Scott standing in the living room.

"What-" Stiles stutters, pausing in the doorway between rooms.
Scott shows his hands in a peace gesture. "Don't hit me," he says with a shit eating grin.

"Ha, ha, very funny," Stiles mocks after a moment of pause.

"I came to see how you are," Scott smiles. "Derek told me everything."

Stiles falters. He can't believe Derek actually told Scott about their deal.

"You have to know," Scott insists. "I didn't know he was going back to Beacon Hills for your dad."

Stiles blinks a couple of times and then he understands.

"I should have suspected he was going back to Beacon Hills," Scott laments. "He was acting weird. But I was just glad he'd leave me out of it," Scott shrugs. "I should have gone with him; then maybe... well, maybe things would be different now."

"I don’t want to talk about it," Stiles decides to say, not sure if he can pull off the lie in front of Scott, who apart from knowing Stiles pretty well, happens to be a werewolf, too.

Stiles wants to stay mad, wants to never forgive his best friend for what he did but... He’s his best friend, after all. And he still knows him well enough to know he doesn’t look very happy with his current situation, whatever it is.

"How did you end up here?" he finally asks, against his better judgment, trying to dodge the talk about his father.

Scott looks at him with concern for a moment but then he seems to decide to go along."Derek saved me. I nearly killed you that first night," Scott grimaces. "And then, with Allison..."

It's been a long time since he last heard that name, but the way Scott says it, it sounds exactly the same as many years ago, when they used to spend time together in Stiles’ bedroom and Scott would ramble about Allison for hours.

"What about her?" he asks when it’s obvious Scott won’t finish the sentence.

"I couldn't stop thinking of her," he admits. "I would have hurt her that night if Derek wasn't there."

"Right, big brother saved you," Stiles says, sullen.

"Derek is not perfect," Scott shakes his head. "And he is definitely not my Alpha, but that night he did the right thing."

"So he's the reason you left like that?" Stiles insists, wanting to know and knowing he shouldn’t ask at the same time.

"Sort of?" Scott cringes.

Stiles throws his arms, huffing in exasperation. He can’t believe Derek started ruining his life so many years ago.

"By the way," Scott falters. "How is- how is Allison doing?"

Stiles stares at him for a good minute before saying, "She left Beacon Hills years ago, man."

Scott doesn't even look surprised. He casts his head down and nods as if it made sense, taking a few steps back.
"Look," Stiles takes a step closer when he notices. "I still want to kick your ass, but you're family no matter what."

Scott looks at him and beams. He just... The adorable fool just smiles at him as a tear runs down his cheek and Stiles just curses. He curses and runs to him, and they are suddenly hugging each other and Scott is openly sobbing as Stiles holds him and tells him everything will be alright, ignoring the pang of pain in his injured shoulder as Scott squeezes him tightly.

And when did things become like this? Stiles is the newly made human slave, introduced to a scary new world and somehow he's consoling a werewolf who previously was his best friend and he doesn't even know what exactly he's consoling him about.

"This better not be about Allison," he murmurs as he pats Scott's back, making the werewolf shake with laughter against him.

"What'd happen if I said it is?" Scott asks against his shoulder.

"I'd kick you in the head again," Stiles explains.

"Then it's not," Scott snorts, stepping back and cleaning his nose with the back of his hand.

"Good, because that was years ago and this place is full of hot werewolf," Stiles reprimands him.

"Ugh, don't," Scott grimaces. “Werewolves are gross."

"Uh, dude," Stiles pulls a face. “You are one, remember?"

"I'm gross sometimes, too."

"Like... when?" Stiles asks, his curiosity winning over his common sense.

"You don't want to know," Scott grimaces again. “Also it's your Alpha’s responsibility now to explain those things."

"Okay, that sounds scary," Stiles says, definitely worried now.

"Oh, it is," Scott grins.

"Shut up," Stiles rolls his eyes.

"All I'm saying is," Scott pats his shoulder, “you're in good hands. It could be worse, trust me."

Stiles can’t believe Scott is actually supporting the idea of Derek being Stiles’ Alpha for real.

“Dude, you don’t even want him as your Alpha, why should I be any different?” Stiles says.

“It’s completely different!” Scott protests.

The door opens then, and Scott is suddenly putting space between them. Stiles is about to comment on that, when Derek is suddenly in the living room. He just stays there, body taut and eyes fixed on Stiles, and Stiles knows he’s in deep shit.

“I better go,” Scott says then, giving Stiles an apologetic half smile.

He passes next to Derek, who just ignores him. Scott frowns, he falters a moment and Stiles could swear he sees his best friend sniffing the air, until Derek growls and Scott leaves quickly after that.
“He doesn’t know,” Stiles murmurs. He realizes he’s suddenly so scared his voice is shaking.

“What do you think you’re playing at?” Derek asks then, voice low and menacing.

“I- I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Stiles stutters.

“Stiles,” Derek warns. “I’m asking you nicely, I will only do it once.”

“I’m not playing at anything, man!” Stiles yells, so keyed up his voice raises a few octaves above the human spectrum.

“Let’s try this again,” Derek says, dropping his eyes to his hands before turning them into claws.

“Derek, wait!” Stiles stretches his arms forward, showing his palms at him. “I’m sorry, okay? I wasn’t expecting Scott to be there! I acted without thinking!”

“That’s your problem, you don’t think!” Derek shouts, making Stiles flinch. “Your actions could end up in your death, or worse, my punishment. So think before doing anything else as stupid as punching a werewolf in the face, even if he’s a beta!”

“That beta is my best friend!” Stiles yells right back. He doesn’t care if Derek can snap his neck with his index and forefinger. “He disappeared two years ago without a word, and I know it was your fault!”

“I saved your life back then,” Derek spats back. “Scott was out of control, he would have killed you if not for me.”

“Whatever you say, buddy,” Stiles says sardonically.

“You’re lucky I already agreed to this,” Derek shakes his head. “You’re putting me in a dangerous position. I’m risking everything for you. For the information you have on the Argents, you hear me?”

“Loud and clear,” Stiles mocks. Of course Derek is only thinking of himself in all this mess. Not a surprise.

“Stiles,” Derek grunts. And before Stiles can finish rolling his eyes, Derek has him grabbed by the collar.

“I’m trying to keep us alive,” Derek growls, flashing red eyes at him. “But I won’t be able to if you don’t collaborate, do you understand?” he asks as his grip tightens, choking Stiles slightly.

“Yes,” Stiles rasps.

“From now on you will stick to the plan,” he affirms and Stiles nods frantically.

“No talking, no staring, no moving. Got it,” Stiles coughs out.

Derek regards him for a moment longer, his eyes traveling all the way down to his hand around Stiles’ neck. “Alright,” he nods, letting Stiles go and stepping back.

Stiles’ hand travels immediately to his throat, holding his neck where his skin burns under the collar. He pants, eyes fixed on Derek in a bit of disbelief.

“You dickhead!” he pants, throat still sore.

“Now that we’re clear,” Derek ignores him. “Go take a shower, my uncle is waiting for us,” Derek
points to the direction of the bathroom.

“Right now?” Stiles squeals.

“I told you he’d want to meet you,” Derek huffs, making this half grumpy half annoyed face that, in any other circumstance, Stiles would find somehow comical. But not right now. Right now Stiles wants to punch that stupid frown away with his fists. The pain in his throat is what makes him obey in the end.

The moment Stiles disappears into the bathroom, Derek sighs and drops onto one of the chairs in the living room, holding his right side where the flesh wound has finally stopped bleeding and started to close up.

Derek closes his eyes, rubbing his temple as he tries to calm himself down. He thought he had it under control when he finally came to confront Stiles, but it’s obvious his wolf was still too worked up by the fight.

The moment his betas left with Stiles, one of the Alphas had attacked him. All because his slave had shown Derek up in front of them. Boyd tried to defend him, but Derek didn’t want to make things worse. So he ordered him not to interfere and then Derek had accepted the challenge.

They fought right there, between couches and fireplaces, right over the rich carpet. He didn’t even need to wolf out to win, but the other Alpha had gotten a good one on his right side before it was over.

He should be grateful, even, for the public challenge. Derek took too long in picking a human, and in doingso he made everyone wary. Sure, human slaves are mostly used to show your status, but they also reflect your commitment to the cause. An Alpha of his rank and position without a human slave is nearly an offense.

Winning that fight kind of fixed things for them. Now everyone knows he’s in control, no matter what his stupid slave did. They will have to work on some public display of obedience nonetheless. It’ll be annoying, but they’ll manage.

Derek raises and goes to his wardrobe. He can’t see his uncle while smelling like fresh blood. He gets his jacket and shirt off and inspects his almost healed up side. There’s dried blood all over his skin, though. Using his dirty shirt, Derek tries to clean himself when Stiles gets out of the bathroom. Derek hears his heartbeat falter a moment before going frantic and he realizes Stiles just saw the blood.

“What happened to you?” Stiles asks in distress, taking a tentative step closer.

“Nothing,” Derek grunts, turning around and seeing Stiles for the first time. He’s still wet from the shower, the towel hanging low on his hips as he holds it there with one hand.

“I- I was going to put on my dirty clothes but I kind of hated the idea, uh,” Stiles falters, looking uncomfortably around.

Derek notices the water running down Stiles’ neck to his chest and his nostrils flare in response.
“Here,” Derek turns around, grabbing the first pair of pants and shirt he can find and throwing them at Stiles. “It’s a good idea to wear my clothes; the scent will help with my uncle.”

He turns around again, barely looking at Stiles, and grabs a sweater for himself, darting inside the bathroom to clean himself properly before getting dressed.

He wets a towel to clean his bloody side and puts on the sweater quickly. He’s about to leave when he sees Stiles’ collar in the sink.

Derek is instantly growling, surprising himself again as he reacts before he can even understand his own instincts. Maybe it’s his imminent meeting with his uncle, or what just happened in the social room that brought out his wolf raw, he doesn’t know. But the sight of Stiles’ collar there is suddenly unbearable.

Derek grabs it and goes outside, past his bedroom and straight to the living room where Stiles is waiting for him already fully clothed.

“The collar,” he grunts, hand showing the object.

Stiles’ eyes widen and one of his hands snaps to his neck. “I forgot- I didn’t want it to get wet,” he explains, disconcerted.

“It doesn’t matter,” he says as he throws it at Stiles, who fumbles a bit before finally catching it with his hands. “Wear it at all times.”

“I forgot, okay?” Stiles protests, hands flailing the collar around.

“I’m serious, Stiles,” Derek insists. “It could mean the difference between life and death in this place.”

Stiles’ stops and regards him for a moment. And then he’s nodding, hands clasping the collar around his neck. “See? Back on!”

But the moment he’s done, he pulls a face.

“What,” Derek grunts.

“It itches,” Stiles scratches his skin under the collar.

Derek studies him a moment. He takes a tentative step closer and then he’s lifting the leather, studying the sore, red skin. “The material is too rough?” he asks in wonder.

“Yeah...” Stiles speaks, and Derek notices his Adam’s apple bowling up and down. He instantly takes a step back.

“Let’s go,” he grunts, quickly getting outside.

He never wanted to get involved with a human in the first place, but it turns out his instincts as an Alpha aren’t easy to shake. Especially now that he’s back and surrounded by other werewolves, other Alphas, who jeopardize what’s his by nature, who challenge him.

The situation is messing with his wolf. There’s this feeling, this pull, the sensation that he must protect and take care of, of bonding, of pack, of wanting to cuddle, even! It makes no sense, this need to claim. It’s driving him insane. His rational mind is fighting it, but his wolf is ready to tear and thrash.
Stiles rushes after him, calling his name a couple of times until Derek stops walking and waits for him.

“Thank you, very kind of you to wait for me,” Stiles says sardonically as he pants heavily.

“No problem,” Derek shrugs.

“Oh, the wolf’s got jokes, huh?” Stiles complains, still bent over his knees and trying to catch his breath.

“Watch it,” Derek warns and Stiles snaps back, looking at him guilty, like he had forgotten he was supposed to behave in public. He straightens and rubs the back of his neck with an apologetic smile on his face. Derek shakes his head as he rolls his eyes and resumes walking, this time together.

They take the elevator to the last floor, where a few of his uncle’s werewolves nod at him and let them through. He gets Stiles straight to his uncle’s favorite room, where there’s food served on a table and the fire place already working.

Derek grunts, displeased. His uncle and his keenness for dramatic entrances.

“What’s wrong?” Stiles asks, surprising him.

“Nothing,” Derek shakes his head.

“Can we eat?” Stiles asks, nearly drooling as he stares longingly at the food.

“Don’t touch anything,” Derek warns.

That’s when Peter Hale enters the room. He smirks at Derek but goes straight to Stiles.

“You must be Stiles,” his uncle says in delight.

Derek observes Stiles flushing, the tips of his ears an intense shade of red. But at least the boy doesn’t reply, he just nods, mouth hanging open as he regards Peter.

Peter circles who he believes is his nephew’s human slave, and Derek tenses up. His uncle is unpredictable even on his best day.

“So this is your slave,” Peter says in amusement, smirking at Stiles.

“Yes, Uncle,” Derek bows slightly.

“Hmm, it’s curious,” Peter muses, finger tapping his chin. “He doesn't smell like you,” he says as he takes a big sniff of Stiles. “Even though your clothes are a nice touch.”

“I haven't scent-marked him yet,” Derek grunts, knowing this was coming and still unable to control his reaction.

“And why is that?” Peter turns to look at him with a playful smile still on his face. “I mean, technically, he's still not yours,” he moves behind Stiles and gets a hold of his shoulders, putting his face right beside Stiles’. “Anyone could still claim him if they wanted to. And then what would you do? Do you like him enough to fight for him? Or would it be more a matter of pride?”

He lets go of Stiles and moves forward, and Derek realizes he was holding his breath. He holds Peter’s stare for a moment and then he's nodding, because he knows what his uncle wants him to do.
“Understood,” he murmurs.

“Good,” Peter circles his shoulders with one arm. “Also, take better care of him. You know he’s a display of your power, not of your physical force.”

“We had an accident when we were-” Stiles starts to say until he seems to realize he’s speaking out loud and he claps his hand over his mouth.

“Uncle,” Derek urges to interfere, body ready to act in case he has to protect Stiles from Peter’s fury. Peter chuckles. “Relax, Derek.” He makes a gesture with his hand. “Go on, little one.”

“Uh.” Stiles falters, his eyes going straight to Derek for help. Derek is holding his breath, eyes wide as he observes Stiles flush a little more.

“I- I tripped and fell downhill,” he murmurs, eyes dropping once before he looks at Peter again.

“You humans are so clumsy,” Peter says fondly.

“My case is worse than others,” Stiles adds, pulling a face.

Derek is ready to order him to be quiet when his uncle surprises him with a loud bark of laughter.

“I can see why you picked him,” he comments, squeezing Derek’s shoulders slightly. “This is going to be interesting.”

He makes Derek turn and guides him to the table. “Now tell me about your trip.”

They reach the table and Peter starts putting all kinds of food on his plate, completely at ease. Derek stays next to him but doesn’t touch the food. He looks over his shoulder to Stiles, who looks this close to losing it, and he jerks his head once, pointing at the seats in the back.

When Stiles takes notices and moves away, his uncle smiles at his plate, like he is in on a secret joke.

“Does he know...?” Peter whispers conspiratorially, a naughty smile framing his face. “That you killed his father, I mean.”

Derek shakes his head, frowning. “No, of course not.”

He decides from the two lies, this is the one working in their favor the best.

“Excellent. We don’t want our slaves to be grumpy, now, do we?” Peter beams. “Because you killed him, right?”

Derek stares at him for a moment, taken back.

“Of course I did,” he nods slowly. “I delivered the report to your office this afternoon.”

“Oh Derek,” Peter laughs. “Don’t look at me like that. I’m just so delighted you finally found someone. You know what I always say about human love. You, better than anyone else, know why we started picking up human slaves. I just want to make sure you did your job well.”

“I know,” Derek grunts, suddenly uncomfortable with the idea of Stiles hearing any of this. “I did what I was sent there to do.”

“Good, very good,” Peter pats his cheek a couple of times and then he notices Derek is not even
holding a plate. “You’re not eating,” he points out in concern.

“I’m not hungry,” Derek shrugs.

“Oh nephew,” Peter smirks, “I think I know what’s going on.”

He leaves his plate on the table, indicating Derek to follow him.

“You must be looking forward to going back to your room,” he embraces his shoulder with one arm, guiding him back to where Stiles is sitting. “You took so long in picking someone; I shouldn’t keep you from finally enjoying yourself with someone else.”

Derek nods, grateful his uncle is giving him an easy way out. Once Stiles sees them approaching, he gets up, which is not his best decision of the night, but it’s not terribly wrong, either.

For better measure, Derek grabs him by the nape of his neck and pulls him closer.

“We’re leaving then,” he announces as Peter folds his arms across his chest and regards them with a little smile on his face, head cocked to one side.

“Stiles,” his uncle reaches out, palm up. And Stiles only falters a moment before lifting his hand and placing it on top of his. “It was a pleasure meeting you. Hopefully we’ll see each other soon, and you’ll finally have been properly scent-marked by then.”

He gives Stiles’ hand a squeeze as he winks and then he’s releasing him.

“Have fun, you two,” he proclaims cheerfully, giving Derek a pat on his shoulder before going back to the table.

Derek tightens his hold on Stiles’ neck and guides him outside without another word. Stiles is a very loud person, and so is his body. It’s endearing in a very annoying and unbearable way, Derek supposes. Especially in situations like this, where he could ruin everything just by the way his heart hammers against his ribcage.

Once out, he senses Stiles is about to speak until they see the werewolves controlling the elevators, and thankfully he holds it in.

Derek nods back at them and pushes Stiles inside the elevator, not letting him go for a second, too afraid his uncle will appear out of the blue to reveal he knows their secret.

Lying to another werewolf is not easy; it’s obviously possible, but it requires a lot of concentration and mental will. Lying to any werewolf is difficult, but lying to someone like his uncle is nearly impossible. He can’t really know if he succeeded; only Peter’s actions will tell him now.

Derek feels the sweat running down his back and he sighs, growing calmer as their elevator travels down floor after floor.

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“Oh my god,” Stiles whines, squirming under Derek’s almost painful hold immediately when the elevator’s doors close.
“Don’t,” Derek grunts right next to his ear. “Not yet.”

And Stiles stops moving. His mind is a frantic mess, but Derek’s strong hold is like an anchor, rooting his body into stillness. They travel down in the elevator to their floor in silence, the only sound Stiles’ erratic breathing.

Derek doesn’t let go of his neck even when he opens the door to their room. And Stiles has a small meltdown moment when he realizes he referred to it as their room.

“Oh my god,” he holds his head with both hands, pulling a face.

Derek shoves him inside and bangs the door closed behind them, storming inside without a word.

"I'm trying not to freak the fuck out but, holy shit, was he for real?" Stiles starts babbling the moment Derek lets him go. “Dude,” he squeals. “That was the creepiest motherfucker I've ever met. Werewolf or human.”

“Shut up,” Derek grunts, rubbing his temples as he walks into his bedroom.

“And what was that about scent marking?” Stiles yells, following him a moment later. Derek is already holding a towel when he enters. Ignoring the question, Derek moves to the bathroom.

“Wait!” Stiles panics. “What was he talking about?”

Derek sighs, dropping the towel on a small armchair right next to the bathroom door.

“You need to bear my smell or you won’t technically be mine,” he finally explains. “And before you ask, that means any werewolf could claim you because you’re not under any Alpha’s protection.”

“I thought everyone knew I was your slave,” Stiles stutters, moving from one foot to the other in a nervous gesture.

“Point is, I still have to mark you,” Derek explains in an exasperated tone.

“O-okay,” Stiles swallows soundly.

Derek regards him for a moment, making him uncomfortable.

“What are you waiting for?” He fakes some bravado. “Let’s do it.”

“So eager,” Derek comments, looking mildly amused.

“Don’t be an asshole,” Stiles rolls his eyes. “I don’t even know what you have to do; I bet it involves werewolf drool or something gross like that.”

“That could be arranged if that’s what you want,” Derek arches his eyebrows.

“Oh my god,” Stiles freaks out. “I’m going to die because I don’t smell of werewolf drool and you’re being completely unreasonable!”

Stiles holds his head with both hands, looking at Derek in horror. “What is my life? I’m begging for some werewolf drool from the grumpiest son of a bitch ever and he-“

“Come here,” Derek interrupts his rant, sighing as he uses his hand to call him over.

“Uh no,” Stiles says automatically. “You come here.”
“Stiles,” Derek warns.

“Why are you so bossy?” Stiles complains.

Derek shrugs in a mocking way, and Stiles nearly loses it.

“Oh my god, okay!” Stiles steps closer, dragging his feet on the carpet. He can’t believe he’s willing to let this party pooper drool all over him.

As he moves slowly toward him, Derek pulls a face, and Stiles gets the impression he doesn’t want to do whatever it is they have to do. Which makes him freak out even more.

Without a warning, Derek pulls his sweater off in a single movement and Stiles is positively dying.

“What-wh-what,” he stutters, not even caring if what he’s babbling makes sense. Because Derek is now shirtless. And Stiles can’t help but notice everything suddenly on display in front of him, and the lack of a wound on the side of Derek’s abdomen, too. Freaking werewolves, seriously.

“Take yours off, too,” Derek commands, pointing at his chest.

Stiles doesn’t move, though. He only stares at Derek like he’s lost his mind.

“Come on Stiles,” Derek huffs. “It’s only the shirt. It’s not even yours. I’m assuming from your reaction you wouldn’t appreciate it if we were doing this the proper way,” Derek air quotes, which is one of the most bizarre things of the night by far.

“Proper way? What are you talking about? What’s the proper way? Wait, do I want to know? Yeah, don’t answer, I don’t want to know-“

“I’m going to try to mark you like this,” Derek speaks over his rant. “But you need to take off my shirt first.”

“But- why?” Stiles whines. “Can’t you mark my clothes?” he points at the pile of dirty clothes still in the bathroom’s floor. “I don’t have more, so I’ll always wear the same thing.”

Derek wrinkles his nose. “Remind me we need to find you new clothes. Now strip,” he says, annoyed.

“Oh my god, the S word,” Stiles freaks out. “Is this some kind of mating ritual?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, you’re not a wolf,” Derek dismisses and oddly, Stiles isn’t sure if he should feel offended. “You can either take that shirt off or I can do it for you, it’s your choice,” Derek crosses his arms over his chest, impressive muscles popping everywhere.

Stiles huffs and makes a big show of how much he doesn’t like this but he ends up shirtless anyway.

“Happy now?” He rolls his eyes, completely embarrassed by his lack of impressive muscles. He only has meh muscles, perhaps okay ones, passable muscles, but there is no competition with Derek, the bastard.

“Okay,” Derek tries to hide a small smile. “Come closer.”

“Seriously, man,” Stiles throws his arms. “What’s with you and making everyone go to you?”

“I’m a wolf,” Derek deadpans. “I’m possessive and I like control. Making you move closer instead of
going to you is in my instincts.” And the way he explains it, it’s like he was talking to someone slow.

“Should I feel all warm and fuzzy?” Stiles mocks.

“You're not here to feel,” Derek growls. “Now take two steps closer. Come on.”

Stiles sighs, suspecting he has pushed his buttons a little bit too much, and not wanting to get nearly choked to death again, so he decides to do as told.

He takes exactly two steps closer and Derek's hands are suddenly bracing his biceps. Stiles jumps in surprise, growing tense as Derek’s fingers move down along his arms to his wrists where he presses a thumb against his pulse.

“Hmm, your rhythm is steady,” Derek murmurs. “And fast.”

“Of course it's fast!” Stiles squeals indignantly. “I don't know what you’re going to do to- oh my god.”

Derek releases his hands and grabs his sides, hands sliding to his back, pulling him closer until their chests touch. At first it's hardly a caress, but Derek keeps pushing him closer until they are flat out pressed together.

Stiles lifts his arms awkwardly as Derek embraces him.

“Are we hugging? Is this really happening?” he squeals.

“Shut up,” Derek murmurs against the side of his head. “I’m not sure this is even going to work.”

“What does that mean? Should I hug you back?” he asks awkwardly, because Jesus, this is one of the most awkward situations he’s been in, and that coming from Stiles means something.

He lowers his arms slowly, resting them on Derek’s shoulders and Derek snorts.

“I’m afraid it usually involves a lot more than hugging.” He speaks right against Stiles’ hairline, nudging his way down to his neck, where he rubs his face against the collar. Stiles feels his stubble rubbing against his already sore skin and he winces, pulling away instinctively.

He knows it’s a bad idea the moment Derek growls.

“Don’t,” Derek says roughly, pulling him closer.

“Oh my god, please don’t kill me,” Stiles squeaks.

Derek tenses all over a moment, and somehow Stiles feels the switch in his mood. Derek takes a hold of his head, fingers digging into his jaw, and lifts his face to expose his neck. Stiles feels enough about pack dynamics to know he shouldn’t fight that. He throws his head back and closes his eyes, hoping for the best.

Derek leans over him, nosing his way along his throat as he inhales deeply.

“Are you- Are you sniffing me?” Stiles can’t help it, he’s freaking out.

“I’m scenting you,” Derek growls right against his jugular, making Stiles shudder.

Stiles knows he shouldn’t, his rational mind knows he should stay still and wait, but he can’t help it. He squirms, struggling against Derek’s hold and trying to pull back.
“Sorry, sorry I can’t- I need some space, ah!” he whimpers when Derek shoves him against the bathroom door, pressing him there with his body.

“I said don’t,” Derek snarls, his face so close to Stiles’, he can see the natural freckles in his eyes through the supernatural red.

“I’m freaking out!” he yells right in his face.

“Calm down,” Derek gets a hold of his face, his palms covering half his jaw and half his neck. “The wolf wants to mark you but I’m making sure you stay safe.”

“Safe?” Stiles snorts. “You’re flashing fricking red eyes and shoving me around, and let me tell you, you seem fixated on my jugular, like you wanted to rip it out with your teeth!”

“You’re so insufferable,” Derek growls, his body still pinning him. “I shouldn’t bother with making things easy for you.”

“Easy?! You nearly gave me a heart attack, dude!” Stiles yells.

“Believe me, this is easy,” Derek snarls right in his face, making Stiles recoil until his head hits the door.

Derek lifts him until his head is above Derek’s and Stiles is totally defenseless and unable to move. He feels Derek’s hands pressing up against his chest painfully. “What-” he tries to speak when Derek bites him right where his neck and shoulders meet. “Holyshit,” he whimpers, his legs kicking as he struggles.

Derek moves forward, using the movement to get between his legs and support his lifted weight with his hips.

After the first moment of panic, Stiles realizes Derek is not really biting him. He’s holding him. Stiles’ frantic mind runs over the facts on werewolves he can remember and comes to the conclusion that Derek is trying to calm him down. And maybe it’s the thought itself that works as a placebo, or maybe getting held there actually makes you calm. But Stiles takes a shaky breath and feels his body growing slack against Derek.

“Okay,” he licks his lips. “Okay, I feel better.”

Derek doesn’t answer; he just keeps holding him. And Stiles lets him; he feels numb and boneless as Derek supports his whole weight with his legs and arms. He closes his eyes and drops his head on Derek’s, arms circling his neck in search of a comfortable position.

That’s when Stiles realizes Derek is humming.

He snorts. “You sound like a cat.”

Derek growls around the skin he’s still biting, shaking him slightly in clear indication to shut up.

Stiles has no idea how long they stay like that. He is starting to doze off when he feels Derek moving away from his neck. He runs his hand through Stiles’ buzz cut hair, holding his head as he moves him away from the wall.

Derek carries him to the living room and drops him unceremoniously on the couch.

“What,” Stiles mumbles, still half asleep as he bounces against the cushions.
Derek huffs and goes back to his room. And the next thing Stiles knows, he’s waking the next morning.

Stiles winces, his whole body stiff as he stretches and yawns. He sits up and rubs his face, realizing he slept in Derek’s borrowed pants without a pillow or a blanket. That’s when he remembers the night before and Stiles groans, covering his face with his hands.

“What the hell was that…” he murmurs against his palms.

Sighing, he drops them and moves his legs from the couch until his naked feet touch the floor.

That’s when he sees the object on the coffee table.

Under the morning light, the leather looks as smooth as velvet. Stiles grabs it and runs his fingers over the material, marveling at the exquisite craftsmanship. The collar is so soft, Stiles knows it won’t hurt his skin.

He supposes it’s kind of a nice gesture. He doesn’t even know what he supposes anymore, to be honest. Not wanting to think about that, he takes the itchy collar off, and puts on the new one, smiling without realizing.
The Instinct

That morning, Stiles is in the bathroom when he hears the door slam.

He hurries outside, stumbling into the bedroom as he zips his pants up, to find the three betas waiting for him. They regard him with arched eyebrows and knowing smirks.

"What?" He snaps.

Isaac is shaking with laughter as Erica throws a bag onto the bed. "Derek said you needed clothes," she comments with a grin.

Boyd winks at him before moving to the living room, apparently no longer interested in Stiles.

"Clean clothes? Oh my god, I think I love you," Stiles rushes to the bed, grabbing the bag and dumping its entire contents onto the mattress.

"It was Derek's idea," Isaac smirks.

"Okay," Stiles huffs. "Go on, say whatever you want to so we can forget about it."

"I don’t know what you’re talking about," Erica replies innocently, batting her eyelashes.

“Alright, fine, I’ll say it then,” Stiles claps his hands together. “Yes, Derek scent-marked me last night, I know you can all smell it with your freaky wolf noses. Whatever, dudes. Your big bad Alpha is a cuddler. In my opinion, you should tease him, not me."

"Sure," Erica says, tone decidedly full of tease.

"I knew you'd give me more shit than these two," Stiles groans, as he picks up a pair of jeans, a shirt and- "Oh, my goodness, clean underwear!" he exclaims, rubbing the pair of boxers against his cheek ecstatically.

"Hurry up and change, you stink," Boyd calls from the living room.

"Gee, thanks," Stiles goes back to the bathroom, ignoring whatever else they might say.

He undresses, feeling somewhat odd as he takes Derek's clothes off of him and eagerly jumping into the shower, taking his time to scrub and using all the hot water before putting on the clean clothes.

"Ahhh, life is good," he announces when he emerges from the bathroom, fresh as a newborn.

"Look at the monkey, all tidy and clean," Boyd teases, leaning against the doorframe.

"Ha, ha," Stiles mocks.

"Hey," Isaac is suddenly in front of him. "The clothes match your new, pretty collar."

Stiles feels the heat creeping up his neck and curses inwardly.

"Naww," Erica circles his back, giving him a half hug as they all tease him.

"Alright," he shakes them off. "Now that you had your fun, please say it’s time to eat, because I’m starving!"
"That was the plan," Isaac announces and Stiles pumps his fist in the air.

He's in a remarkably good mood when they reach the cafeteria floor. He’s freshly showered, wearing clean clothes that actually fit, and he’s about to eat warm food. What else could he ask for? He also survived the whole scent-marking adventure, which he admits was a bit anticlimactic after his initial freak out. But at least it gave him a sense of control and he needed that.

He's still marveling at the fact that there is an actual line of werewolves waiting patiently to order a cooked breakfast, when Scott appears.

"Hey, man," he says, beaming.

Stiles feels a painful pang in his chest the second he sees Scott, but he dismisses it quickly. After all, he's surrounded by strangers. Werewolf strangers. And Scott has been a part of his life since he can remember. Remaining mad at him is impossible, especially when Scott uses those puppy eyes on him.

"Hey Scott," Isaac says with a smile before Stiles can reply. "Want to have breakfast with us?"

Erica snorts and seems ready to say something before Boyd’s arm circles her waist and he pulls her back to murmur something in her ear, making her forget about them for a moment.

Stiles feels like a spectator. He observes Scott hesitating for a heartbeat before agreeing and he can see Isaac's faint blush, too. He narrows his eyes, mentally noting he should ask Scott later. He doesn’t even bother paying attention to Boyd and Erica, though. They think they are being sneaky; Stiles snorts.

"What?" Scott asks him with a silly smile on his face.

"Uh," Stiles falters. "Nothing, this is just like a bad joke, being in a cafeteria line with a bunch of werewolves, you know." He shrugs, suddenly uncomfortable.

Scott follows his movements, sniffing the air before he grins. "Ah, so he did it."

"Yeah," Isaac answers for him. "He even gave him a new collar. First one itched, apparently," he adds with a conspiratorial wink.

Scott chuckles, patting Stiles' shoulder. "Told you he's a good guy."

"Can we drop the subject?" Stiles asks, feeling uncomfortable and skittish all of a sudden. It wasn’t like he had a reason to be embarrassed. They didn't even do anything last night - awkward cuddling so didn’t count. And yet, a blush is creeping along his cheeks. He tries to shrug it off, figuring it's because there are certain things you just don’t discuss in front of your bestie, and Scott is so not helping in the not discussing department.

"Come on Stiles," Isaac elbows him. "It's a big deal here."

Stiles looks at him in disbelief. Who is this guy and where is Isaac? And why is he constantly looking and smiling at Scott? Better off, why is easygoing Scott being equally weird around him?

When the line finally moves, Stiles motions for Scott to go first.

"What's wrong with you?" Stiles hisses as he turns around, looking at Isaac and stabbing him in the chest with a finger.
“Nothing, what are you talking about?” Isaac almost stutters.

“Oh my god, you like-” he half exclaims until Isaac covers his mouth so fast he doesn’t even see it coming.

“Zip it,” Isaac hisses. His eyes look wide and scared. He’s afraid. And that’s the reason why Stiles relents, showing his palms as he nods in agreement.

Oh my god, he keeps freaking out in his mind. A werewolf has a crush on his best friend. He probably shouldn’t be finding it as adorable as he does, but really, they are like two puppies, how can he not find it adorable? Although he’d get skinned alive if he dared say it out loud.

They order indecent amounts of food and sit in one of the vacant tables. Seriously, the place looks like a high school cafeteria. Or maybe a cult. That thought gives him pause, his forkful of eggs stuttering to a halt midair to his mouth.

“What?” Scott asks.

“Nothing, I just realized you guys must have some sort of system going on here. Who cooks? Who cleans? Is it a communal thing?”

Scott looks uncomfortable, rubbing the back of his neck. "That's why we have humans," he frowns.


"Those are personal slaves," Erica says as she checks herself in a hand pocket mirror.

"We don't call them slaves anyway," Isaac explains. "They work in the facility. We have humans who clean, cook, do the chores." He shrugs, as if that explained everything.

"So you pay them," Stiles says, hopeful.

Boyd snorts, not even bothering to look away from his bacon as he keeps eating.

"Oh god, you guys! You don't call them slaves but that's exactly what they are!" Stiles exclaims, good mood suddenly lost.

"Stiles, calm down-" Scott warns.

"Calm down? What's wrong with you? Does the bite come with asshole side effects?"

"We're not alone, remember?" Erica hisses.

Stiles takes a look around and indeed, several werewolves are staring at them. Cursing inwardly at his stupidity, he takes a deep breath and tries to calm his raging heart. "Sorry," he murmurs. "But that's just- really, really fucked up, okay?"

"Okay," Scott pats his hand. "Now let's finish our food."

Stiles isn't hungry anymore, but he forces himself to clean the plate anyway. Several days of werewolf diet in the wild have taught him to eat whenever he has a chance.

“Oh, by the way,” he remembers suddenly. “What happened to Derek yesterday? He had this nasty looking wound,” Stiles points at his side. “When he came to the room last night. Did he get into a fight or something?”
The three betas tense up in unison and stop eating, dropping their forks to their plates.

“Dude,” Scott cringes. “You always have the worse timing.”

“What?” Stiles squeals. “That’s not true! I’m very-

“If Derek wants you to know,” Isaac interrupts. “He’ll tell you.”

“Did they put cryptic puffs in your cereal this morning or what?” Stiles arches an eyebrow.

”Alright, enough talking.” Erica rises. “Let’s go.”

Boyd follows her and Isaac hesitates for a brief moment to see what Scott is going to do before ultimately following suit.

”Where are we going?” Stiles demands without moving.

”We’re taking you to Derek, you should be happy,” Erica purrs, making Stiles scold.

”What’s your schedule today?” Isaac asks Scott, ignoring them.

”Patrolling,” Scott grimaces.

Isaac makes a sympathetic face and shrugs. ”Maybe we’ll meet again for diner?”

”Maybe,” Scott smirks, raising and squeezing Stiles’ shoulders as he passes behind him. ”I’ll see you later.”

And for a moment Stiles wants to beg him to stay. But he knows that would be absurd, so he just nods instead and waves him goodbye.

He finally gets up and follows the betas outside the cafeteria.

”Seriously though,” he comments to Isaac while they wait for the elevator. ”You couldn't be more painfully obvious.” He shoves him playfully, or at least he tries to. Instead, he sort of collides into the werewolf’s side.

”Shut up,” Isaac retorts, hurrying inside the elevator the moment it arrives. Erica and Boyd chuckle as they all follow him.

”Kid's got a point,” Boyd snorts.

”Hey, don’t call me that!” Stiles protests as Isaac groans and drops his face against the elevator's wall. Repeatedly.

Once on the floor, Stiles realizes he has no idea where he is because he’s too overwhelmed with the situation to pay attention to the places they are taking him. He’s never been more helpless than now, surrounded by who knows how many werewolves, in a place with a layout he doesn’t know and he’s not even trying to pay attention. He can imagine what his father would have to say about this.

”So, which floor is this?” He tries to gather some sort of information.

”Why do you care?” Erica replies, tossing her hair back.

”Seriously getting real tired of your bullsh-” Stiles harrumphs, stepping into Boyd’s massive back when the werewolf suddenly stops walking in front of him.
“Get in,” Boyd grunts, opening a door Stiles didn’t even see was there.

Inside, there’s a big oval table with a bunch of Alphas around it, studying intently what looks to be a map. Derek is among them, and he approaches them instantly.

"Hey," he says lowly at Stiles, eyes on his neck.

Stiles feels himself flushing for no good reason. So what if Derek left him a new collar and he’s wearing it? The leather is softer and his neck feels a lot better now. There is no reason to get all flustered about it.

Derek remains fixated on his throat a moment longer before he lifts his eyes and looks at him straight in the eye, making Stiles falter. He grabs Stiles by the nape of his neck to pull him closer, and Stiles suspects it’s an Alpha thing. After all, the neck is a weak spot, a submissive point. So he goes along with it for the sake of public appearances.

"Go on with your schedules," Derek tells his betas and they nod.

It surprises Stiles when Isaac steps closer to hug Derek briefly, and Erica kisses his cheek. The gestures look habitual. It’s kind of... nice. It feels like family, he thinks, surprising himself.

Once they are gone, Derek guides him further inside.

"They have duties you can’t accompany them to and I have to spend some time here,” Derek murmurs. "So you'll have to wait at the back with the other humans for today. We’ll work on something tomorrow."

At those words, Stiles actually studies the back of the room and sees a bunch of chairs lined along the back wall, with a few people sitting there. Derek removes his hand from Stiles’ neck as a gesture to go on, and Stiles only pauses a moment before joining the other humans back there.

They are mostly young, boys and girls his age. He expects them to talk to him; after all he’s fresh meat in an enclosed place like this. But no one does. In fact, they don’t talk at all, which is odd. They just sit in their seats and observe the Alphas at the other end of the room, discussing strategies and attacks over the large map.

Stiles realizes they’re probably not talking for fear of being heard. He can almost hear what the werewolves are discussing so it must be easy for them to pick on any little sound the humans made, too.

After awhile, he starts getting agitated, feet shuffling quickly up and down, fingers drumming over his knees as he shifts uncomfortably. If only he could get distracted by something. And that’s when he decides to invent a game where he tries to catch the attention of the other humans without actually making a sound. Stiles has no idea how long he tries, but he doesn’t win, not even once.

Derek appears at some point, and he almost jumps off the chair thinking it’s time to go. But Derek only offers him a bottle of water and a sandwich without a word before going back to the oval table.

He shrugs, content with the prospect of at least doing something. Even if it is only eating. He tears the bottle open, taking a few big gulps of water before attacking the food. He studies the humans at both sides and realizes he’s the only one eating. Some of them are actually openly glaring at him, which makes Stiles roll his eyes. Now they look? Really?

Later in the afternoon, when all the Alphas are finally leaving the room, Derek calls him over to the table.
“Take a look”, he says, gesturing to the map.

“What am I supposed to see?”

Derek looks around, taking a step closer and grabbing his neck when an Alpha passes next to them, pulling his own slave to heel with a leash.

“I want you to take a look,” Derek whispers right next to his ear. “And tell me where the Argents are.”

“Oh!” Stiles suddenly understands, relaxing under his hold now that he knows what to expect.

“Well, last thing I heard, they-“

“Derek?”

They both turn around to a man Stiles has never seen before.

“Doctor Deaton,” Derek lets go of Stiles and stretches his arm to shake hands with the stranger. “What are you doing here?”

“Your uncle wanted my opinion on something.” The man explains, shaking his hand a moment too long while Derek shows his teeth in a poor excuse of a smile.

The man ignores Derek’s menacing glare and looks at Stiles instead. “And you are?” he asks politely.

Stiles is about to speak when he remembers and looks at Derek instead, who seems mildly surprised at the “proper” subordination for a moment before covering it.

“This is my slave, Stiles,” Derek deadpans.

“Oh, I see,” Deaton shakes Stiles’ hand, too. And at the contact, Stiles feels something weird, like a bolt. “You succumbed to your uncle’s pressures,” Deaton states with the same kind of venom Derek showed a moment ago.

“Wow,” Stiles can’t help but comment. “You two don’t like each other much, huh?”

“It hasn’t always been like that,” Deaton smiles broadly. “Derek is just having a hard time adjusting to the new times.”

“I’m kind of new here, you know? So I honestly have no idea what you’re talking about,” Stiles rubs the back of his head, uncomfortable.

“I’m a doctor, of both species,” Deaton explains patiently.

“But you’re human,” Stiles replies pointedly.

“I am,” Deaton smiles. “You could say I have diplomatic immunity so that I can attend to both parties when they need me.”

“That’s enough,” Derek cuts in before Stiles can reply.

But it doesn’t matter. Stiles remembers his mom talking about people like Deaton. Humans who treated werewolves on the rare occasions they got sick, who worked as guides to some packs’ alphas. She said some people called them Emissaries. Stiles always thought that was total bull, but he’s not
so sure anymore after meeting the real deal, though.

"Hmm," Deaton murmurs. "Let me see you better."

He holds both of Stiles' hands and rises them, parting his arms and looking him up and down like he's inspecting his clothes.

"You didn't do a good enough job," he tells Derek. "And you know that if I can tell, so can your uncle. Be careful."

"Wait, whoa there Doc, hold on." Stiles snatches his hands away when he catches on what Deaton is talking about. "How can you know? You're human, you can't smell scent."

"There are more ways than that to know when a werewolf has marked someone as theirs," Deaton smiles enigmatically. He seems to be a professional at it, Stiles is starting to suspect.

"I don't know what you two are planning," Deaton continues. "And I'd rather keep it that way, but I can tell there's a connection between you two, it's just not the one everyone expects." Deaton regards them both a second before asking in an undertone. "You're working together, aren't you?"

Stiles feels panic uncurl in his guts, creeping up, pressing down on his chest and choking him. Derek has a hold of him before he inhales the first big gulp of air.

"Please, relax," Deaton simply says. "It's okay, I made a promise to Derek's mother a long time ago. He knows he can trust me, even if he doesn't."

Stiles feels his eyes growing impossibly wide, he looks back and forth between them until Derek tightens his hold on him and nods reassuringly.

Stiles sags, knees trembling, his breathing finally slowing back to normal. For a split second, he could almost hear the sound of rabid werewolves chasing after them.

"Well, talk about scaring the living crap out of someone for no damn good reason, Doc," he snaps. "I'm sorry," Deaton says laughing. "Here, take this," he hands Stiles a business card. "If you ever get out of here and need a job."

Derek steps away from them, leaning over the table where the maps are still laid out.

Stiles reads the card, regarding Deaton warily. "I don't get it."

"I always need people with the right... *spark* to ignite things," Deaton says oddly. "I can tell you're perfect for it."

"Spark? What did you say you do exactly?" Stiles presses casually.

"I didn’t," Deaton smiles. "I travel between territories; both races request my services because I'm impartial." Deaton nods at the card. "I know it's hard to find a working phone these days, but if you ever find yourself seeking a neutral ally, give me a call."

"Huh," Stiles huffs, completely lost for words as Deaton pats Derek's shoulder, saying his goodbyes before leaving the room.

"You're not going to explain what just happened any better, are you?" He asks Derek the moment they're alone again.
"Come back here," Derek answers. "We still have work to do."

Stiles spends the rest of the afternoon working on marking the spots in wolf territory where the Argents had been over the years, pinning each city his father had received correspondence from.

By the time Scott appears, he's starving and his back aches from leaning over the low table for so long.

"I thought I could take him for dinner?" Scott offers.

"Right," Derek seems to falter for a moment. "Okay, keep an eye open and bring him back to the room right after."

"Sure thing," Scott grins, gesturing for Stiles to follow him.

Stiles wonders what the proper protocol to say "see you later" to your Alpha is? He’s seen the betas hug Derek goodbye, but he suspects they aren't quite there yet.

"Uh, I’ll see you later, dude," he waves as he rushes after Scott, who snorts and elbows him lightheartedly once they’re alone in the corridor.

"Ugh," Stiles groans. "Was that as awkward as I think it was?"

"Worse," Scott teases.

"I'm the worst slave in the world, I cringe at my own useless slave skills."

"For what it’s worth, he looked just as uncomfortable. More even."

"What are you talking about? He was his usual broody self. He’s mastered the whole hot dark stranger routine to a tee."

"Hot?" Scott arches an eyebrow.

"Dude," Stiles scoffs. "You're still on probation for BFF, so watch it," he replies, poking him in the chest.

Scott shows his palms in surrender as they get in the elevator and presses the cafeteria button.

"All I'm saying is... well, I don't see you resisting too much," Scott replies, shrugging.

"What does that mean?" Stiles can feel his face growing hot. Perfect.

"Didn’t they kidnap you?" Scott asks him like he didn’t actually know that, the bastard.

"Yeah," Stiles fakes a smile. "That was very charming."

"Then why are you joking with them, hanging out like you’re buddies... freakin’ cuddling up with the Alpha without even resisting?"

"What am I supposed to do? I'm trying to survive!" Stiles snaps back. "They aren't the assholes I thought they were at first, okay? And about Derek... That's fucking unfair. I didn't have another option."

"I get that..." Scott trails off. "I just don't think you disliked it all that much, is all."
"Well you know jack, so drop it," Stiles glowers at him as they leave the elevator behind.

"Alright," Scott says, trying to laugh it off. "You know, I agree, they are good people, if you forget the fact that they’re not, you know, people."

"About that," Stiles changes the subject. "I met some dude named Deaton today."

"Oh, you met the vet?" Scott arches an eyebrow. Cool werewolf trick, apparently, Stiles can’t remember his best friend being able to do that before.

"Vet?! He said he was a doctor!" he squeaks.

Scott barks a laugh. "He used to have a vet clinic before the war. But he's legal, I like him."

"Should I trust him then?" Stiles asks, unsure.

"You shouldn't trust anyone," Scott shrugs it off.

"Wow, I can see Derek is a big influence, huh?" Stiles jokes. "I got the impression he didn’t like Deaton."

"Derek doesn't like anyone, except apparently you," Scott responds, clearly intent on teasing him to death.

"Dude, lame," Stiles rolls his eyes. "Is that a joke because we cuddled?"

"No," Scott frowns. "He likes you because you only cuddled."

"You lost me, and I'm usually pretty smart."

"Stiles," Scott pauses in front of the cafeteria, grabbing his shoulders. "You still don't know how things work here. But- slaves don't have any say. At all. Alphas take what they want, get it?"

Stiles feels the whoosh of air leaving his lungs as he realizes what Scott is implying.

"Are you seriously saying Derek likes me because he hasn't raped me yet?!" Stiles tries to hiss out as lowly as he can, although he can’t really hear anything over the deafening sound of his pulse in his ears.

"He's giving you a choice," Scott lets go of him and rubs at his neck. "I don’t know what happened since you two met, but I've never seen an Alpha treating their slave like that. It's a dangerous game. He thinks he's helping you but he isn't."

"What do you mean?" Stiles frowns, suddenly out of breath.

"If you're not properly claimed by him, someone else will."

"Jesus Christ, you're giving me the creeps again," Stiles shudders.

"I'm worried about you!"

The three betas approach them before Stiles can reply to that. He can’t believe he’s thinking this but, damn, Scott is a good friend. When he’s around, of course, he adds bitterly.

His BFF is soon talking with Isaac about his day while Stiles eats his food in silence, mulling over their conversation.
He knows he can't tell Scott that the reason why Derek treats him like he does is because he's not actually his slave. They have a deal. But maybe faking it is being too dangerous. Maybe he should talk to Derek. He’d rather make some sacrifices and stay alive then be stubborn and get hurt by another werewolf who’s less considerate than his secret partner in crime.

Stiles is lost in his thoughts when he hears a commotion in the cafeteria. Raising his eyes, he sees Derek approaching them and notices the rest of the werewolves moving restless in their seats.

Erica is the first to go to him. She tries to touch his stomach but Derek slaps her hands away. That’s definitely high in the scale of weirdness that Stiles’ life has become. Derek doesn’t ever initiate the physical contact, but when one of his betas approaches him, he never pushes them away.

Isaac follows after her, but he doesn’t try to touch Derek. Confused, Stiles looks at Scott to ask him what’s going on when he notices his friends’ wrinkled nose.

“What’s wrong?”

“He smells like blood,” Scott rises but stands still, observing Derek.

“Are you okay?” Isaac finally asks Derek.

"Yeah, I just came to pick him up," Derek points at Stiles, calling him over with his hand.

“Me?” Stiles kind of squeaks. He gets up anyway and walks over.

“Let’s go,” Derek grabs him by the neck and Stiles goes along with it.

They leave the three betas and Scott behind, walking in silence to the elevator.

“What was all that about?” Stiles finally asks when they’re alone.

“Nothing,” Derek grunts out.

“Did you eat today?” Stiles arches an eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Derek says, sounding a bit taken aback by the random question. “Why?”

“I don’t know man,” Stiles shrugs. “I thought you might be grumpier because you were hungry. Guess this is just your natural charm.”

Derek huffs and ignores him the rest of the way.

The map they studied that afternoon is spread over the coffee table when they arrive at their room. The last thing Stiles wants is to cram any more Argent history, but he knows Derek is not going to let him off that easily.

They go over and over the spots Stiles marked on the map late into the night, until he’s half asleep and useless.

- 

“Are you sure they lived here for so long?” Derek asks for the third time. It just makes no sense.
He’s been there, visited that city multiple times during the time Stiles says his father received correspondence from them.

“Like I said before, yesss,” Stiles slurs, practically sprawled on the couch, eyes half closed.

Derek sighs, running his fingers through his hair. There’s something off about the places Stiles is marking, but he can’t quite point it out. He can feel it, and it’s driving him crazy with frustration. He’s about to ask again when he notices Stiles’ state, and decides to stop for the night, knowing it’s useless to press a human passed their limits.

“We’ll continue tomorrow,” he says as he gets up.

“Wait,” Stiles tries to raise his arm to stop him, but he soon drops it back on the couch. “What about my scent?”

“What about it?” Derek arches an eyebrow.

“Aren’t we gonna cuddle?” he murmurs so sloppily, Derek almost thinks he’s making up half the words.

“We don’t have to do it every night,” he hedges, the lie slipping out easily.

“Are you sure?” Stiles insists, even as he’s bringing his legs up to stretch out on the couch, still fully clothed and without a blanket, too.

“Shut up and go to sleep,” Derek says, already walking into his own room.

“Don’t be a prick,” he hears Stiles murmur into the couch cushions as he goes to his wardrobe to grab some clean sheets. That’s when an idea hits him and he makes an abrupt turn, going to his bed instead.

He pulls the used sheets off his bed and returns to the couch, covering Stiles with them brusquely. After a second thought, he pulls off his shirt, too, and leaves it ready for Stiles to wear tomorrow.

He knows it’s not even close to the right marking. It may fool a lesser Alpha, but there is no way he can let his uncle see Stiles again until they come up with a better solution.

At least he knows Deaton won’t tell Peter. Even though the two used to work together before the war, he knows Deaton did make a promise to his mother. Even if he never knew why or what happened... He used to want to find out, but not anymore. It wouldn’t change anything anyway.

He leaves before Stiles wakes up in the morning, busying himself to avoid Stiles and his betas. Sadly, he can’t avoid his own mind, which thinks of nothing but Stiles being unmarked and out there, where all the werewolves can smell him and-

Growling, Derek shuts that train of thought down, excusing himself from the training center. It’s time for lunch, anyway. Stepping into the hall, there’s a surprise awaiting him.

“What are you doing here?” he snaps as he keeps walking.

“I wanted to talk to you,” Isaac rushes after him.

“Can’t it wait? My uncle is waiting,” Derek presses the elevator button, crossing his arms impatiently.

“It won’t take long,” Isaac reassures him. Derek can feel his beta’s anxiety, the way he’s circling him
without touching, waiting for permission.

“C’mere,” he raises one arm and Isaac instantly moves under it, pressing against his side.

“Is it about Scott?” he sighs, resigned to the idea that he has to deal with his betas’ love lives even though he didn’t sign up for it when he turned them.

“Why would you think that?” Isaac asks, voice high pitched as he moves away.

Derek raises his eyebrows as he enters the elevator, not even bothering to answer that question.

“I mean,” Isaac tries to recover. “It’s not about me. It’s about you and Stiles.”

Derek turns around, looking at his beta in surprise.

“We’re just worried about you,” Isaac murmurs, head bowing under the glare of Derek’s sudden flashing red eyes.

“Don’t,” Derek gestures with his hand for Isaac to stop talking. “I’m your Alpha, that’s my job.”

“We know that, but we’re pack, remember?” Isaac moves closer. “Pack takes care of each other.”

“I’m fine,” Derek reassures him.

“We can tell when something is going on,” Isaac insists.

“I’m just keeping him cooperative to get the information we need. Tell Erica and Boyd that everything is fine.”

“Then do something, stop the rumors, make the challenges stop at least!”

“I can’t control if a bunch of Alphas decide to attack me,” Derek lies so skillfully his beta could never tell.

“They want Stiles,” Isaac affirms. “You know that’s the only reason why they challenge you. And they want him because they can sense he’s not been fully claimed.”

“I know what I’m doing, I’ve got it under control.”

Derek knows he’s being stubborn, that no one else could possibly understand his reasons. But after spending years keeping everyone at bay, the idea of claiming someone is simply too overwhelming. No matter what his wolf wants to do to Stiles, he still has enough control over himself to know he’s not ready for it.

“Are you sure?” Isaac insists. “Because, you’re putting Stiles in a dangerous position without even telling him. Guy is clueless of how dangerous it is to even escort him from your room to lunch and back. Is that really having things under control?”

“Since when do you care about a slave?”

“That’s the problem!” Isaac exclaims. “He’s not your slave and you’re not treating him like one. The other Alphas can tell. It makes everyone nervous and it unbalances the normal state of things.”

“What are you suggesting?” Derek snaps back, anger flaring out in the way he growls the words.

“Just—” Isaac lowers his face. “Just mark him.”
“I already-“

“Properly this time,” he interrupts Derek.

“You’re seriously not suggesting what I think you are,” Derek shakes his head in disgust.

“We don’t care if you like him,” Isaac says softly. “If that’s what’s stopping you, we are fine with it-“

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Derek stops him before he can say anything else. He’s said more than enough actually.

“It’s fine! We noticed during the trip, I had never seen anyone affect you like that. By your reaction I knew there was something-“

“Isaac,” Derek growls. “This conversation is over.”

“Just- “ Isaac grabs his arm. “Think about it.”

Derek hesitates a moment, but he finally nods, knowing Isaac won’t stop until he believes Derek will do so.

“Thank you.” Isaac squeezes his arm before letting go when the elevator’s door opens.

"I'm going to be busy for a while,” he takes a step out and pauses. "You know what to do.”

"We'll keep him safe," Isaac explains as Derek nods and steps out, allowing the doors to close behind him.

Once the elevator is gone and he’s alone in the corridor, Derek leans against the nearest wall with a deep sigh.

“Fucking Christ,” he curses, low and hoarsely.

After collecting himself, he enters the Alphas' room, where his uncle is already waiting for him at the head of the table.

“Ah, dear nephew,” he exclaims. “Come, sit next to me, I was starting to suspect you would miss this reunion,” he says, motioning to the nearby chair with a pleasant smile.

“One of my betas held me back,” Derek apologizes as he sits where he’s been told.

Each Alpha has at least one slave attending them, staying at their feet as they eat. Derek realizes then he should have brought Stiles. He forgot because he never before had a slave to bring to these weird social occasions where all the Alphas reunited. He curses inwardly, this will only pick his uncle's interest in Stiles even more.

“Betas...” Peter Hale smiles fondly. “They complicate our lives. But what would we do without them, right?”

“Order others around,” a lower Alpha replies, making everyone at the table laugh before falling back into their previous conversations regarding the war.

“Tell me,” Peter comments after a while. “How is Stiles adapting to his new life?”

“He’s doing good,” Derek busies himself with his food.
“He seems to have a tendency to let his mouth run ahead of his brain,” his uncle comments, cutting his meat meticulously.

“We’re working on it,” Derek purses his lips.

“I’d like to watch that someday,” Peter raises his glass of wine in a celebratory gesture. “He has exquisite pale skin, I’m sure it marks beautifully.”

Derek finds himself growling low and menacing, making his uncle laugh in delight.

“It’s good to know you like him that much,” he says, amused before drinking from his glass. “I was starting to wonder why you kept him all to yourself.”

Derek doesn’t even answer, he allows his fangs to elongate as he keeps growling.

“Enough with that,” Peter says with a snap of his hand, no longer amused.

Derek digs his claws in his thighs, using the pain to make himself calm down.

“I’m sorry,” he placates, bending his head down.

“It’s fine, we all understand the instinct, don’t we?” His uncle asks to a now very quiet table.

The Alphas all rush to agree with him.

“Now,” Peter pins him with his stare. “I heard some peculiar stories about other Alphas challenging you. But I told myself, my nephew would never let that happen, right?”

“You shouldn’t listen to gossip,” Derek tries to joke, a smile plastered on his tense face.

Peter holds his stare for a moment longer and then he grins. “You’re right, I tend to forget how large dens can be.”

Derek returns the smile, nodding reassuringly. He doesn’t believe for a second his uncle is buying any of this, though. From the moment he came back, Peter had been dropping hints and insinuating things. Derek knows he needs to be ready for whatever his uncle has planned. And he has reason to; after all, Derek lied to him, used his missions to archive his personal vendetta. If Peter ever finds out, not only will he be in trouble, but his betas, too. And Stiles.

“There’s something quite unique about Stiles, though,” he says, deciding to play along with his uncle’s game.

“Oh my, I think lunch is not the place to talk about such matters,” Peter jokes, receiving several chuckles.

“He seems to know the Argents,” Derek decides to continue, ignoring the comment that makes him more uncomfortable than he’s willing to admit.

“Does he?” Peter arches an eyebrow, playing with his dessert in mock innocence.

Derek knows his uncle wants to find the hunters who killed their pack, but this war has sidetracked his priorities, something they usually clash about.

“He recognized the name during a conversation,” Derek comments casually as he cuts the red velvet cake on his plate and eating it in two big gulps without really tasting anything. He can imagine Stiles’ groan just looking at the cake, though, and how he’d be ashamed of Derek’s flippant eating. The
image is enough to make him grin.

“Did you know before choosing him?” Peter asks, snapping him out of his thoughts. His tone is casual, but Derek knows him enough to see the tension in his shoulders.

“Nah,” he dismisses, trying to look like he doesn’t really care. “I’m not interested in what he has to say, that’s not what slaves are for.”

A few Alphas make noises in agreement.

“Of course,” Peter places his hand over Derek’s. “But if he knows something about the Argents...” he trails off. “Maybe you should investigate.”

What? Derek feels his eyes widening. That was too easy. No, something is wrong. This can’t be right. And now Derek is trapped. How can he decline without sounding suspicious? Dammit, of course, now Peter has him right where he wanted.

“If that’s what you want,” he says stiltedly with a shrug.

“Fantastic,” Peter grins. “Keep me informed!”

Derek excuses himself shortly after that. He needs to act, now, faster than his uncle and before it’s too late. He takes the elevator, but instead of heading to the training floor, where he’s expected to instruct some newly turned werewolves, he presses the button to the basement.

"Mr. Hale," the guard on duty greets him with a nod. "I wasn't expecting you back so soon."

"I got a new case," Derek tosses his badge on the desk. "Need a card to get out."

"Did your uncle give you permission?" the beta asks, tugging uncomfortably at the neck of his uniform.

"Is that the way to talk to an Alpha?" Derek growls, trying to scare him into submission.

"I'm just following orders, sir," the beta shrieks. "Your uncle came down yesterday and told me to deny you a pass unless he said otherwise."

Derek curses, turning around and clenching his fists, claws stabbing his palms. He knows he could try to get that card by force, but it wouldn’t change the fact that Peter is still one step ahead of him. Going out without his permission would be akin to desertion. He’d be signing his own death sentence. His pack’s death sentence.

"Alright, forget about it," he grunts out as he retrieves his badge and goes back to the elevator.

He was right about Peter though. He's plotting something. But then, that's what his uncle does best: deceit, lies, manipulation. Derek’s pretty sure he did exactly what his uncle was expecting. He can feel the jaws of a trap closing in. It’s worse than a mouse stuck in a labyrinth looking for cheese, because at least the mouse can see the walls of his cage. But Derek can’t even catch his bearings, let alone any idea of what kind of game his uncle is playing.

But he knows one thing: they are in danger. All of them. His uncle doesn’t know the details, but he’s suspicious, and that’s more than enough to get them into trouble.

He knows Peter is probably expecting him to bust into his office and demand an explanation of why he can’t leave, which is exactly why he can’t do that. He has a pack to think of, a revenge to fulfill
outside this place. He never cared about this city anyway. He can leave and never come back. His uncle will understand when he presents the heads of the humans who massacred their family to him. But for now, he has to get everyone out, preferably alive.

He goes back to the training room and burns some frustration with the new pups until Derek is exhausted. It’s late when he finally gets back to his room, which is why he expects Stiles to be asleep, not waiting for him on the couch.

It’s been almost a week since they left the wolf base, and Derek is still not used to seeing that collar around Stiles’ neck. It always snatches his breath away, how the leather circles his throat, the way it caresses his pale skin, highlights the contours of his neck with every shift of Stiles’ body. It calls straight to his wolf.

Knowing it’s not the time to think of that, he looks around the room instead, noticing that his shirt is in the same spot he left it the night before.

“You didn’t wear my shirt,” he points out flatly, annoyed by Stiles’ foolishness.

“Dude,” Stiles grimaces. “Gross! I’m not wearing a dirty shirt drenched in werewolf sweat.”

Derek huffs. Stiles has a natural talent to complicate things. It’s frustrating and exasperating in ways Derek had never known before meeting him.

He sits on the other end of the couch, putting space between them and sliding an arm over the back seat, gesturing Stiles over with a finger.

"What?" Stiles arches his eyebrows.

"You know what," Derek gestures him over again.

“Again with that,” Stiles rolls his eyes, sliding closer on the couch.

"Stiles," Derek calls when he still leaves some space between them.

"I-," Stiles falters. "Should I take my shirt off?" He looks a bit embarrassed as he asks this, averting his eyes to the side.

The gesture takes Derek by surprise. He hesitates only a moment before taking his own shirt off and nodding in agreement.

"Of course you had to agree on that," Stiles murmurs as he gets shirtless, too.

He leans against Derek, who circles his back and presses him to his chest, making Stiles tuck his head under his chin.

"At least you could bring me a magazine while we do this," Stiles protests, resting his hands on Derek's chest carefully.

"Shut up," he grunts.

"Or, I don’t know, a TV in your room would be pretty awesome, too," Stiles rambles on.

"Stiles," Derek warns.

"But I’m bored!" Stiles protests. “I have nothing to do here except follow you around or your betas. Eating every few hours is cool and all but it’s not the best way to break up the monotony. And now
"You wouldn't like the alternative," Derek interrupts before Stiles can keep rambling long into the night. He can’t believe they’re having this conversation. He had hoped Stiles was as uncomfortable with the subject as himself, in order to allow them the mercy of avoiding the topic altogether.

"You keep saying that," Stiles pushes against his chest to look at him. "But I have no idea what this ‘alternative’ really means."

Derek can hear the blip of Stiles’ heartbeat, the small lie in his words. It makes him falter. How did he find out? Who did he talk to? Scott, Derek realizes with an inner sigh of resignation. They used to be best friends, and Derek is sure Scott would be the only one willing to bring that up.

"It means-" he says after a long pause, deciding to play along and see what Stiles says, "-that proper scenting usually involves sex."

"What?!” Stiles stutters, moving away from him. "Then all those slaves..."

"Some of them," Derek interjects. "It depends on the wolf."

"It depends- wow," Stiles says, eyes round in disbelief. And Derek realizes he doesn’t know everything. Scott told him only parts, but which parts? How much does he know exactly? And the question that worries Derek the most, what does he think about any of it?

"Come back here," he murmurs, pulling Stiles back against his chest.

"Okay, uh," Stiles licks his lips nervously and leans back over to him. "I suppose this isn't that boring, after all," he continues, and Derek can hear him swallowing nervously.

"I assumed," Derek closes his eyes, feeling a pang in his chest at the confirmation that Stiles knows what they’re discussing and he doesn’t want any of it. His own reaction surprises him. No wonder his betas are worried.

He runs one of his hands up Stiles’ back, who lets out a shaky breath as Derek palms his way up to his nape, where he leaves his hand atop the leather collar. It’s the first time he’s really touched Stiles. A proper touching, an intentional caress.

Derek sighs, letting himself finally relax for the first time that day. He keeps Stiles tightly in place, hearing Stiles' rabbit heart beat frantically in the silence of the room.

“Try not to drool on my hair if you fall asleep,” Stiles whispers after awhile, tone flippant but body betraying him.

Derek growls, pushing him aside and getting up. He doesn’t know what he was thinking. This human can’t make anything better, Derek knows that. It’s just that, the way the other Alphas trigger his instinct, the manipulations of his uncle, it’s all getting to him. He needs to stay focused, and getting attached wouldn’t help things.

“Goodnight,” he grunts out, closing the bedroom door behind him quickly.

The next day passes very similar to the previous. Derek avoids his uncle and tries to get his team assigned to any mission as an excuse to leave the city, but none of the Alphas are willing to hand over their case. It’s obvious Peter has something to do with it.

When he finally makes it back to his room, he’s exhausted.
“Thank god you’re back!” Stiles exclaims, head hanging off the couch and feet on the wall.

“What are you doing?” Derek pauses.

“I’ve been in this room the whole day,” Stiles complains. “I think I’m going nuts. I’m pretty sure I’ve developed claustrophobia or something.”

Derek pauses, considering how all this must be for Stiles.

"Are you hungry?" he asks, deciding to do something.

Stiles blinks at him, clearly dumbfounded by the unexpected question.

"Yeah, I guess," he turns around, straightening on the couch.

"Let's go then," Derek gestures him over as he opens the door for him. It’s late enough for it to be safe to leave the room.

"Where are you taking me?" Stiles asks, even as he’s getting up and heading towards Derek.

"To eat something?" Derek answers slowly with an arched brow.

"It's past midnight, I don't know about werewolf opening hours, but I'd guess the cafeteria will be closed by now, you know?" Stiles babbles as they get outside and Derek closes the door behind them.

"We're not going to the cafeteria," he says, turning to look at Stiles, who literally beams at him.

“A new place?” Stiles looks about two seconds away from bouncing up and down. His sheer happiness is so unexpected, Derek's breath catches in the back of his throat for a long second.

They move in silence through the darkness, Derek guiding Stiles through the corridors and down the stairs to descend to the cafeteria floor, going through a back door into the kitchen area.

He leaves Stiles waiting on one of the many metallic tables and goes to open the fridge where they keep the desserts to take out a whole red velvet cake.

Stiles opens his eyes impossibly wide and gaps at the sight of it. “Is that-” he tries to ask.

Derek puts the cake down on their table and goes to search for cutlery.

“Here,” he offers Stiles a fork, who grabs it slowly, still gaping in awe at the cake.

Derek rolls his eyes as he goes back to the fridge and fetches himself a sandwich.

“You're not eating cake?” Stiles asks like it’s sacrilege, leaving his fork on the table.

“I don’t like sweets,” Derek responds with a casual shrug, hopping on top of the table next to the cake and biting down on his dinner.

“Then why-” Stiles tries to speak, clearly uncomfortable before dropping the question.

“Eat,” Derek states, nudging him with a knee good-naturedly.

Stiles licks his lips nervously before finally grabbing the fork again and picking at the first piece of cake. The moment he takes a bite, Stiles makes a noise of ecstasy, exactly like Derek had imagined
earlier.

Derek busies himself with his sandwich in order to hide the content smirk stretching across his face.

“Oh my god,” Stiles groans. “This is the most amazing thing I’ve ever eaten. Red velvet cake, more like orgasm in my mouth!”

Derek shakes his head, smirk closer to a smile at this point. He watches in silence while Stiles devours the whole cake without pause.

“Ugh,” Stiles pats his stomach after his pig-out session. “I think I ate too much.”

Derek snorts, sliding off the table.

“Is there a werewolf law about puking? Because ugh, I’m this close. You might have to roll me back to the room.”

Derek is about to reply when he hears a pair of feet trying to be quiet outside the kitchen, moving closer.

“Let’s go,” Derek grits out, half whisper before grabbing Stiles’ arm, pulling him through the double doors to the cafeteria and rushing them back to the corridor, straight towards the elevator.

“What’s wrong?” Stiles pants out, confused, eyes wide.

“Nothing-” Derek isn’t able to finish his sentence, because something hits him from behind. He falls to the floor, tasting blood at the back of his throat.

He howls when claws dig into his back. Twisting and turning, he manages to catch sight of Stiles pressing the buttons for the elevator frantically.

Derek twists, letting the wolf out, roaring as he pushes the other Alpha away to get back on his feet.

But the Alpha doesn’t attack him again. Instead, he goes for Stiles, grabbing him and slamming him against the elevator’s door so hard Stiles eyes shutter closed momentarily as he falls down with a thud.

Overwhelmed by his own instinct, Derek crouches down and roars so loud his throat burns, seething with rage. He leaps up and crashes into the other Alpha, feeling in that moment Stiles’ emotions blasting like a fricking nuclear bomb. He can sense Stiles’ muscles taut with tension, his urge to flee, and his resolution to stay and fight instead. Stiles pounds at the Alpha, his fists connecting with a jaw and making the werewolf snarl.

Derek grabs the Alpha from behind, digging his claws in his kidneys as repayment for before. He lifts the werewolf off the ground, and Stiles follows them, kicking the Alpha between the legs with his knee before losing his own foot and falling down, clearly still concussed by the blow from before.

“Stay away,” Derek growls sharply, throwing the Alpha away.

He hears the elevator doors open and takes advantage of it without question. His priority is to get Stiles out of there, no matter what.

Derek shoves him inside the elevator, pressing the button to get the doors to close behind them. They click closed just as the Alpha starts struggling to stand. And Derek and Stiles breathe heavily in the
sudden silence after the elevator starts to move.

"You're bleeding," Stiles hisses a moment later, his hands pressing against the already healing gashes on Derek's back.

Derek leans his forehead against the elevator door, allowing himself a moment to feel Stiles’ hands on his body. His wolf nearly whines at the contact, wanting more.

"I'm fine," Derek finally grunts, moving away.

At that, Stiles stumbles back, leaning on the wall and looking down at his hands in wonder.

“Stiles, you okay?” Derek asks. “He didn’t hurt you, did he?”

Stiles can’t stop shaking. He’d punched a werewolf in the face and then kneed him in the nuts. That has to count as badass, right?

“I’m- fine, yeah, I think I’m fine,” Stiles nods absently.

“You think or you know?” Derek growls. He moves closer and palms Stiles’ arms and chest, searching for any wound.

“I hit my head, that’s all,” Stiles explains, more calmly than he thought he’d be, what with all the crazy immanent death and dismemberment.

Derek nods and steps back. They remain in silence, regarding each other in the small space of the elevator. Stiles can smell the metallic scent of blood on Derek and wonders how strong it must be for someone with heightened senses.

“What was that?” Stiles finally asks, voice rough before clearing his throat.

“Nothing, you don’t have to-”

“Worry?” Stiles snorts. “Sure, let the human stay oblivious to what’s really going on, cause that’s working out so well so far!” He snarks back, teetering between panic and anger.

“You’re better off-”

“No!” Stiles snaps. He bends forward and pokes Derek in the chest, hard. “You’re going to tell me what’s going on right now, before another werewolf has the chance to slit our throats while we walk back to the room.”

“And if I don’t, then what?” Derek snarls back, defiantly.

Stiles gapes. Goddamm werewolves and their goddamn stubbornness. Jesus Christ, Stiles isn’t asking for a play-by-play of wolfy business, he just doesn’t want to get eaten in his sleep. Not to mention that Derek’s shirt is a torn mess, and his exposed muscles shouldn’t be as distracting as they are.

“Then I’ll go to your uncle,” he finally settles on a response, raising his chin.
Derek huffs a laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Stiles wrinkles his nose.

“Please go ahead,” Derek chuckles. “If you have a death wish, that is.”

The elevator doors open and Derek darts outside without another word.

“Alright, so I won’t go to him,” Stiles hedges, reaching their room. “But I will do something! I could leave, you know?”

“Good luck with that,” Derek snorts, not even looking back as he goes to his room, tugging at the tattered remains of his shirt.

“Would you just stop?” Stiles yells, slamming the door closed behind him as hard as he can.

It finally has an effect, making Derek stop and turn around, brows furrowed and a scowl firmly in place.

“Someone attacked us,” Stiles says patiently, like Derek hadn’t been there. “You and I,” he points between them. “We’re in this together, no matter how much we dislike it. You have to include me in your plans or I can’t help.”

“I don’t need your help,” Derek snarls back quickly.

“I don’t care!” Stiles snaps. He feels his body tense with anger, all the stress of what happened crashing down on him. “Alright? No one cares what you do or don’t fucking need, so put your big werewolf pants on and do what has to be done.”

“What do you know about what has to be done,” Derek growls, low in the back of his throat. He turns away, rubbing his face with both hands. “I’m keeping you alive, Stiles. What else do you want?”

“I want—” Stiles chokes on his own words. “I want to stop feeling helpless all the time. I’m the Sheriff’s son, for God’s sake, I know how to defend myself and I’ve never needed protection before in my life.”

“You did punch that guy in the face,” Derek points out, making Stiles chuckle, the sound only edged with hysteria.

“That was pretty badass,” Stiles grins, momentarily forgetting how hard his head is throbbing.

“I wouldn’t go that far,” Derek teases back, the frustration clearly easing out of him.

The moment is so unexpected, the way Derek opens up to let him in, that it makes Stiles impulsive.

“Scott said something about—”

“Scott should stay out of it,” Derek cuts him off before he can even explain himself.

It’s like a slap in the face, a cold rejection. Of course Derek knows what Scott told him. The elephant in the room is real for the both of them, and this is the way Derek has to say he’s not interested. That he is so not interested, he’d rather be attacked by a bunch of crazy werewolves, than physically touch Stiles more than absolutely necessary.

It pisses him off because it’s not fair. Stiles didn’t ask for any of this, didn’t ask to be risking his own
life for- what? Derek came to his town, to his house and snatched him away. Stiles had never wanted to become a poster boy for Stockholm syndrome. But now, now that it’s clear whatever they’re doing isn’t working, how dare Derek reject him without a second thought.

“He’s worried about me!” he finally snaps back.

“I got it under control,” Derek says exasperated.

“A rabid Alpha just tried to kill you and you say you got it under control?” Stiles bites out, throwing his arms up in frustration.

“Stiles,” Derek growls. “Just trust me.”

“Yeah, good one, how about no?” Stiles mocks, more furious than he’s been in a long time. ”Trust you, like it’s not a big fucking deal. Like my life doesn’t depend on your opinion of when things are dangerous enough to start pissing our pants." Stiles sighs heatedly. "Just trust you like my mother did, right?"

"What,” Derek says dumbfounded.

"My mom saved you," Stiles presses on. He never wanted to tell Derek, but then he never wanted to be here in the first place.

“How do you-” Derek takes a step back.

“I was there, the night she took you and your sister out of town,” Stiles spits out, livid.

“I didn’t know,” Derek says softly, dropping his eyes.

“No, you didn’t, did you? Know a lot of things, I mean,” Stiles snorts in disgust. “Did you know she died minutes after you left?”

“What?” Derek snaps his head back up, eyes wide open.

“She died saving your sorry ass and I can’t just-” Stiles chokes on his words. It’s been years and he still can’t talk about it. About her.

”No…” Derek murmurs.

“Some part of me knows that it’s not fair, but-”

“No!” Derek snarls, and the vehemence in that one syllable takes Stiles back in surprise.

“Derek-” Stiles tries to say but he’s already backing away.

He sees the terrified look on his face a moment before Derek leaves the room in a rush, leaving him alone.

“Shit,” Stiles curses in utter confusion. “What the fuck just happened?”

Stiles spends the next couple of days stuck in the room. Derek never came back after their fight and the betas don’t let him out. So he has a lot of time to cool his heels, think about what he said. Mostly he remembers Derek’s face right before he fled the room. Stiles shouldn’t feel guilty for telling the truth, for making Derek realize- His mother had died to save him. Nothing could change that. Nothing could ever change that.
He’s ready to break out by the third day and face whatever dangers awaiting, Alpha teeth and claws be damned, except that’s when Scott shows up.

"Thank god you came," he clings to his best friend the second he closes the door. And it’s only by chance that he notices Scott wrinkling his nose for a moment.

"What?" he steps back, lifting one arm and sniffing under his armpit. "I showered today."

"That’s not it..." Scott trails off, clearly uncomfortable. "You smell-"

"Like I’m going crazy from being locked in here?" he helps.

“No,” Scott grimaces. “You smell like after your mother died.”

Stiles grows instantly cold.

“Forget I said anything,” Scott hurries to say. “I knew you’d be going crazy by now,” he tries to joke. “So I came to see if you wanted to accompany me to the common room.”

“Y-yeah, I suppose,” Stiles says, he feels a bit numb.

He supposes he’s spent the last few days thinking of his mom a lot, but that doesn’t mean- Stiles shakes his head, clearing his mind. He still has a priority: getting out of this room. He has no idea what the common room is, but right now he’d agree on a trip to the garbage dump rather than stay trapped in these four walls to wallow on thoughts of his dead mother for another minute.

“I have the day off and I thought,” Scott shrugs. “Why not the pack meeting? There will be too many werewolves there for anyone to think about attacking you.”

“I’m fine with that plan, let’s go!” he forces a grin and a bit of enthusiasm.

They take the elevator back to the first room Stiles visited when they’d arrived. It’s full of werewolves and slaves, looking exactly the same as it had then.

They sit in a couch near a fireplace and spend their time talking about Beacon Hills. Stiles suspects it should be depressing, but somehow talking about the town he grew up in makes him feel better.

Slaves keep passing by with trays full of drinks, and after a while they’re both a bit buzzed. Well, honestly, Stiles is half way to wasted, and Scott is fine.

“Oh look, isn’t that Isaac?” he slurs, his words making Scott turns around to search for him.

“Oh yeah...” he trails off. “Hey, can I leave you here for a second? It won’t take long.”

“Sure, dude,” Stiles smiles. He hasn’t felt this good since the velvet cake, right before everything went to complete shit.

“You’ll be fine here,” Scott reassures him as he gets up and goes after Isaac.

Stiles giggles. Werewolves think they are so sneaky, but Stiles is totally onto all of them.

He slides down the couch, almost reaching the floor without knowing how, when a werewolf sits next to him. Stiles may be drunk, but he still knows when he’s in deep trouble. Getting up on wobbly legs, he tries to move to another couch, but the stranger grabs his arm and pulls him down, closer to him this time.
“Where do you think you’re going?” the werewolf purrs.

“Uh I—” Stiles slurs. “I have to pee, it’s the booze, need to get it outta my system.”

The creepo grabs his hand and places a soggy kiss on Stiles’ knuckles, like a disgusting dog lapping at a bowl of food. It makes Stiles cringe away.

He’s ready to crack some more nuts when Derek is suddenly there, roaring and pushing the werewolf away. He lifts the creepo off the floor and throws him against the fireplace.

"Mr. Hale,” the werewolf whines. “I’m sorry I didn't know-”

"You didn't know?” Derek roars, showing his fangs as he wolfs out. "What about now? You know now?” he raises the werewolf again and throws him harder. “Or should I keep explaining?”

The werewolf whines pitifully and crawls away from them.

Stiles’ wet hand is still stretched in midair as he regards Derek, gaping without realizing it.

“You’re-” amazing, he tries to say, tongue completely uncooperative.

"You’re coming with me,” Derek barks, grabbing his arm and being careful not to dig his claws into Stiles’ arm.

He manhandles Stiles to one of the walls on the side, banging open a hidden door. He pushes Stiles inside what looks like a service room where the humans—the slaves—take their breaks.

Derek orders everyone to leave and the humans scramble out without a word of complaint, eyes lowered and steps quick, like they’re used to it. Which they are. Stiles feels disgust curl the pit of his stomach. A moment later, he’s shoved against the door.

"Derek!” he squawks when the werewolf tackles him, pinning him so hard against the door that the knob digs into his back.

"Fangs!” he squeals when Derek buries his face in Stiles’ neck and sniffs. "You're still all wolfed out, Derek, careful!”

Derek growls, and his claws grab Stiles’ wrist.

"Oh my god,” Stiles squeezes his eyes shut. “I'm gonna die.”

"Your hand stinks,” Derek growls in a voice different than his usual. He pulls Stiles’ hand up in a painful tug and grimaces while sniffing it.

"He- he didn't do anything-” Stiles stutters out. “You arrived first- Derek- oh my god,” he jumps when Derek presses his cheek against Stiles’ hand, nosing at his palm and rubbing his still wolfed out face all over it.

Stiles can feel the fur on the sides of his head every time Derek moves, surprisingly soft. He's tempted to move his hand and stroke through it when Derek opens his mouth to suck on a few of his fingers, careful not to bite him.

Stiles’ mind goes blank. His whole body going slack as Derek tongues his way slowly between the pads of his fingers, lapping all the way down to his knuckles, where he sucks at the skin, probably leaving marks.
Stiles watches Derek doing all this in a daze. He doesn’t even realize the small noises in the back of his throat until Derek’s claws press against his neck, seeking his pulse and pressing down firmly.

Derek spends his time lapping and sucking Stiles’ hand clean of the other wolf’s scent. He doesn’t hurry it, his tongue moving lazily over each knuckle, his fangs pressing against his palm without hurting.

Stiles realizes he’s been holding onto him only when Derek drops his hand and steps back, the Alpha’s shoulders sagging. His head twists right and left in a spasm, before turning back to be less wolfy, and more human.

"What- what was that?" Stiles stutters, completely out of breath.

"My wolf took over for a moment,” Derek pants. “I had to scent you.”

"You scared the crap out of me," Stiles breathes out. He can’t feel his legs. His whole body feels flustered and tight and- he’s hard.

"Oh crap," he murmurs, dropping his head down to hide his sudden mortification, bracing his knees as he bends over.

"Go back to the room," Derek orders as he pushes Stiles aside and opens the door he’d been leaning against. "I'll see you there later," He says firmly before exiting.

When Stiles is left alone, he looks down at his boner and sighs. Just what the hell has his life become.

He takes as long as he can to get back to the room, dreading the moment he’ll have to face Derek again. He has no idea what he’ll do if Derek brings up this. He’s not even sure why his body reacted like it did. Stunned, he realizes he’s more concerned about the unauthorized party in his pants than the way Derek wolfed out and almost ate his hand for dinner.

In the end, he goes back to the room and waits. He’s sure Derek won’t show up. It’ll be the fourth night he hasn’t slept in his room. And after popping a boner in the worst case scenario ever, he can understand Derek’s reluctance.

He’s just changed into his pajama bottoms when the door opens, startling Stiles.

Derek walks in and pauses.

This is the man- werewolf, that wanted to kill his father, the reason his mother died. Stiles can’t help but wonder what’s wrong with him as his heart skips a beat at the sight of him.

"What?" Derek asks, low and roughly, eyebrows quirked delicately.

"You were gone for days," Stiles shrugs, like that explained everything.

"I know," Derek says after a beat.

"Avoiding me?" Stiles presses on, already knowing the answer but unable to stop himself from needing to hear the words.

"Yes," Derek nods, studying him in the semi-darkness of the room.

"Why?" he asks around the lump in his throat.
"I lost control," Derek grunts. "I never lose control."

Stiles is taken aback by the answer. He was dreading the moment Derek would bring up his mother again, but he suspects neither of them is in a hurry to poke at the wounds after all.

"Control is overrated," he shrugs, deciding to be obnoxiously flippant.

"That's what people without it think," Derek bites back bitterly.

"Are you going to stay?" Stiles curses inwardly at the tone of his voice.

"I tried to stay away, but it was worse," Derek says, tone flat, like that explained all the secrets of the universe.

After a long disturbingly awkward pause, Derek murmurs a good night and steps into his own room, closing the door to leave Stiles behind.

- 

Derek lays awake in bed for a long time after his talk with Stiles. Or rather, not talk. He can hear him moving restlessly in the other room, his fast heartbeat and ragged breathing.

It’s driving Derek insane.

He hears Stiles move off the couch and to his door, hesitating there. Derek bolts up in his bed, holding his breath, waiting for Stiles to decide what to do.

Finally, Stiles opens the door and steps into the bedroom.

He doesn’t speak, he just stares at him. And Derek does the same, not trusting himself to not chase Stiles away with bitter words and harsh tones. Even in the darkness, he can make out Stiles’ naked torso, and his uncle’s words float up in his mind, unbidden. His skin really would mark prettily.

“I don’t want to die because I don’t smell enough like a sour werewolf,” Stiles murmurs as he moves to the foot of the bed, bending over and walking on his hands and knees over Derek’s legs until he’s laying down on top of him.

Derek slides his hands up Stiles’ shoulders to his neck, where he rubs the collar with his palms, feeling the leather moving smoothly against his skin and relishing the feel of it.

“You got a fixation with that,” Stiles says roughly, face buried in Derek’s shoulder, the words muffled against his skin.

Derek falters, his fingers flinching as he considers stopping. But his instinct is making his whole body scream with want, it’s a measure in self-control to keep himself from rubbing against Stiles’ half-naked body until the only scent is his. His wolf wants to erase all the other werewolves’ scents that are still lingering against his skin. His betas, Scott, all of them. His wolf wants to rip them apart for daring to be close enough to leave their scent behind. It howls a mantra in his mind, that he’s the only one allowed to touch, to mark, to keep-

Derek gasps, feeling exposed and raw like a wire. Taking a deep breath, he moves Stiles to the side, spooning him instead, arms tight around his chest. He thinks he won’t be able to sleep with Stiles
between his arms like this, the constant thrum of need drumming in time with each heartbeat, but after a while he starts to relax.

“I’ll protect you,” he whispers next to Stiles’ ear, feeling him tremble in response.

“I know,” Stiles breathes out, voice barely above a whisper.

The warmth of Stiles’ body heat wraps around him like a blanket, and their breathing evens out as Derek starts to drift away, resting for the first time in what feels like a very long time.

-

The next morning, Stiles wakes up alone on the couch.

He stays there, staring up at the ceiling, one finger tracing the curve of his collar, as he wonders just what the fuck they’re both playing at.
Spark

Stiles never thought that living with werewolves could become monotone, but as it turns out, even the most bizarre situations can fall into some sort of normalcy.

Take for example Stiles’ slave status. The novelty is definitely over. Stiles has had time to observe, learn and adapt. He’s used to the collar, too. Doesn’t even feel it anymore.

Admittedly, he’s losing his mind. He thought they’d stay in this place for a couple of days, and then he and Derek could go their separate way. But Derek is taking his time in asking his uncle for permission to go on a mission to chase the Argents, the original plan. Stiles has the feeling that something happened and no one told him. He suspects Derek is keeping things from him, simply because he’s a paranoid bastard who doesn’t fully trust anyone, even his betas.

Stiles doesn’t want to say he’s trapped, because the moment he recognizes it, it will be real. And it’ll mean he’s not free. At all. His deal, his arrangement, his plans; it will all be a big, fat lie. And he'll be just another human slave tricked into believing he’s in charge of his life. He can’t afford thinking like that, or he will do something stupid.

He is also spending a lot of time talking about the Argents. It’s odd, talking so much about a part of his childhood Stiles had grown up to hate. He’s tempted to tell Derek about Gerard many times, but something stops him. The idea of explaining what really happened nauseates him. It’s like the lie he fed for years has turned into a monster that controls him.

It’s not a problem with Derek, though. He wants to know everything about the Argents. How many of them they were, their roles in the family, the structure of their society, their age, the weapons they preferred, their strategies to capture or kill werewolves. But he never asks Stiles about his mother. Turns out they are both experts at ignoring the problem until it eventually goes away.

There are still things Stiles isn’t telling, mostly to protect his father. He doesn’t want to drag any attention to him. According to all these werewolves, the Sheriff of Beacon Hills is dead and Stiles wants it to remain that way. If Derek knew certain things, he’d most probably want to go back and find his father. And that’s the last thing Stiles wants. He’d rather stay trapped here for the rest of his miserable life than give them reasons to go after his dad.

Even his situation with Derek has fallen into a strange normalcy. They fall asleep together, and Stiles wakes up alone in the morning back on the couch. They don’t talk about it, just share a bed, ignore the tension and cross fingers that will be enough to survive. Or at least, Stiles does.

That’s why he doesn’t expect to awake one morning still in Derek's bed.

Half asleep, Stiles doesn’t even wonder what happened, he just smiles and stretches lazily, enjoying the luxury of a bed instead of a uncomfortable couch for once. He turns around, finding Derek’s back and spooning him. He presses against him, his morning wood finding Derek’s ass.

Stiles makes a satisfied noise and grinds against him, tightening his hold on Derek, who arches his back just slightly and presses back. They share a perfect moment, where both move together, eyes still closed and breath even, until Derek seems to awake and stiffens all over.

There’s a long second where neither moves, until Derek shoves him away. He rises from the bed and moves quickly to the bathroom, closing the door behind him.
Stiles slaps his own forehead.

"Stupid," he murmurs, looking down at his boner. "You're so stupid."

Considering it’s the best option, he leaves the bed and moves to the couch, like a kicked dog. He is going to apologize, maybe say something like, you know how morning woods are, don’t take it personal. Except in this case it’s totally personal. But when Derek emerges from the bedroom, Stiles can’t find his voice.

"I'll see you tonight," Derek murmurs as he leaves quickly.

Stiles sighs, he runs his hands over his buzz cut and flops back on the couch. Way to ruin their progress with another inappropriate boner.

He wants to stay hidden under his covers, but the three betas show up at his door a bit later, announcing it’s breakfast time and dragging him out when he refuses to go.

Being around them helps his mood, though. Soon he’s commenting and laughing along as they talk about their shifts and the life in the den. Like everything else, Stiles' relationship with Derek's betas has become routine. When he first met them, they terrified him. Now, though, Stiles would say they are almost friends, or as close to it as he was going to get in this place.

A gorgeous human girl crosses paths with them and Stiles almost trips on his own feet when she bats her eyelashes at him and smiles seductively before hurrying after her alpha.

Here’s the thing: Stiles has started to notice more and more strangers staring at him lately. It's nothing too obvious but when all humans avert their eyes, you tend to notice when they suddenly stop doing so. And they stopped a while ago. Stiles has no idea what happened, but it’s not only the humans. Some werewolves have started to stare at him, too. And not in an I-want-you-to-be-my-appetizer way. He receives conspiratorial nods, knowing smiles, even winks!

He hasn’t mentioned it to anyone yet. At first he thought it was his imagination, then he thought it couldn’t mean anything. But as they walk into the cafeteria, this old lady, who is following a werewolf, looks straight at Stiles and smiles fondly. And Stiles realizes two in less than five minutes is not a coincidence. Either he’s turned into a chick magnet (for all ages) or there is something definitely going on, and he would be an idiot if he didn’t find out what.

"Have you noticed anything weird lately?" He finally asks during breakfast.

“ Weird?" Scott asks through a spoonful of cereal.

“Yeah, weird like," Stiles says again. “I don’t know, people looking at you? Slaves murmuring as you pass them by maybe? Werewolves you don’t know winking at you?” Stiles purses his lips, pulling a face at the thought.

"Alright, freckles," Erica raises from the table. "I'm taking you to Derek today."

“Rude much?” Stiles complains half-heartedly. “I was in the middle of a conversation.”

“It’s cool,” Scott dismisses, leaving food on his plate and rising from the table. “I gotta go anyway.”

Stiles looks at Scott in surprise as he says a quick goodbye and leaves in a rush.

“Uh,” he hesitates. “Speaking of weird, what was that all about?” he asks Isaac, because at this point Stiles accepts that, if there is something going on with Scott, Isaac is probably involved or in the
know.

"Why are you looking at me? I don’t know,” Isaac shrugs, busying himself with his food a little bit too much.

“We don’t have time for this,” Erica taps her high heels. “Derek is waiting.”

Stiles sighs, pushing the chair back and following her outside. She’s strangely quiet as they walk to the elevator and wait for it. Once in, though, Erica turns around and looks him straight in the eye as her suddenly clawed hand is on Stiles’ chest.

"Listen to me closely," she says fiercely. "Stop talking about werewolves winking at you in public, for god’s sake. You're getting the slaves restless. They- some of them have started to look at me. They’ve got this stupid idea that we're buddies or something. Do you have any idea how dangerous that is?"

“Oh my god!” Stiles exclaims, ignoring the claws pressing against his chest. “So I wasn’t imagining shit. You noticed, too!”

“Of course I did! We all noticed,” Erica says exasperated. “All this nonsense for some misplaced chivalry. I never took Derek for a romantic but he clearly feels some sense of honor with you. And his stupidity is going to cost us all,” Erica rolls her eyes.

"W-why-what are you talking about?" Stiles stutters so horribly he cringes at himself. "We just have a deal! He wants is my knowledge on the Argents."

"So naive," Erica claps his cheek a few times. "Ugh, it's disgusting."

Stiles backs away, scoffing, but Erica follows him, pressing him against the inside wall of the elevator with her clawed hand.

“Why haven’t you had sex yet?” She narrows her eyes. Stiles tries to struggle, but Erica doesn't even budge. “I know you find him attractive,” she deadpans. "Don't worry. I understand, I have eyes, too. I've seen him naked. Trust me, I get it. I totally support it, too. Gay sex is hot."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Stiles squeaks. "Are we on hidden camera? Are you on drugs? Was there wolfsbane on the pancakes?"

"Someone has to do something," She says right before the elevator doors open and she goes suddenly quiet. She drops her hand and points outside. "Move it."

They walk into a deserted corridor and move together.

"Why is everyone always talking to me on the elevator rides anyway?" Stiles babbles nervously. "Are you werewolves fond of small enclosed spaces for your good natured gossip?"

"Dear lord, I can't understand what he sees in you." Erica shakes her head. She stops, grabbing Stiles and leaning closer to whisper. "It's the safest place to talk. The noise prevents supernatural ears from eavesdropping."

"The motors' noise," Stiles says in understanding.

"You're so smart," Erica snorts as she resumes walking and Stiles follows after her. "You should do something about it," she says, tossing her hair back.

"You and Derek," Erica gives him an exasperated stare.

"I don't know-"

"You're his slave," she insists.

"Pretending slave," Stiles mumbles under his breath, using air quotation marks and hoping Erica won't kick him for saying it out loud.

"It doesn't matter," Erica dismisses with her hand. "He's an alpha, he *claims*. He's holding back for you."

"Don't be ridiculous," Stiles snorts.

"He wants you," she holds out a palm. "You want him," she holds out the other. "What's the big deal?"

"There's no big deal," Stiles gestures wildly with his arms. "There's no deal at all!"

Erica stops walking and drops her head down, sighing dramatically. "You're even worse than him."

"That's so not true!" Stiles exclaims indignantly. "I feel insulted, I'm a lot better than Derek."

Erica deadpans. "Then prove it."

"I feel like I'm gonna regret this," Stiles crosses his arm. "What are you suggesting exactly?"

"*Do* something about this. Seduce him!" Erica arches her eyebrows, looking him up and down with a critical eye. "Apparently he's into pale, bony and freckled, so it should be easy. Just submit to him, I promise his wolf won't be able to resist it."

"Submit?" Stiles asks, suddenly out of breath.

"You know, expose your neck, offer your ass, I have no idea, I never had to do that," Erica shrugs. "Does Boyd-"

"You won't finish that sentence if you know what's good for you," she warns. "Just get it done. Or another wolf will find you. And you don't want that, trust me." Erica sounds worried, almost frantic as she continues. "You can't count on one of us always being with you, Stiles. We're doing all we can but still, if something happened-"

"Y'know," Stiles interrupts her with a smile. "I have no idea what to think of you. Sometimes you are such a bitch, no offense, but then others, you're like my BFF."

Erica snorts and pauses in front of the radio room, where Derek has been assigned today. "Good luck, honey," she says, stepping closer and pressing her impressive cleavage against him.

"Uh- uh thanks," Stiles stutters, trying really hard not to stare at anything under her neck. Erica chuckles, making this lewd expression that makes Stiles’ plan seem suddenly silly. There's nowhere safe to look at.

"I really like you, Stiles," Erica purrs, stepping back very slowly. "I hope you make it out alive."
Stiles stares at her open-mouthed as Erica moves down the hall, leaving him by the door. Well, shit.

He hurries inside, where the alphas are already coordinating groups and getting the betas to contact the teams on the outside to update their data and give them new orders. Stiles goes to the back of the room, where he sits among the other slaves.

He can feel their eyes on him for a moment, and Stiles thinks back to the apparently no longer unsuccessful game he came up with when he first arrived. Now, he opts to ignore the slaves as he searches for Derek in the room.

There he is, bent over a big radio, hand pressing a headphone to one of his ears as he speaks into a mic. Stiles can’t hear what he’s saying, but he doesn’t have to. He follows the hard lines defining Derek’s body, observes Derek’s hands working the machines, scribbling down notes that he passes to other werewolves. Stiles' favorite part are his eyebrows, though. They speak volumes even if Derek doesn’t. And as he concentrates on his job now, his face shifts and furrows and Stiles has to suppress a giggle.

When did watching Derek Hale become this entertaining? Stiles doesn't even remember when he stopped being bored during these meetings and started to use the time to ogle the alpha. Erica's words dance in his head as Stiles lets his eyes roam over Derek's strong hands, up his corded arms, his muscled shoulders and thick neck... When his eyes finally reach his face, Derek is looking oddly at him, like he had felt the trail of Stiles' stare the whole time.

Just the idea is enough to make Stiles shift, feeling suddenly uncomfortable in his pants.

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Derek grips the table, trying to repress his impulse. Stiles doesn't even realize what he's doing. He's oblivious to the arousal that is just radiating off of him and how it's affecting Derek.

His nostrils flare when Stiles squirms in his seat. Derek remembers the feeling of Stiles' cock this morning pressed against him, grinding slowly. He can sense how hard Stiles is right now, too, and the thought is enough to get his body tight in all the right places.

He receives a few sympathetic stares as he excuses himself and walks outside. Cursing, Derek runs his hands through his hair, yanking hard enough to hurt. To top it all off, Derek had to run away from his own room this morning. He’s reached a new lower. He hasn’t been sleeping much lately, staying awake at night to listen to Stiles’ heartbeat, driven by his instinct to protect and stay alert. In the morning, he always carries Stiles back to the couch before he can wake up. But all those sleepless nights had caught up to Derek and he'd fallen asleep before he could move Stiles to the couch this morning.

That’d been a mistake. One he’s not making again. The feeling of Stiles pressed against him is going to occupy his thoughts all day. To make things worse, he can’t stop reliving that exact moment when he'd arched his back and surrendered himself for one perfect moment.

He's been thinking of what Isaac told him, considering the idea of just giving in, of letting himself take what he so desperately wants. It just, it isn't that simple. Derek is afraid of losing himself, of letting the instinct take over and forgetting who he is and why he's here. He can barely control his impulses now that he’s not giving in. Wouldn't it be ironic if his ticket to the Argents distracted him
enough to keep him from his revenge entirely?

He’s been in the operations room all morning, hearing back from different teams out on the borders that backed up to human territory. He needs information on how the border is holding because once they leave, they won’t have access to any new territory updates. And that’s dangerous nowadays. He has a list with the last cities Stiles’ father received correspondence from the Argents, and he’s spent his time finding out the exact situation in each of them.

Derek has also been avoiding his uncle successfully as he works on his escape plan. But not today. Today there's another alpha meeting, and he can’t refuse. Leaving the operations room behind, Derek takes the elevator to the last floor. He should have brought Stiles with him to the first reunion, but he’s not sure that’s so wise anymore. That’s why he asked Isaac to pick up Stiles from the operations room and take him back to the room when the time for the reunion approached.

Derek is a bit restless, thinking of Stiles being alone among all those alphas, even if it is for ten minutes while Isaac arrives. But there’s nothing he can do now. He reaches the last floor and what he sees has him instantly alert.

In front the doors there are two big werewolves, guarding the place.

“You can’t go in,” one of them says as he approaches.

Derek falters a moment. He stops walking and regards them warily. “Why not?”

“Your uncle doesn’t want to see you,” the same werewolf says.

Derek lets his claws, flashing red eyes. “Step back,” he growls.

“We’re not letting you in,” the werewolf growls back, showing his fangs. “Those were your uncle’s direct orders.”

Derek considers his options. He can either fight them or turn around and leave. He didn’t want to see his uncle, anyway. So he retracts his claws and calmly, he nods at them. Derek returns to the elevator and decides to go back down.

What the fuck was that? Why would his uncle not want to see him? Things are getting worse, faster than he can control. This can only mean that Peter had known he was lying since the first day they got back. That's the only reason why he'd be doing all of this. Derek suspects this is just another of his uncle’s games. He likes to play with people. He could just ask Derek directly, but Derek knows what his uncle really wants. He wants Derek to confess and admit he lied to him, to tell him everything on his own. Unfortunately, he can’t do that. Not yet.

As he wanders down corridors, betas and alphas alike greeting him, Derek notices there’s something odd about the whole scene. He pauses, the corridor busy with werewolves coming and going, circling him to keep their way. That’s when one slave darts their eyes up to Derek’s face and looks at him.

Derek arches an eyebrow in surprise. Slaves don’t do that. Even less to an Alpha. A dispute could happen for less than that. He starts to notice the slaves walking behind their werewolves and surprisingly, Derek discovers almost all of them dart furtive stares at him.

What the fuck? Derek curse inwardly. Did this have something to do with why his uncle suddenly didn't want to see him? Damn it, he really needed to be careful.

He decides to call it a day and take his research to his room until he decides what to do. When he
arrives, Stiles nearly jumps to his feet.

“Hey,” he greets, but Derek doesn’t even look at him. “You left me in that room full of alphas, you know? Isaac had to come for me.”

Derek can’t deal with Stiles right now. This day has been too intense and strange and he just needs to be alone. He ignores Stiles, going straight to his room and closing the door in hopes that Stiles takes the hint.

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Stiles is livid. How dare the asshole abandon him like that and now he refuses to even talk? Stiles is meeting new levels of frustration with Derek. The worst part is realizing how much he depends on Derek, and his betas. Stiles is raging, pissed at them but even more so at himself. His father didn’t raise him to be like that.

He paces back and forth a couple of times and then he’s bursting into the bedroom.

Derek is on his bed, leant on his headboard as he reads over his notes on the Argents. It’s unfair how much he looks like a catalogue model with those sweatpants, naked feet crossed at the ankles, five days stubble and massive arms holding the notebook casually over his impressive abs.

And maybe Stiles is annoyed and exasperated, but that doesn’t mean Derek isn’t being ridiculous by just... existing like he does.

When Derek doesn’t even glance up to acknowledge his arrival, Stiles huffs.

“Aren’t you gonna scent me tonight?” He finally says, surprising himself. What? That’s not what he came to say!

Derek grows still, book still in his lap. He lowers it and looks at Stiles with an unreadable expression. “Are you asking me to?” He arches an eyebrow.

“All I’m saying is that, I thought it was important,” Stiles gesticulates. “Y’know, for me! To being alive, you know?”

Derek snorts. “You’ll be fine.” He grabs his book and goes back to reading.

“What does that even mean?” Stiles asks in exasperation. “Seriously Derek, I’m starting to get sick of you always keeping me out of things.”

“Have you ever wondered,” Derek starts saying as he puts the book aside and finally centers all his attention on Stiles. “That maybe I’m trying to protect you?”

“Don’t bullshit me,” Stiles snorts. “You only care about yourself, why would you care what happens to me?”

“Because you’re the only one who can bring me to the Argents,” Derek deadpans.

Well, that shouldn’t disappoint as much as it does.

“I already told you everything I know about them,” Stiles crosses his arms defiantly.
“Not everything,” Derek leans forward, suddenly cunning eyes pinning Stiles.

“I- I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Stiles stutters.

“I know you’ve been keeping something from me. I can smell it on you. I know when you lie, when you tell half truths.” Derek regards him a moment, studying his reaction as Stiles tries to pull on his best poker face. “Don’t worry,” Derek scoffs as he leans back. “I’ll figure it out sooner or later.”

“Cocky bastard,” Stiles snorts.

Derek crooks his head to the side, regarding him with a slightly amused expression. “Alright, pop in,” he says, patting the bed.

“What?” Stiles squeals.

“You want to get scented,” Derek explains, clearly making fun of him. “So come here, I can do it as I read.”

Stiles hesitates a moment, considering going back to the living room and hiding there forever. But he can’t really count on being lucky. He doesn’t know if carrying Derek’s scent is actually saving his life or not in a daily basis. And he can’t risk it.

Cursing, he takes his plaid off and then pulls his t-shirt over his head in a quick movement.

Derek is staring at him over the top of the book he’s clearly pretending to read at this point, and when Stiles moves to the edge of the bed, he lowers it and calls him over with two fingers.

“No matter what you think, I am trying to keep you in one piece,” Derek says, head slightly bent down as he looks at him.

Stiles suddenly can’t swallow the lump in his throat. “I know,” He agrees with conviction.

Derek snorts. “You make no sense.”

“What does that mean?” Stiles pauses before climbing to the bed.

“A moment ago you said,” Derek points at him. “That I don’t care about anyone but myself.”

“And you said you needed me for my information on the Argents,” Stiles throws back as he climbs on his knees. “So I know you’ll keep me alive. Because you need me,” he informs with a shit eating grin.

“Shut up,” Derek says without spite. He opens his arms and Stiles moves until he’s over Derek, lowering down on top of him, face buried in the crook of Derek’s neck and leg thrown over his hips.

The moment he’s there, he sighs, suddenly tired. It’s not even dinner time, what’s wrong with him?

“Go to sleep,” Derek murmurs, book rising in front of his face as he reads, while his other arm holds Stiles against him.

“Good idea,” Stiles murmurs, already half asleep.

He thought this would be awkward after the unauthorized boner from this morning, but like he said, even the most bizarre situations can fall into normalcy. Stiles has noticed that he tosses and turns when he ends up alone on the couch in the mornings. It hasn’t been very long since they started sleeping together, and his body is already used to it.
He relaxes now, Derek’s high body temperature making him sleepy. A while later he feels Derek move, putting the book aside before turning off the lights. He lays back down with Stiles still tucked between his arm and his chest and Derek shifts, getting them both comfortable.

Stiles drifts off quickly after that.

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The moment Stiles falls asleep, Derek untangles himself and gets out of bed.

He can barely breathe. He's been concentrating on his own heartbeat to remain calm, worried about losing control. Moving to the couch, he sits down, elbows resting on his knees as he holds his head with both hands.

Derek had a plan, he'd thought everything out and had a plan. Then they arrived and his Alpha instincts took over. He's not even sure what's gotten into him, he's never felt this way. When he saw that other werewolf hovering over Stiles, marking him, he lost it. He wanted to rip him apart. He wanted to claim Stiles right there, for everyone else to see. He had been so painfully aroused, too. He didn't understand but his wolf did; it was simple, Stiles was his and someone had dared touch what was his. But he's never been so close to getting his revenge, and he's not going to let a human distract him. There are enough complications without adding another one to the equation.

Derek senses Stiles waking up in the other room and he's on his feet and moving before he can even think. Stiles is rubbing his eye and yawning by the entrance when he finds him.

"What's wrong?" he asks in a hushed tone.

"You weren't there," Stiles explains, still half asleep.

"Go back to bed," Derek closes his eyes as he speaks. Damn, it's like he exists merely to torture Derek.

"Come with me." Stiles reaches for him, fingers pressing against his stomach, like he were aiming for cloth to grab and pull from, but met skin and muscle instead.

Derek grabs his hand to put it away, but Stiles uses the link to pull him, guiding him back to bed. And Derek just allows it.

They climb back into bed together and Stiles is there instantly, searching for his spot, that divot in Derek's shoulder where he always rests his head. His eyes widen as he realizes Stiles has his own spot on Derek's body.

Derek needs to move him away before he gives in. Because all he wants to do is press Stiles' face down and claim him. He’s so hard, he's afraid Stiles is going to notice. So he rolls him away, and then Derek is up and moving quietly to the bathroom, where he takes a very cold shower, ignoring his cock as he washes himself until his teeth chatter.

This is why he never wanted a slave. Humans complicate things. His wolf wants things he doesn't want to want. But there's no way to reason with the instinct once it's awoken.
Stiles lies awake in bed. He hears the water running in the shower for what seems like hours, eyes pinned in the darkness of the ceiling.

He has time to think of what Erica told him today. Her words run through his mind over and over again, his heart racing as he considers it. She assured him Derek wouldn’t turn him down. She made it sound like it would be easy. He looks down at his erection and snorts. This is clearly not a take-one-for-the-team type of situation, no matter how much he tries to delude himself. He wants Derek, has wanted him for a while now. Stiles knows Derek can be a savage prick at times, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t also a very attractive one.

Derek opens the door then. He's still wet, wearing a towel around his hips. The light of the bathroom coming from behind keeps him in shadows, and Stiles feels his heart hammering as he comes to a decision. He doesn't speak, just uncovers himself, showing Derek how hard he is.

A clear invitation hang in the air between them. Derek growls, low and rough, making Stiles shiver; he thinks Derek is about to pounce and he's waiting eagerly.

"Take a shower if you need to," Derek finally whispers. "And go back to the couch when you’re done."

Stiles realizes he isn't breathing. Mortified, he scrambles out of bed. Of course Derek doesn't want him, what was he thinking? Thanks a lot, Erica. He should have known. He has experience with rejection, after all. But somehow this hurts more than usual. He let himself be vulnerable for a moment and got a slap in return. Stiles blames the werewolf mojo they have been doing. All that weird cuddling got to him, it has to be that. He suspects that's what happens when you are a virgin, you mistake things, you give them more importance than they really have.

He rushes to the bathroom without even looking a Derek, and bolts himself in, pressing his back to the door. Looking at the mirror in front of him, Stiles studies his reflection: A gawky, pale boy, too flustered and shaky. He snorts, how could he do something so stupid? He feels like walking over and hitting the mirror with his forehead so he doesn't have to look at his stupid face anymore.

Focus, he thinks. He still has to get out of here and find his father. That's the only thing that matters at this point.

Taking big calming breaths, he moves away from the door and starts the shower, getting naked and inside quickly. He’s going to take a cold shower until he sees the little red mark indicating the warm water. Stiles looks back down to his hard cock and changes his mind. He hasn’t come in a long time, maybe that's the problem. He used to spend a lot of time with his hand before werewolves came crashing into his life.

Stiles smirks into the faucet, feeling the hot water running down his body. He palms himself and yes, he’s still hard. He's never been so hard. He starts stroking himself and a shaky breath escapes his lips. This is exactly what he needed. Arching his back, he braces himself against the shower wall and starts pumping faster. He doesn’t want to last long, he just wants to come desperately.

Stiles bites down on his bottom lip, groaning and pushing back against the wall as his body rocks and he feels the orgasm build inside him, heat waves running up and down his spine, making him shiver uncontrollably as he finally comes. Closing his eyes, he sees the image of Derek in bed reading his notebook. Stiles groans, unsure if it's because of the intense aftershocks or because of the
mental image.

He stops touching his still stubbornly hard cock and moves the faucets from hot to cold, gasping when freezing water hits his sensitive body. Just one time is clearly not going to be enough and he doesn't want to take forever, or have to walk back through the bedroom with a hard on.

After five minutes he's shaking and soft. Satisfied, he towels himself dry and puts on his used underwear, dismissing the pants. He gets out and walks quickly back to the living room, where he grabs his pj bottoms and puts them on. Still shivering, Stiles goes to the couch and hides under the comforter. He intentionally avoided looking at Derek as he passed through the room, and now he regrets it. He's not going to be able to fall asleep thinking whether or not Derek heard him.

The next morning, there's a knock on the door that has Stiles nearly jumping out of his skin. Disoriented, he disentangles himself from the comforter and glances around the room, realizing Derek already left and he didn't even notice.

Another knock on the door has him putting on a shirt and rushing to the door. He expects to find Scott in the other side, but instead he's greeted by his mother.

"Stiles," Ms. McCall says fondly.

"What-" he stutters, barely registering his jaw dropping down or how, a second later, he's dragging her into a fierce hug.

"I have no idea how you ended up here," he beams. "But I was never more happy to see a friendly face in my life!"

Ms. McCall hugs him back and pats his shoulder. "Come on, let's get inside and close this door."

"Sure," Stiles says roughly, swallowing back the tears pricking at his eyes and stepping back to allow her in.

Once they are in the living room, Ms. McCall sits on the couch while Stiles regards her with incredulity. "How- I mean," he paces back and forth in front of the coffee table, hands running wild over his buzz cut.

"I assume from your reaction that my son didn't tell you I was here," she says calming.

"No! Of course he didn't!"

Scott's mom chuckles. "He's just overprotective sometimes."

"I-" Stiles pauses for the first time and thinks about it carefully. "I'd do the same, if it was my dad."

"Come sit with me," she pats on the couch next to her. "Let me see you, it's been a while."

"Yeah," he murmurs as he sits down. "A lot has changed."

"I can see that. You're all grown up now," she says, cupping one his cheeks softly.

"What are you doing here?" Stiles whispers, his eyes narrowing in disbelief as a silly smile forms on his face.

"Scott came back for me," she smiles. "He knew I would never stop looking for him. So after he was in control of his wolf, he searched for me."
"I knew you had left Beacon Hills, but I never..." he averts his eyes. "I always felt guilty about losing contact after he-"

"Stiles," Ms. McCall holds his hand. "He left without a word. It took me a long time to forgive him, even when he came back and saved me. I can only imagine what you're going through here."

"He saved you?" Stiles asks in surprise.

"I-" Ms. McCall grimaces a bit. "I went into wolf territory with the idea of finding him. Some werewolves found me instead. Thank god Scott saved me. He challenged the werewolf and won."

"That- that sounds awful! He won you back?!" Stiles exclaims.

"This world isn't perfect, Stiles. We're at war and awful things happen at war. You keep that in mind and thank the universe for every little good thing that happens to you."

"But then you-"

"Yes, I'm Scott's slave here," she says calming. Stiles tries to protest but Ms. McCall presses on. "Before you say anything let me explain," she rushes. "I don't have much time and Scott didn't want me to see you so I can't stay much longer."

"Scott didn't? Why?" Stiles asks in a high pitched voice.

"Because he's worried about you and didn't want me getting his best friend into more trouble," Ms. McCall admits.

"I'm so confused right now, you have no idea."

Melissa chuckles, clasping his hands. "There are families living here, Stiles. Not all werewolves are like Peter Hale. Some love and respect humans. Some have family members who are human. Partners, siblings, children. And the only way to be with them and be safe is to go along with Peter's rules. Don't get me wrong," she says seriously. "Peter has a lot of allies. Some very powerful ones. A lot of werewolves despair and hate humans, have slaves to torture them, have fun in humiliating them. But then, there are others just pretending."

"But the scent-marking..."

"Family has a connection, Stiles. I'm Scott's because we share that connection. It's not really a physical thing. The werewolves who mistreat their slaves, who kidnap humans, they use the marking to do horrible things. But that was never what this was about. Ask Derek, his pack used to be formed by werewolves and humans a long time ago."

"You mean his family?"

"Yes," Ms. McCall holds both Stiles' hands, looking at him straight in the eye. "That's why when he picked you- when he started treating you like he has... Some of us- There's a revolution coming, Stiles. Humans and werewolves together, we want this system to end. And Derek is an inspiration for many werewolves to face what's truly happening. They think, if his own nephew doesn't share his beliefs, why should we? Derek and you... You have sparked a fire. And it has spread to a lot of us. Slaves whisper about you. I've heard them, while doing chores where they won't be overheard, they repeat the things you've said. They look up to you, Stiles."

"I- I don't know what you think I can do, but I am no one. I'm not a hero."
"You don't have to do anything," she reassures him. "You've already done enough. You are a hero."

"Is this what Scott didn't want you to tell me?"

"He's worried that if you know, you'll want to help and that'll put you in danger."

Stiles sighs. "He's such a fool."

"He cares about you."

"I know, I care about him, too. Even after everything, he's my best friend. If anything happened to him-" Stiles chokes.

Ms. McCall squeezes his hands fiercely.

"What do you want me to do?" He finally asks, resolute.

"Talk to Derek," she pleads. "I talked to Scott and we know it was never Derek's intention for any of this to happen."

"Trust me, he doesn't give a crap," Stiles rolls his eyes.

"That's what you need to change."

"How?" he frowns in confusion.

"You're his mate, aren't you?" Ms. McCall asks then.

"Whoaaahhhhh!!" Stiles jumps back on his feet, quickly moving away. "Slow down! Pardon my french but, no fucking way!"

All he can think is mate? Mate? Mate?! Like a fucking mantra of doom. Mates don't exist, that's fairytale bullshit. How could that be? You mate for life? Please, Twilight tried it years ago and it was awful enough as fiction. No, just no. Stiles is freaking out. And all he can think is, we haven't even have sex yet. At the 'yet', his brain short-circuits.

Ms. McCall frowns. She hesitates a moment and then she's on her feet, moving closer and holding Stiles' shoulders gently. "You're the only one who can talk to him," she says slowly.

"I don't understand why you think-"

"I talked to Deaton," she cuts in. "I know the connection he saw between you two. Talk to him, just try it. If it doesn't work out, then fine, I won't ask you again. But what if I'm right? What if you can convince Derek to lead a revolt against Peter?"

"Peter is his only family," Stiles tries to reason. "He would never-"

"We don't know that," Melissa insists. "Who do you think ordered the alphas to attack him, to try to kill you?"

"Kill me?" Stiles exclaims.

"I heard from the Alpha’s slave, his target was you."

"Oh my fucking god!" Stiles doubles over, suddenly unable to breathe.
"Shhh," Ms. McCall rubs his back in circles. "Calm down, it's okay. Derek was there, he saved you, remember?"

"What does Scott think of all this?" Stiles ignores her comment about Derek and gets his breathing slowly back to normal.

"He-" Ms. McCall grimaces. "He doesn't trust Derek. Never did. Doesn't believe Derek will care enough to help us. He's worried something will happen to me."

"Why doesn't he trust Derek?"

"Derek wasn't always like he's with you. He was cruel, cold, distant. I think he just didn’t know how to handle other people. You’ve helped to change that."

"Please," Stiles says sassily.

"Hey, I'm serious." She slaps his head.

Stiles cringes, head bent down as he rubs where Ms. McCall hit him. "Ouch!"

"I know what I'm saying," she insists.

"Alright." Stiles shows his hands in surrender. "No more bodily harm, please."

"Don’t be a drama queen," she rolls her eyes.

"I'll talk to him," he tells her. "It won't matter one bit, but I'll try."

"Do it quickly," she says, nodding as a grin stretched across her face. "Because we’re getting out of here soon."

"Excuse me, did you just say that we’re getting out of this place?" Stiles blinked a couple of times, unable to process her words.

"I can’t tell you anything more," Ms. McCall smiles. "Just be ready. And now come here, let me hug you one last time before I leave."

"You’re leaving?" Stiles asks, sounding a bit more needy than intended.

"I’ve stayed longer than is wise," she whispers right next to his head. "Be strong, Stiles. You’re not alone."

Stiles chokes back a sob as he clings to her. He didn’t know he needed this until he heard the words. But he’s been feeling so utterly alone. Knowing that there’s another human in his same position, who knows what he’s going through, who cares about him, changes everything.

- 

Derek is beating his betas in the training center. There’s no other way to describe it.

Erica is already splashed on the floor next to him, observing how Isaac stubbornly insists on testing his strength against Derek, who keeps snapping his bones and sending him away.
“So,” Erica tosses casually. “Did Stiles talk to you?”

“About what?” Derek asks without taking his eyes off Isaac, who is once again trying to attack him.

“I don’t know,” Erica shrugs.

“Erica,” he says suspiciously. “What are you talking about?” He grabs Isaac and throws him away, breaking him a few ribs.

“Oh my god, Isaac,” Erica exclaims. “Would you stop already?”

“No, one day I’ll make it!” Isaac says out of breathe as he bends over and holds his side where his ribs are already healing.

Derek narrows his eyes, staring at Erica. He can sense when his betas have done something they shouldn’t. Call it a werewolf power, or Derek just knowing Erica well enough by now.

“Boyd, replace me in kicking Isaac’s ass,” he orders as he walks over to where Erica is still on the floor. “And you,” he points at her. “On your feet.”

Isaac makes a cat call when Derek says that. “Uh oh, someone is in troubleeeeee!”

“Shut up!” Erica snaps back, getting on her feet.

“Erica,” Derek looks her straight in the eye. “What did you say to Stiles?”

“I-” she falters. “Don’t freak, okay?”

“I told him he should do something about you two,” she rushes to explain.

“Do... something,” Derek arches an eyebrow. He can feel Isaac and Boyd standing still behind them, listening to their conversation. “Did I tell you to stop?” he asks over his shoulder, making his two betas hurry to fight again, although it’s only a half-hearted attempt.

“Derek, you know how dangerous things are getting,” Erica tries to plead. “He needed to know that you, well, you know,” she shrugs, refusing to say it out loud.

“Yes?” Derek smirks menacingly. “Go on.”

“That you want him, too,” Erica speaks so quickly, the words come out together in a rush of air.

Derek pauses. He can feel three pair of eyes staring at him expectantly. But he can’t react, all he can do is remember last night, how Stiles offered himself.

“You have no idea what you did,” he breathes out, his body taut as he remembers hearing Stiles in the shower. Last night was a torture for him, and all because his betas interfered without his permission.


Derek sees it then, what he has to do to regain control. He ignores the little protest in the back of his mind, deciding on it.

“I’m calling the deal off,” he chokes out. “I need you to get him out of here for me. I can’t—” he
pauses. “Just do it, make sure he’s safe.”

Derek feels a pang on his chest as he speaks. Ignoring it, he turns around and leaves the training center. He goes straight back to the room, knowing Stiles will be there, planning on telling him.

When he opens the door and sees Stiles on the couch, though, he pauses. He thought he could do this, that he could look at Stiles and tell him they were over, that he was moving out and to hell with their deal, that his betas would keep him alive until he could escape.

Derek sags against the closed door. Fuck, he can’t do it.

“Come here,” he says instead, calling Stiles with his hand.

After a pause, Stiles rolls his eyes but stands and walks over anyway.

When he’s in front of him, Stiles gasps and holds still as Derek moves his fingers up along his arm, following the line of his collarbone until he finds the collar. Pausing a moment, Derek looks at him straight in the eye and then pulls Stiles’ head down toward his chest until the collar's clasp is visible. Derek undoes it, taking it off and throwing it to the floor.

"You don't need this," he murmurs right against the skin covered a moment ago, omiting the 'anymore'.

He feels Stiles shuddering in response and Derek holds his breath. He runs his mouth along Stiles’ neck, not really kissing it, just brushing his lips to the skin usually covered by the collar. He allows himself this moment, knowing he won’t touch Stiles again. The thought is dangerous, it makes him want more, be greedy in the way he presses his mouth against Stiles’ pulse, trying to memorize it. Stiles sighs, sagging against him. "But you said never take it off," he murmurs. Derek ignores him, breathing in his scent. "You said it was the difference between life and death," Stiles insists softly.

Derek groans right against his neck. He realizes what he’s doing and takes a hasty step back. He can’t say it. Stiles has no idea why he took his collar off, and Derek can’t say it. The words are like stones at the bottom of his throat, he can’t swallow them, but he can’t spit them out, either. He’s stuck.

Derek moves passed Stiles and goes to his room, to put space between them. But of course, Stiles can’t drop it.

"I mean," Stiles calls from the living room. "What if someone comes and they see me without it?"

"You want to put it back on?" Derek pauses in the middle of his bedroom, eyes closed and fists clenching and unclenching. Stop talking, don’t say it.

"I'm just pointing out what you said!" Stiles says indignantly, walking into the room.

"If you grew fond of it," Derek fakes a mock tone, turning around to face Stiles with his best blank face.

"Uh, I like to be alive," Stiles says annoyedly. "Give me one good reason why I should take it off when it's keeping me alive?"

Derek rubs his face, sighing. "I don't like seeing it around your neck," he says roughly. It’s the truth, or at least, part of it. It’s more than he wanted to admit. He hates the collar and he’s obsessed with it. The collar is like the physical representation of the internal push and pull Derek has been struggling
Stiles pauses. "Why not? I thought it was wolf-nip for you guys."

Derek huffs, sitting on the edge of the bed. "All I'm saying is that you don't have to wear it."

"And I'm saying I want to!" Stiles snaps back. "No, wait. That's not- shit. It just- It makes me feel safe, okay?" Stiles finally admits. "And I know that's fucked up. So you see, I kind of have a problem. Either I give in to my Stockholm syndrome and wear the freaking collar or do as you say and leave it off."

"Tough decision," Derek snorts.

"I'm serious," Stiles insists, licking his lips nervously.

"Do whatever you want," Derek shrugs, holding back from just snapping at Stiles to stop talking about the damn collar.

"Ugh, I hate my life," Stiles curses, spazztic hands flying wild around him as he goes back to the entrance and grabs the collar, putting it back on.

At the sound of the clasp, Derek closes his eyes. He can’t seem to escape.

“So, um...” Stiles says tentatively, walking back to the bedroom. “I know we had a deal but...”

At the word deal, Derek snaps his head up, looking at him in surprise. There’s no way Stiles knows.

“I have a proposition,” Stiles continues.

Derek arches an eyebrow, waiting for him to explain.

“Look, I know you don’t care but-”

“Then don’t bother,” Derek cuts him in.

“I have to, okay?” Stiles sounds annoyed. “Turns out I’ve become the Katniss Everdeen of the wolf den, which by the way makes you Peeta. I’d say Scott is Gale, but that’d be totally awkward, so yeah, not going there. Anyway, I still want to get out of here and find my dad but I know he wouldn’t approve of me leaving all these people behind.”

“What are you talking about?” Derek asks, suddenly worried.

“You know,” Stiles gestures with his hands. “The little vive la révolution we apparently initiated? I don’t know the details but, like... Dude, we can’t just leave all those slaves and werewolves behind when we leave.”

“Who told you that?” Derek narrows his eyes.

“Not relevant,” Stiles dismisses passionately. "What matters is that we just have to do something!"

"Not our concern," Derek dismisses. This is the last conversation he thought he’d be having with Stiles after deciding to drop the whole slave thing.

"There are werewolves, too! Don’t you care about them at least?"

"I don't, and neither should you,” Derek stand and stalks forward. “You think your father will
survive much longer while you’re here? You should think about him more and less about these strangers who wouldn’t hesitate in selling you for their own freedom.”

Stiles seems horrified. He looks at Derek with his big doe eyes, making Derek curse inwardly. It’s obvious that he can’t just abandon Stiles when the moron has decided to take on a crusade for the weak and defenseless. Who in his right mind decides to do that when their own life is pending from thin air?

“I don’t have time for this,” Derek growls. He shoves Stile harder than necessary, pinning him against one of the bedroom doors. “You’ll forget about this if you’re smart.”

“And if I don’t?” Stiles asks, licking his lips nervously as Derek glares at him.

“I won’t be able to protect you,” Derek finally says, eyes following Stiles’ lips movement.

“I can live with that,” Stiles breathes out, giving him a sardonic grin.

“No, you can’t,” Derek steps back, he crosses the space to the main door in half a heartbeat and is closing behind him before Stiles has taken his first gulp of air.

Outside, his three betas are waiting for him.

“Let’s go,” Derek orders without even looking at them. “We’ve got a lot to do.”

No one speaks as they all get on the elevator. Once inside, Derek turns around to look at Erica.

“Forget what I said earlier,” he says, voice firm and authority.

Derek is getting his pack out of the wolf den. Tonight.
Attack and Surrender

When Derek leaves, Stiles slides down to the floor and stays there for a long time, just staring at nothing and trying not to think.

He’s not sure what he’s more disappointed about, Derek not caring about what he had to say, or Ms. McCall being wrong about them. Not that he believed in that bullshit, but still. Mates. Stiles snorts.

“Give me a break,” he murmurs, fingers running over his hair and realizing for the first time it’s grown longer. Stiles pauses, thinking how long he’s been in this place, away from his dad.

That thought gives him pause. The longer he stays in the den the colder his dad’s trail will get. He doesn’t know what Derek wants to do, but Stiles supposes it’s safe to say they left their deal behind. He has told Derek all he’s willing to share about the Argents. There’s only one thing left, help Stiles to escape. Problem is, Derek doesn’t seem in any hurry to do that.

Stiles comes to the conclusion that he can’t keep waiting. He needs to talk to Ms. McCall and plan his own escape. Derek doesn’t trust him, so Stiles shouldn’t do it, either.

Scott appears a couple of hours later.

Stiles can’t leave the room without company, which means that some days he can’t go to the cafeteria if none of the betas come to pick him up and he has to make use of his stocked food. But he hates eating alone. He usually celebrates whenever Scott remembers to save him from his prison. Not today, though.

“Hey buddy,” Stiles says, his voice a bit higher than normal. He cringes, waiting for Scott to call him on it and demand to know what’s going on. He can almost hear himself spilling the beans about Scott’s mom, before he realizes his friend has flopped on the couch next to him, head between his hands.

“What’s wrong?” Stiles asks, confused.

Scott sighs dramatically, and a second later he groans, throwing his arms up in the air before getting back up in a huff. “Dude, being a werewolf sucks sometimes!”

“Tell me something I don’t know,” Stiles snorts.

“I’m still having problems controlling my wolf.” Scott drops his head down. Stiles is so surprised, he doesn’t even know how to respond. “I should be able to control the change, but I can’t.”

“Why not?” Stiles frowns.

“They think it's because I was bitten.” Scott shrugs.

“And what does Derek say?” Stiles asks.

“I don’t know.” Scott frowns.

“You don’t know?” Stiles asks with an arched brow.

“I just can’t stand it when he tries to go all Alpha on me,” Scott grimaces, a bit exasperated.

“Dude...” Stiles’ eyes widen. “He is an Alpha, and you need help.”
“He’s not mine,” Scott snaps.

“Who cares! Just listen to whatever he has to say.”

“I don’t know, man,” Scott says, rubbing the back of his neck, clearly offput and defensive.

“Or...” Stiles trails off, mischievous smile stretching his face.”Maybe I could try to help you? Like, why can't you control it? What, you get all wolfed out and start killing poor defenseless bunnies?”

“Something like that...” Scott replies uncomfortably.

“Hm.” Stiles strokes his chin with the back of his hand. “Isaac said something about an anchor. Maybe you need that?”

“Anchor? What do you mean?” Scott asks, confused.

“Dude, really?” Stiles scoffs. “What have you been doing all this time? An anchor, like something that'll hold you back, y’know?”

“Okay.” Scott nods. “Something like what?”

“I don’t know.” Stiles rolls his eyes. “I guess it depends on the wolf.”

Scott frowns, lowering his eyes. And Stiles can almost hear his brain thinking. A moment later he murmurs. “Alli- uh, no. Never mind.”

“You were gonna say Allison,” Stiles deadpans, not even surprised his friend is still obsessing over her.

“Maybe? I still...” Scott trails off with a sigh. “But I don't even know where she is.”

“You probably don’t need her GPS location to use her as your anchor, just saying,” Stiles says, shrugging

“Ugh, I don’t know, dude,” Scott frowns. “It’s not exactly easy to think about her.”

“Right...” Stiles nods, crossing his arms. He can understand that.

The silence stretches between them while Stiles ponders if he should say what he’s thinking.

“What about Isaac?” he finally blurts out, the idea having circled around in his head since the beginning of the conversation.

“What?”

“Isaac, he-” Stiles gestures, moving his palms back and forth against each other a couple of times. “Well, you and he are close.”

“Oh, I guess so,” Scott says, unsure.

“He could be your anchor,” Stiles explains with a tentative smile.

“Just because we’re close-”

“Come on, dude,” Stiles says, cutting him off. Scott opens his arms wide, inviting a more detailed response. “Seriously? You’re really gonna make me spell it out for you?” Stiles says with an
exasperated sigh.

“’It’ what?” Scott snaps.

“He likes you!” Stiles says, way too full of exasperated annoyance at the two’s puppy love tip-toeing around each other to play this game anymore with Scott.

Scott blinks at him. “No, he doesn’t,” he replies with a derisive snort.

“Please.” Stiles rolls his eyes. “He does, he totally wants your cubs!”

“Okay, stop,” Scott says, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Come on, it’s obvious the guy is smitten with you.”

“Stiles,” Scott growls.

“All I’m saying is that I thought you two may-”

“Shut up, okay?” Scott growls, yellow eyes flashing.

Stiles stumbles back in surprise to trip on the couch. He ends up half sprawled across it. “Dude! Woah! Wolf alert!” he exclaims.

“Just drop it,” Scott hisses, breathing hard as he calms down slowly, his eyes going back to their normal brown color.

“Alright man, I-”

“Besides he's with Erica,” Scott says, surprising Stiles.

He looks at him a beat, picking his words carefully. “Nah... Erica is with Boyd. They try to be sneaky but, pfff obvious much?”

“What?” Scott looks taken aback.

“Yeah, man.” Stiles claps his shoulder. “Isaac only has puppy eyes for you.”

Scott growls, rough and low one more time. Stiles brings his hands up in surrender. “Got it, subject dropped. Totally dropped. Not gonna go there ever again buddy.”

“Sorry.” Scott shakes his head. “See? This is what I was talking about.”

“Yeah.” Stiles nods. “You totally need help with that wolf temper. Maybe some nice yoga?” Stiles jokes, before his stomach picks that moment to growl angrily and they both look at each other before laughing.

“Okay, I’m getting you out of here,” Scott says, pointing to the door.

“Thank god,” Stiles exclaims as they walk outside.

“By the way,” Scott says casually as Stiles closes the door. “I know my mom was here.”

Stiles falters and nearly stumbles over his own feet. “How- what?”

“I could smell her in your room,” Scott says proudly. “But she also told me she came to see you,” he finishes, sheepish.
“Dude,” Stiles hisses. He grabs ahold of Scott’s arm. “She told me about-”

“Yeah, I know,” Scott interjects, nodding. “It’s fine, I’ve realized it’s good that you know. That way you can help us now.” He smiles this time, genuinely pleased and Stiles isn’t sure how to react.

“Help with what?” Stiles frowns while they resume walking.

“With getting out of here,” Scott breathes out, bright, hopeful smile now helplessly contagious.

It lasts about .2 seconds before Scott is suddenly wolfed out and growling. Stiles almost thinks he’s growling at him, but then he notices the two rather big and definitely imposing werewolves standing in front of the elevators and he pauses.

"Nothing here for you, guys," Scott growls, shifting Stiles behind him, apparently in protective mama wolf mode.

"Alpha Hale wants to see the slave," one of the werewolves says, nodding at Stiles.

“You mean Derek?” Stiles asks because he couldn’t hold his tongue if his life depended on it. Which in this case maybe wasn’t too far off from the mark.

"You're not taking him," Scott says fiercely, crouching down, fangs showing.

"Scott, it's okay-" Stiles starts but then the quiet werewolf is darting forward to attack Scott, all claws and wolf-speed. "No! There's no need for that!" Stiles protests, trying to get between them, but the other werewolf is suddenly in his face, slapping him hard enough to make him stumble back into the nearest wall. His head bangs against the wall, his teeth chattering from the impact.

"Stiles!" Scott shouts and that’s all the opening the other two wolves need. One punches Scott in the face, the other gutting him with his claws, and he falls to the ground with a solid thump, blood everywhere.

Stiles can’t breath. His vision is swimming and it’s not just from a concussion. He tries to speak, but he’s not sure if he actually makes any sound. His head throbs and he’s pretty sure there’s blood dripping onto his neck. At least, there’s a wetness there.

Except none of that matters, he can’t feel any of it. Because Scott isn’t moving, Scott’s not getting up. The only thing he can feel is his chest aching, a burning sensation in his gut. His skin is too tight and each shaky shallow gasp of air tastes of copper.

Scott’s still not moving.

When the two werewolves are satisfied that he’s not going to be moving, they turn to regard him.

"Is he alive?" Stiles whispers, his voice shaking so badly he can hardly understand himself.

"He'll live," the talkative werewolf responds, shrugging with a menacing grin. The other one grabs Stiles, clawed fingers scraping against his skin as he manhandles him into the elevator.

"Where are you taking me?" He stutters, his whole body shivering uncontrollably. He turns in the wolf’s grasp so he can watch Scott. Hoping, praying there’s a twitch. *Anything.*

The doors slide shut. Nothing.

The two don’t talk to him again as the elevator takes them to the top floor and Stiles finally gets it. The penthouse only means one person.
The elevator dings, the elevator doors opening onto a short hallway. The two werewolves shove him inside the same room Stiles visited the first night he’d arrived, and lock the door behind them.

"Stiles," Peter exclaims in delight a moment later, entering the room from another door. "You came."

"Your dogs didn't give me much of a choice," he snaps back not even trying to control himself. He’s still shaking so badly. He fists his hands to try to hide it.

Derek’s uncle falters, his eyes briefly turning cold and menacing before shifting back to his charming self again. "You know how security can be sometimes," he excuses his men with a gesture. "Please forgive them if they caused you any inconvenience." He continues with a sympathetic head tilt.

"Are you kidding me?" Stiles snorts. "They almost killed Scott, and look at my face!"

"Stiles." Peter smiles indulgently, while the gleam in his eyes speaks of nothing but. "There's no use in discussing this. I don't control what my men do."

"Right. Well, you wanted to see me," Stiles says, crossing his arms and raising his chin, trying to hide how utterly scared he was. "I'm not scared of you," he says, halfway to help reassure himself.

"Interesting," Peter cocks his head to regard him. "Why don’t you sit with me?" He gestures to the table and Stiles obeys, walking with shaky legs to the nearest chair.

"I’ve wanted to have a little chat with you for a while now." Peter grins, all predator as he sits a few chairs away. “Can you imagine why?"

“Because of my charming personality?” Stiles bubbles out before he can think. Words are his only defense mechanism.

Derek’s uncle chuckles, hard eyes pinning him with sudden intensity. “The truth is that I have some questions for you. Are you willing to answer me, Stiles?”

The way Peter says his name makes Stiles shudder. “Sure,” he croaks out.

“Excellent,” Peter clasps his hands. “Tell me, how much did your father really share with you about his job?” When Stiles doesn’t speak, Peter continues patiently. “Come on, I'm not my nephew, I can handle the truth, you don't have to lie to save your life."

"Is this about the Argents?" Stiles asks in confusion. He doesn’t want his dad involved in any conversation with Peter.

"In part," Peter shrugs. "I'm just curious about how much you've lied to Derek and how much you really know about what your father used to do."

"I'm telling him the truth," Stiles says, indignantly. Peter’s opinion doesn’t matter to Stiles, he is a lunatic, but, that doesn’t mean he doesn’t like what Peter is insinuating.

"Did your father ever tell you when there were new werewolves in town? New attacks?" Peter asks with sudden, pointed interest.

"I- uh, yeah I guess, I helped sometimes but he knew I didn't like it." Stiles shifts uncomfortably in his chair. What the hell was going on?

“You didn’t like it, huh?” Peter asks, clearly amused. “You know, I used to know your mother. Brave woman. I can see her in you when you speak.”
Stiles tenses, completely taken aback by Peter’s words.

“But tell me,” Peter insists. “Since your father knew you took after your mother, another wolf lover—” Peter makes a pause. “It’s been a while since I last heard that phrase. Wolf lover. Furry lover.” Peter pulls a face, a mixture of disgust and delight. “I’m sure you don’t like it very much, do you? I’m sure you heard people calling your mother that all the time.”

Stiles is barely breathing. He can’t move, can’t even speak. His eyes burn as he forces himself to swallow through the sudden lump in his throat.

“Touchy subjects?” Peter chuckles. “Well, my point is, since your father ‘talked’ to you, did he also tell you every time a werewolf died in Beacon Hills?”

Stiles blinks. He clears his throat several times, trying to regain his composure. “I- He didn’t have to tell me, everyone knew when a werewolf got killed.”

“But what if a hunter didn’t do it? Let’s say, you find a rogue werewolf already dead...”

“Uh,” Stiles arches an eyebrow. “People don’t care who or how werewolves are killed, only that they’re dead.”

Peter throws his head back, laughing in delight. “That’s a very good answer.”

He rises and moves to a small bar attached to the wall, pouring some whiskey in a short, wide glass before returning to the table.

“You know,” he says, cordially, smelling the liquor. “I’ve tried to kill you several times since you arrived. But apparently you’re tougher than you look.”

Stiles’ heart clenches painfully, skipping a beat before thundering inside his chest, which suddenly feels too small.

“By all means you should be dead by now,” Peter continues matter-of-factly, shrugging before taking a sip. “But here you still are. It’s quite fascinating, don’t you think? I decided to get rid of you because you’re a bad influence on my nephew, of course. But it turns out, for a mere human, you are remarkably unbreakable. I have to admit, I’m very intrigued,” Peter practically purrs the last words, flashing a grin full of teeth. Stiles grips the armrests so tightly his knuckles hurt.

“I had decided to kill you myself today.” Peter points at him with the hand holding the glass. “But now- I’m thinking you’re too peculiar to waste like that.” He finishes his whiskey and gets to his feet again, the movements a little too quick, the chair clattering a little too loudly.

Stiles flinches, already expecting sharp claws on his face or teeth scraping his neck. And he can think of Scott bleeding in that corridor. He can’t die yet, his friend needs him.

“Easy boy,” Peter says, tilting his head with a smirk before heading back to the bar. He watches Stiles as he pours himself another shot.

“I could also claim you,” Peter adds with a shrug. “After all, Derek hasn’t done it yet. I thought that could be fun, you know? It’d help to teach him a lesson. Nothing too drastic,” he dismisses. “But now that we’ve talked...You’re smart, Stiles. I could use someone like you in my pack.”

"W-what?” Stiles stutters.

"I'm offering you a gift.” Peter smirks. He approaches Stiles slowly, fingers sliding along the table’s
edge as he moves.

Stiles feels trapped, his breathing ragged.

"If you're feeling some sort of loyalty toward my nephew. Well-" Peter shows his teeth in a poor excuse of a smile. "I'm sorry to be the one breaking this to you, but you don't owe him anything. After all, Derek killed your father."

Stiles is breathless when, for a second, he believes it. The fear is real even though he knows it's not true. After a second he takes a shaky breath.

"Stiles?" Peter smirks, looking at him oddly.

He's afraid of speaking, of giving away the secret. It's his father's safety that’s at stake. Derek lied for him. There’s no way Stiles is going to ruin everything now.

Peter gapes very slowly, his eyes widening with realization. "He didn't, did he?" He finishes with an odd smile.

Stiles closes his eyes, squeezing them so tightly, white spots start dancing in front of them. When Peter grabs his shoulders, he moves his head, turning it to the side to try to get away.

"Look at me," Peter says roughly, voice cold and controlled.

Stiles refuses, keeping his eyes shut. Peter digs his claws into his shoulders until he gasps, snapping his eyes open in pain.

"Your father is still alive, am I right?" Peter breathes out, lips stretching into a cold smile, showing sharp fangs.

Stiles doesn't want to reply, doesn't want to lie because he knows Peter will know. But Peter is crushing his shoulders and his face is turning into an abomination mere inches from Stiles, bones breaking and reshaping into a monster.

"No," he chokes on the word, closing his eyes and shifting away as Peter snarls, spitting on his face.

Stiles is paralyzed by fear, knowing he's going to die. There's no other possibility. He's alone with a monster. And Peter is not just any Alpha, he is an animalistic beast. His wolf form is like a monster taken straight out of lore and nightmare. Like the reptilian they’d encountered on their trip.

He waits for the bite, knowing Peter will kill him now. He thinks of his dad and Scott briefly, too shaken up to think anything coherent. And then the thought of Derek sneaks into his mind and Stiles squeezes his eyes close. He hates to think the last time they were together ended in a fight.

As if summoned by the mere thought, the door bursts open and Derek is suddenly there.

Peter barks a laugh, snarling at him. And Derek snarls right back, turning into his wolf form right in front of them as Peter takes a few steps away from Stiles, not as a show of fear, but to face Derek and fully transform, too.

Stiles sags with relief. He takes what feels like his first big breath for a long time. He's suddenly not afraid. Derek came for him. He didn't abandon him.

"Derek," Peter growls in a terrifying voice. "You're finally here, I was starting to believe you had given up on Stiles."
Derek growls, walking slowly inside the room, his eyes on his uncle the whole time as he approaches Stiles to help him off the chair.

"I never pegged you for the jealous type, wanting what’s not yours," Derek growls as he brings Stiles to his feet, holding him by his elbow.

"But he's no one’s, he's not claimed," Peter replies, smirking. "You know how this works, nephew. I was only trying to teach you a lesson."

Derek roars, like he wouldn't like that idea at all.

"You know," Peter continues, talking in his terrifying wolf voice. “Stiles has been sharing some very interesting tales while we waited for you."

"Derek," Stiles says desperately, this close to reaching for him. He has screwed things up so badly.
Derek looks at him for the first time and frowns. “What happened to your face?” He murmurs, making Stiles falters. He’d forgotten about his busted lip.


"I couldn't find him," Derek says flatly.

"So you took his son?" Peter snarls.

"No," Derek denies fiercely.

"Don't lie to me!" Peter roars. "You lied the day you came back and thought I hadn't noticed. But how couldn't I? We’re the only family we have left, we share blood, Derek."

"What do you want from me?" Derek lowers his head a little, and Stiles feels like kicking him. No, don’t! He wants to scream. How could Derek just give in like that, how could Derek not see his uncle for who he really was?

"I want the truth," Peter says, taking a menacing step closer. Derek shoves Stiles behind him. "Admit that you've been lying to me," Peter insists. "I told you to forget about the Argents until this war was over but you couldn't, could you?"

"How can you stand idle, waiting to take justice for our family?" Derek asks. And Stiles can almost hear the hurt in his voice.

"I'm the Alpha!" Peter roars so loudly that Stiles has to cover his ears. "Everyone depends on me, I got my pack killed once; it’s not going to happen again.” Peter pauses, breathing deeply a moment. “Once they are secured and there is no war, we will kill them together. We’ll do it your way, Derek. However you want. You have my word."

Stiles can feel Derek hesitating. He knows how much Derek must want to believe Peter, because Stiles would want to do the same thing if this was his only family left, if this was his dad making him promises.

"You can't keep Stiles, though," Peter says, and that seems to break the spell. Derek is suddenly alert again, even growling. “He's making you reckless, it's dangerous for you."

Stiles’ breath hitches, waiting for Derek’s reply, knowing his fate is about to be decided right now.
Suddenly, the building shakes. The glasses on the table topple over and fall, the chandeliers’ shake, the books on the bookshelves begin hitting the floor. Stiles has lived in California long enough to know what to do in case of an earthquake. But before he can move under a door frame, the windows burst in a crashing explosion of glass and fire.

Derek is there, between the blast and him, covering Stiles with his body as the room explodes around them. Stiles tries to grab him but the ceiling falls over their heads, and Derek is suddenly gone.

"Derek!" Stiles yells in the noise, not even hearing himself. He feels rubble falling over him and covers his head, diving underneath the dining table. It stops some of the impact but now he is buried in the darkness.

“Stiles!” he hears Derek roaring from the other side. Stiles listens to the sound of rubble being pushed away until a beam of light hits his eyes, making him blink.

Derek is suddenly in front of him, pulling him out from the ruins that were the penthouse before. Stiles gets on shaky legs and takes a look around. Where there were walls before, now all he sees is open sky. The beam of light is from a helicopter that’s circling the building.

“We’re under attack,” Derek yells over the noise of the helicopter. “I’ve got to get you out of here!”

Stiles has time to nod once before Derek’s grabbed his hand, pulling him over the debris and through the wrecked doors.

“Where’s your uncle?” he yells once they’re in the corridor.

“He’ll be fine,” Derek growls as he kicks a door open and they dart downstairs.

Soon they find more werewolves and humans as everyone leaves their rooms, rushing together. Stiles can hear the helicopter outside, the blast of guns going off in the distance, and above all of it, he can hear people screaming.

He gets closer to Derek as the crowd grows bigger, making sure they don’t lose each other.

“Derek!” Erica calls them over when they reach the common floor. She, Isaac and Boyd are waiting for them as they move through the crowd.

“Where’s Scott?” Isaac asks them the moment they arrive.

“Peter’s dogs attacked him on our floor,” Stiles explains. He’s worried about him, Stiles doesn’t know how long Scott would need to recover. What if he is still unconscious in that corridor?

“I’ll go find him!” Isaac shouts over the roar of the crowd. He’s darting through the people before any of them can do anything to stop him.

“Erica,” Derek orders. “Take Stiles to a safe place. I have to fight, you need to make sure he’s safe, do you hear me?”

Stiles looks at him in terror. “No!” he shouts. “I don’t want to go, I can fight, too!”

“Stiles,” Derek gets a hold of his face. “I need to know you’re somewhere safe while I fight.”

“But” Stiles tries to protest, but then Derek is pressing his forehead against his and Stiles’ words are caught in his throat.

“Please,” Derek breathes out. The word is lost in the noise of the crowd but not before Stiles registers
His eyes are wide when Derek finally steps back and orders, “Erica, go!”

Erica’s perfectly manicured hand circles around his wrist but he moves without thinking.

Stiles throws his arms around Derek’s neck and hugs him fiercely, crushing him as hard as his human strength allows him. “Be careful,” he says against Derek’s ear before Erica finally pulls him away and into the crowd.

The last image Stiles has of Derek, is of him looking dumbfounded after them.

As it turns out, there are a few levels underneath the building Stiles doesn’t know about. Erica takes him to the one at the end, through endless corridors and rooms filled with slaves, until she reaches a small empty one.

“This is Derek’s, no one will bother you here,” she says in a rush, shoving him inside.

“Wait! You can’t leave me alone in here,” he exclaims.

“I’m sorry Stiles,” she says nervously. “I need to make sure you’re safe, and this is the safest it gets around here. But Derek needs me. What’d you rather, I stay here babysitting you, or you grow the fuck up and let me help our Alpha?”

Stiles blinks. He looks her a moment before nodding. “Make sure nothing happens to him.”

“I always do.” Erica flashes a grin before closing the door behind her.

Once he’s alone, Stiles looks around the small space. There’s a narrow bed against the far wall, next to a toilet and sink. No windows, of course. Soon, he’s feeling claustrophobic, the walls and ceiling falling over him.

Stiles spends what feels like eons in that room. At first he paces around, he tries to listen through the walls, he pauses whenever there’s a big explosion upstairs. A couple of times he’s tempted to go outside and see how the rest of the slaves are doing, but then he remembers Erica’s words and he stays in the safe room, even if it’s driving him crazy.

He’s drifting off when he hears a big explosion, so close he feels everything shaking around him.

This time, Stiles opens the door and looks outside. Panicked people are rushing back and forth, but no one pays him any attention as he watches the scene. Small debris falls from the ceiling and Stiles knows a bomb must have went off right on top of them. They may be buried alive for all he knows and the ceiling could fall over them at any moment.

Taking a calming breath, he steps out. “Listen everyone!” he shouts, trying to use his father’s Sheriff voice. “You need to calm down, go back to your rooms and wait!”

Some people seem to falter and pause to listen to him, but most of them keep up their mad rush. Stiles helps whoever seems in need of a hand to move to a room and, once he realizes there is no one else to help, he moves to the entrance, trying to see the state it’s in after the explosion.

To his surprise, it seems to still be open and clear. Stiles doesn’t go past the door, though. He takes a calming breath and goes back to the room to wait for Derek.

He knows Derek will come back for him, he has to.
Derek watches how Stiles disappears into the crowd in astonishment. He can still feel the way Stiles crushed him between his arms, the way Stiles’ cheek pressed against his stubble, the way his voice shook with intensity when he whispered next to Derek’s ear, and his insides twist and knot. His instinct is screaming at him to go after Stiles so hard, he has to physically make an effort to stay where he is.

When he can no longer see Stiles, Derek moves upstairs to the operations room, Boyd trailing him. He has to shove people away to get to the main table.

“Report!” he barks as he approaches the werewolves in charge.

“Sir,” one of them nods. “They attacked through three different flanks, using missiles on the top floors, bombs at the entrance and, using the confusion, sent men rushing inside before we could react.”

“Where are the packs?”

“We sent almost everyone to the bottom floors to stop the mass of humans, sir.”

“Are there any teams outside?”

“Not that I know of,” the young beta fumbles.

“I need three packs with me, then,” Derek orders, looking around as three hands of different Alphas rise.

They follow him outside of the room.

“Gather your pack and meet me in the first subfloor, we’re going to use the tunnels to get out and ambush them from behind.”

The three Alphas agree and rush to find their betas.

“Derek,” Boyd asks then. “Are you okay?”

Derek notices then that he’s stuck his claws into his own palms. He takes a shaky breath and nods. “Timing couldn’t be worse.”

“I know.” Boyd snorts. “What are you gonna do?”

“We’re following the plan,” Derek says resolutely. “First we kill the hunters and then we’re getting out of here.”

Boyd is about to reply when Isaac appears around the corner. He’s bleeding from his left eyebrow, his clothes torn and dirty.

“What happened?” Derek is on him before the beta can even open his mouth.

“I couldn’t find Scott,” Isaac says frantically. “I followed his scent but he wasn’t there anymore, I don’t know-”

“Isaac.” Derek shakes him. “What happened to you?”
“Oh,” Isaac seems to finally understand. “A blast almost caught me, they’re setting bombs off on every floor.”

“Shit,” Derek curses. “They’re inside, then. The packs didn’t contain them.”

“We’ve got to go,” Boyd says, urgently.

Derek guides them through demolished corridors, opening doors to trashed rooms and panicked slaves trying to get away from the crossfire.

Once they reach the bottom floors, things get worse. They have to keep stopping to fight hunters, and it’s a delay Derek knows they can’t afford. Erica joins them during one of the fights. She rips a hunter’s throat out, saving Isaac from a blade tipped in wolfsbane, and rushes with them downstairs.

“Well!” Derek barks.

“You have to jump over the corpses down there,” she says next to him. “There are hunters everywhere, I’m not sure the underground armored rooms are so safe right now.”

Derek stops running abruptly. He turns and grabs Erica from the arm. “You left Stiles there?” he growls.

“Where else did you expect?” she tries to struggle away from his claws. “We’re being besieged here, Derek! Nowhere is safe!”

“Then anything happens to him down there-” Derek growls.

“There’s no time for this,” Boyd interrupts them, grabbing both of them and pulling them forward.

They’re soon met by the other three packs and together, they walk through the narrow tunnel, emerging on the streets three blocks away from where all the action is happening.

Derek organizes the groups quickly and efficiently, having himself and his three betas marching first, followed by another pack, with the other two attacking each flank.

They all wolf out, lowering to four legs to run through the streets until they reach the den. There are tanks and other vehicles around it. All the hunters’ backs are turned on them, and they dart forward, claws and fangs at the ready.

The strike comes naturally to him, he’s done this a million times. He’s a well-greased machine, attacking the vital or impeding points quickly and efficiently as he keeps rushing to the den, never stopping.

Even though his betas could never beat him in a fight, Derek watches proudly as they attack both alone and together, all lethal precision in each swipe or bite, relying on everything they’ve learned from him.

At some point, they hit a barricade and it prevents them from moving forward. Blood slowly drifts down into his eye and across cheek while he pauses to study their surroundings. He’s with his betas and what’s left of the other packs.

He knows the situation is bad, that they can’t hide from wolfsbane bullets here.

He’s about to order everyone to scatter, when the humans start shouting among them.

“The Alpha!” One of them yells. “The Alpha is here!”
Derek smells his uncle before he sees him.

Peter Hale appears then, jumping over a military car, the humans in his path dropping to the ground as he darts forward. He climbs a massive tank, gets to his feet on top of it, before bending back and howling to the night.

Derek feels the rumble inside his chest and he’s howling back before he even registers it. So are the other werewolves around him.

Humans scatter in panic at sight of his uncle. Making the most of it, Derek darts forward and knocks over the first hunter he can find.

“Keep moving!” he roars to the packs.

Soon, his betas are next to him, the other packs close behind.

Peter crouches down on top of the tank, springing forward to hit the ground gracefully in front of Derek. He raises slowly and turns into his human form again.

“Nephew,” Peter peels his lips back in some sort of grin. “It’s good to see you’re still here. I thought you might be in another state by now.”

Derek falters. He gestures for the other packs and his betas to keep moving forward as he and his uncle stay put.

“Why would I do that?” Derek growls back.

“Please.” Peter barks a menacing laugh. “I knew your plans for escape all along. Who do you think orchestrated all of this?”

Realization hits Derek like a punch to the gut, twisting in the pit of his stomach.

“You’d do this to your own pack?” he asks in disbelief.

“Don’t!” Peter shouts. “You forced me to do this, with your lies and defiance. You were going to betray me!” He snarls. “You were turning everyone against me. I couldn’t allow that.”

“I only lied because you wouldn’t avenge your own family!” Derek is livid. He’s never been so close to losing control.

“I can imagine guilt is a terrible companion,” Peter crooks his neck, cunning red eyes studying Derek. “After all, it was your fault our family was slaughtered.”

Derek makes a pathetic noise, lowering his head, the burn in his eyes not letting him see anything for a moment. He’s lived with the guilt for so many years now, but having to hear his uncle actually say it, it tears him apart.

“And it’s going to be your fault that I kill Stiles now,” Peter adds triumphantly.

That’s all it takes to snap Derek out of it. He raises his head, eyes flashing red, to growl at his uncle.

“You should have treated him like a slave.” Peter gestures. “You had to defy me, you had to rile the slaves... Look what you made me do!” he roars the last part, fury lacing the sound.

“You did all this because a bunch of slaves were getting brave?” Derek asks, eyes narrowed, unable to understand.
“A bunch?” Peter snorts. “Try all, my dear nephew. And now I’m going to kill your little pet for what you’ve done, before I teach you a lesson in obedience.”

Derek crouches low and roars, his uncle following suite. They leap forward and collide in midair. Even before they crash into each other, Derek knows he can never win this fight, just as he knows his betas could never win against him.

But Derek also knows he has to try, because if he fails now, Stiles will die. And it will be because of him, because he wasn’t strong enough to protect him.

The fight rages on for what could be minutes, or hours. Rage and guilt fuel every swipe, every snarl and cuff. All Derek can feel are slashes across his ribcage and his fangs sinking into tender flesh.

His uncle’s fur stinks of blood each time he lands a blow, and Peter’s claws start to dig deeper with every rake. As Derek falls to the ground again, he hears bones snapping duly. It’s not a good sign. It’s starting to take longer for his body to heal, and the broken bones grind together with each shift of his weight, making it harder to attack.

Peter throws him against the tank and uses one of his terribly strong wolf legs to press on his throat, trying to crush his windpipe. Derek gets a hold of Peter’s foot, trying to move him away or hold him back, but the pressure keeps up no matter what.

Then, a burst of machine-gunfire blasts in the night around them and Peter drops like a stone on top of him, suddenly human again.

Derek tries to move him away, but then he hears the hunters and pauses. His uncle’s warm blood drips slowly on him and Derek closes his eyes, trying to hold back the fit of coughing his sore throat is demanding after so much abuse.

Once the hunters walk away, Derek shoves Peter off and gets to his feet. He doubles over in a fit of coughing, blood flecking the ground with each one. When his lungs are no longer on fire, he crouches to take a look at his uncle.

It looks as though Peter has been hit by several wolfsbane bullets. Even though he’s a full alpha, Derek knows he’ll need help to survive.

Rising, he studies their surroundings and soon finds what he’s looking for. He moves to the body of a hunter a few feet away, taking a gun from his cold hands.

When he comes back to his uncle, Peter is conscious again. He’s coughing blood and trying to stand up to no avail.

“Take this,” Derek says tersely, shoving the gun at his chest. Peter holds a hand up to grab it. “This is your only chance to survive.”

He straightens, looking down at his uncle, who looks back at him uncomprehending.

“You shouldn’t help me,” Peter finally says, smiling with menacing teeth covered in blood. “I won’t stop until I find you and your slave again. You know that.”

“He’s not my slave,” Derek growls low and rough, and then he kicks his uncle in the face.

Hopefully it will give him enough time to find Stiles, his betas and get the hell out of this city.

Derek stumbles in his way to the den. He feels the blood running down his abdomen, soaking his
pants. He knows he doesn’t have much time before he crashes down. The wounds inflicted by an Alpha such as Peter need more time and rest to heal.

He’s almost reached the front of the building when a sudden blast of fire and noise sends him flying backwards. Derek hits a car hard enough to knock the wind out of him. He drops to the ground, where he tries to cover himself from the big explosion.

When it’s over, he rolls to the side and looks in front of him. What used to be the entrance of the building is now a jumble of iron and rubble.

He’s on his feet, screaming Stiles’ name before the shockwave is over.

Derek darts forward, his muscles screaming in protest but not giving a damn. He’s limping by the time he’s actually in the rubble of the entrance, but he doesn’t stop. He wades through the wreckage of twisted metal and dead bodies, finding the entrance to the lower levels, unable to contain the terrible waves of nausea that shake his body. He needs to know that Stiles is alive. He can’t stop until he does.

Derek takes a big gulp of air in relief when he discovers the first floor is still standing, ignoring the werewolves and humans hiding there. Thankfully the blast missed the back of the building where the underground hidden floors were built.

Once he’s reached the bottom floor, Derek can smell Stiles’ scent over everyone else’s and he heads straight for him. He opens the door so violently, he almost tears it off its hinges.

"Stiles-" he calls, a tone of desperation in his voice. But Stiles is there, Stiles is safe.

Derek stops in his tracks when their eyes meet, only barely remembering to close the door behind him.

Stiles needs a moment to register what he’s actually seeing.

Derek is in front of him, breathing heavily, looking battered and bruised, covered in blood and filth. He’s wrecked, like standing on his feet is already too much of an effort.

They stare at each other and something just breaks between them. Stiles lets out a shaky breath and stumbles back, seeking support on the wall behind him. They don’t speak, there is no need. Stiles just waits, knowing Derek will come to him.

A heartbeat later, Derek pounces on him, pinning Stiles against the wall and lifting him with his arms like the first night he scent-marked Stiles. And Stiles just allows it, circling his shoulders and clinging to him, wrapping his legs around Derek’s waist, their mouths colliding in a clash of teeth and tongues, devouring each other in a frantic kiss.

Derek groans low in the back of his throat, digging his fingers under Stiles’ jaw, forcing him to bend back and expose his neck. And Stiles lets him, easily submitting to Derek.

Derek bites the leather of the collar first, and then he slides a finger between the collar and Stiles’ neck, lifting it, digging into Stiles’ jaw before biting again, this time on flesh, seeking the frantic
pulse and sucking hard over it.

At the first bite, Stiles nearly comes in his pants. He convulses out of control, his legs shaking around Derek’s waist, his body going taut and then limp as wave after wave of pleasure crashes over him.

Derek pulls back from his neck. He looks down between them and up at Stiles’ face before pushing his legs back down with strong arms and dropping to his knees. He unzips Stiles’ pants and shoves them violently down.

"What- oh my god," Stiles says with stuttered breathing. Derek buries his face against Stiles’ crotch, sniffing, rubbing, licking, and Stiles’ legs just give in completely under him. He’s sliding down the wall until Derek presses a hand against his chest, pinning him in place.

"Oh fuck," Stiles breathes out, shaking and squirming as Derek takes him in his mouth, deep as he can, sucking eagerly. "Oh my- shiiiiit!"

Stiles feels the head of his cock pressing at the back of Derek's throat and Derek's tongue darting out to lick his balls, and his eyes just roll back in sheer pleasure.

Derek stops abruptly, making Stiles whine. But he’s up quickly and pinning Stiles with his whole body instead and Stiles is instantly onboard with this new plan. He busies himself unzipping Derek’s pants, clumsy fingers taking a moment too long, before pulling them down and urging Derek to press against him.

“We don’t have time for this,” Derek says roughly as his hands press their hips together, belying his words.

Stiles doesn’t even care to respond, he just moans, pressing back as their hips meet. Stiles makes a very embarrassing noise at the first contact, and then he arches his back, seeking more friction, more anything. He runs his hands through Derek’ hair, pulling him closer for another kiss as they thrust together, but Derek averts his face at the last second, going for Stiles’ neck instead.

Stiles doesn't have time to protest before Derek has his hand between them, fisting them together and making him groan. Stiles feels a tingling in his spine that runs down to his toes, which curl and uncurl inside his shoes.

"I can't- oh god, I can't believe I'm going- so close," he groans, words breaking as he takes one shaky breath after another. "Please," he pleads, hoping that's enough to get Derek to do what he wants.

But Derek tilts his head to bury his face against Stiles’ neck again, holding onto him, jerking them together at a steady pace.

Stiles lets out a long shaky moan that ends in a groan, leaning his head against Derek's shoulder. He curses, babbling nonsense, his skin hot and flushed. He feels helpless between Derek’s arms. He arches his back, leaning his head against the wall, exposing his throat. His hands dig into Derek’s shoulders, moving him closer and guiding him back to his neck.

The gesture seems to break something inside of Derek, because he lets out a guttural growl, nudging along the line of Stiles’ exposed neck with his nose. He inhales deeply, and Stiles tenses, awaiting the bite.

Derek hums, low and rough, his chest rumbling as he licks Stiles’ neck, before sucking the already abused spot to finally bite him slowly, tentatively, driving Stiles mad.
Derek stops fisting him, moving his hands behind Stiles, fingers digging into his back as they rock together. But Stiles needs more. He’s hard and leaking, but still nowhere near ready to beg for it. So he tries to move his hips backward and slide a hand between them. But Derek snarls against his neck, teeth scraping, pressing Stiles back against his cock.

"Fuck Derek, fuck-" Stiles moans. "I need- don't be an asshole!"

Derek makes a noise then, like a snort mixed with the most ridiculously sexy thing ever, and one of his hands drifts back over Stiles' hips to palm him roughly, making Stiles whimper and thrust up into his hand eagerly, desperately seeking contact. And for once Derek does exactly what he needs. He fists Stiles' cock and, after a few lazy strokes, starts to pump him hard and fast.

Derek lets go of his neck and nips his way to Stiles' chin, where he sucks on it, moving along his jawline. But Stiles doesn’t want that. He turns around, seeking Derek’s lips, and for a moment he can see the hesitation clearly drawn in Derek’s face before he allows Stiles to capture his mouth.

Stiles moves slowly, his lips pressing against Derek’s, who is still not responding. He darts the tip of his tongue out and brushes Derek’s bottom lip, making him groan. After a moment, Derek shudders and darts forward, capturing Stiles’ mouth and finally kissing back.

At the response, Stiles convulses, squeezing his eyes shut, feeling pulses of pleasure running down his spine as he comes into Derek's hand. His muscles clench and unclench wildly as his mouth opens in a silent groan, the sensation heavy and hot in his gut as he shatters open.

Derek stays with him the whole ride. He holds him through it all, until Stiles' legs are shaking and he can't seem to get enough air. He smirks against Stiles’ mouth before mouthing back down his neck and biting him again.

"Oh fuck, ouch!" Stiles protests. It hurts this time. He's about to struggle when he feels Derek's hard cock pressing against his hip. "You haven't-" he breathes out, his hands sliding behind Derek and clenching his ass, guiding him forward.

Derek slides his cock between Stiles’ legs, leaning forward and using the friction of Stiles’ thighs so move back and forth steadily.

Stiles gasps, pressing his legs together, trapping Derek and gaining a satisfying growl in return.

"Do it,” he whispers. “Mark me, I want you to.”

Derek snarls and then he rocks his hips fiercely back and forth a couple of times before he comes. Stiles squeezes his legs around him, and Derek shudders, hard.

Derek stops biting him, tongue lapping his abused skin now, making a little sound in the back of his throat and collapses over Stiles.

Stiles tries to stay on his trembling feet, but his knees wobble and he's going down fast with Derek’s weight on top of him. In the last moment, Derek is able to rearrange their collapse so that he’s spooning Stiles, burying his face in the nape of his neck to nose along Stiles’ hairline.

Stiles sighs. His body hurts in all the right places and the rug is probably gonna leave burn marks, but he's content. Shattered. Fucking blissed out.

"Bed?” He asks weakly, not really minding staying there a bit longer. He wants to ask what’s been going on outside, but he doesn’t want to break the moment yet.
That's when he realizes Derek has fallen asleep. He doesn't even stir when Stiles turns around between his arms to look at him. He must be exhausted to be out cold. Stiles smiles softly, fingertips brushing lightly along Derek's stubble.

He uses the moment to inspect Derek. He's full of half healed wounds, scabs and flesh blood. And Stiles hasn't missed his limp when he moved inside the room.

Stiles suspects he'll freak out about what they just did later, but right now he just doesn't care. Not even when he moves and feels the stickiness between his legs, he's actually in no hurry to clean himself. Which should be freaking him out already, but the thought of Derek's come... God, that shouldn't be so hot. Thinking that he'll carry Derek's scent for everyone to know- he's almost getting a stiffy from the thought alone.

Stiles snuggles closer and closes his eyes, letting go as Derek's warm body lulls him to sleep.

A full bladder wakes him up what can't be too much later. He doesn't want to, but Stiles has to move.

"We have... to..." Derek babbles in his sleep when Stiles steps out of his arms.

"Shhh, it's okay," Stiles soothes, cupping his cheek a second before getting back to his feet.

He attends to his body's needs and then cleans himself with toilet paper because there isn't a shower in the room. He lifts the collar, looking at the big bite mark on his neck in the mirror. It's definitely sore, and the contact with the collar hurts. But he isn't as bothered about it as he supposes he should be.

He goes back and hovers over Derek, who is still oblivious to the world. Stiles looks at him, his regular breathing, and the way he looks younger while he sleeps, his features so different and relaxed. Ignoring the blood and dirt, he grabs the comforter in the bed to put over Derek's sleeping form.

Stiles gets his pants next and puts them on. He's zipping them up when Scott opens the door a crack, pointing at him and gesturing for Stiles to follow him outside. He falters only a second, glancing at Derek's sleeping form briefly before following Scott outside.

"I'm getting you out of here," Scott hisses the moment he's outside.

Stiles hesitates, looking back at the room, emotions all tangled up.

"Come on," Scott insists.

He just had sex with Derek. And yet, he realizes he can't trust him. Stiles has no idea what Derek has planned for him. And he knows his dad is alone out there, and he will never stop searching for Stiles, no matter what. He has to be Stiles' first priority, too. Even over himself, over what he wants. Stiles closes his eyes, and hates having to make this decision.

"What'll happen to him?" Stiles murmurs, not even having to gesture.

"Derek?" Scott sounds surprised. "He'll be fine." He frowns. "We have to go."

Stiles nods, but doesn't move yet. He holds up a hand, asking for Scott to hold on, before going back inside. He doesn't dare look at Derek again, afraid his resolution will falter. Instead, he takes his collar off and places it on the bed, fingers lingering over the soft leather a moment too long.
After a pause, he goes back outside where Scott’s waiting for him.

He nods resolutely and asks, “What do I have to do?”

Scott grins.

They flit out into dark corridors Stiles has never seen before, up stairs and through secondary doors, not meeting a single soul during the escape.

They’re running down a small alley at the back of a building, when Stiles realizes unbelievable that he’s out. *He's free again.* He looks up at the night sky and sees smoke, hears echoes of explosions as guns go off in the distance. It looks like the werewolves have moved the fight a few blocks away from their den.

Scott takes him to a car where Ms. McCall is already waiting for them and Stiles sees the rest of the slaves and werewolves in the other cars too.

“You got them all out,” Stiles breathes out, smiling in disbelief.

“Not all of them,” Scott replies grimly. “But enough to escape and regroup with the resistance.”

“The resistance?” Stiles asks as they get into the car with Ms. McCall.

“An alliance of wolves and men,” Scott says, turning around in his seat to grin at him. “Your mother started it, and we’re about to take over.”

Stiles looks at his best friend, his eyes widening as the words sink in. Ms. McCall starts the car and Stiles looks out through the window, watching the half destroyed building slip by, knowing that somewhere inside is Derek.

At the thought, Stiles feels the first pangs of guilt as they take off into the night.
Derek stirs in his sleep and instinctively stretches his arm, searching for Stiles out of habit. When he finds nothing, though, Derek startles awake.

Disoriented, he leaps to his feet. That’s when he feels a pang in his right side and Derek finally remembers; the attack, his uncle, Stiles- At the memory of Stiles undone between his arms, Derek's whole body tenses, a cold rush making him shiver before the heat licks his gut.

That's when he sees the collar on the bed.

Derek takes a tentative step forward, and reaching down, he grabs it with slightly shaking fingers. 

_He's gone._ Derek knows, just as he knows bombs are still going off a few blocks away from the den. He waits for his instinct to leap forward, for it to make him wolf out and go after Stiles.

But it doesn’t happen.

Derek keeps holding the collar, thumbs caressing it absentely as his chest tightens and he feels the thundering of his bloodbeat in his temple. Derek feels raw, like an exposed live wire. It physically hurts to feel the distance between he and Stiles. Derek has never experienced anything like this. He’s pretty sure he could even name the miles between them and be precise. Stiles is like a pull that tightens Derek’s chest, white spots dotting his vision.

Scott’s scent hits him like a punch in the stomach. Derek snarls, tightening his hold on the collar, that creaks under the pressure. He knows Stiles left with him. There is no hesitation, no wonder. Derek just knows. It doesn't even surprise him. He knew Stiles was getting restless, he just thought he’d be faster in getting Stiles out of there before he and Scott worked out a plan together. Derek never doubted Stiles would stop for nothing in his determination to find his father.

"Stubborn idiot,” he murmurs.

The fainting scent of Stiles reaches him then, breaking through his numbness. It's like the spark to ignite the latent fuel running through his veins.

Derek flashes red eyes, the color leaking through his hazel iris slowly, burning from the inside out. His body shakes and twists, and Derek makes the conscious decision to go.

He tears the door off and darts down the corridor, moving so fast he’s just a blur to everyone in his path as he follows the scent outside. He runs upstairs and doesn't stop until he's in the back of the building, where he smells the metal and gas from the cars that used to be there, and the fainting smell of humans and werewolves.

Did Stiles leave or did they take him? Derek imagines Stiles getting in a car and driving away from the wolf den to go straight to the humans’ headquarters and he nearly laughs. Stiles won't like it. He will- Derek pauses. Stiles will want to find his father no matter what.

Erica shows up then. "Derek! Thank god I found you!"

She's limping and one side of her face is covered in blood but otherwise she seems to be fine.

"What's wrong?" Derek croaks out, as she races towards him.
Erica falters and slows down until she's walking the few steps between them. "What happened?" she asks tentatively. "Where's Stiles?"

Derek frowns. He doesn't want to talk about it. "What's been going on while I was inside?" he asks instead.

Erica eyes him suspiciously, her glare moving up and down Derek's body slowly. She sniffs the air very subtly and her eyes widen.

"We-" she clears her throat. "We lost Isaac."

The words are enough to catch Derek’s attention. "What do you mean ‘lost him’?"

"He decided to follow Scott's scent north, Boyd has gone after him but we won't be able to track them if we're not fast enough."

"North?" Derek asks in confusion, head titled as his nostrils flare and he scents the trail of Stiles again. It's fainting but, it's definitely still there; Scott went with him.

"We were helping move the hunters away from the den when Isaac smelled Scott and lost it. I've never seen him like that."

"He just ran off?"

"We tried to stop him but he said Scott might be hurt and running to protect himself and we couldn't convince him to wait for you."

"Dammit, Erica!" Derek growls. "You should have stopped him."

"How?" She asks indignantly, her voice rising. "He's my friend! I'm not going to hurt him."

"No, you'll just let him hurt himself." Derek runs his hands through his messy hair. For a heartbeat he remembers Stiles tugging it and he falters.

"I-," Erica stutters, something not very common for her. "I'm sorry, okay? What should we do? We have to find him, Derek." She pleads.

"We will," Derek rubs his temples. "You will."

"What?"

"Go north, find Boyd and both of you go after Isaac, tell him he's tracking a fake scent. Scott set it up when he planned getting Stiles out of here."

"Scott did what?" Erica yells.

"I'm going after them," Derek says resolutely. "Scott needs to be back before the pack finds out he left. And Stiles..." Derek trails off.

"It's okay," Erica interferes. "I know. You have to go after him."

"He's going to take me to the Argents," Derek says ferociously, making Erica blink in confusion. "I'm going to need you for that. So find Boyd and Isaac and go back to Beacon Hills."

"Beacon Hills?" Erica asks.
“That’s where Scott will take him once Stiles tells him about his father.”

“Alright,” Erica nods, although she looks unsure.

“I’ll meet you there in a week.” Derek holds her shoulder and looks Erica in the eye. “You remember my old house, right? I’ll wait for you there.”

Erica swallows soundly before nodding.

Derek doesn’t want to go back to the old mansion, but it’s the only safe place he can think of right now.

Erica clutches him then. She tightens her hold until Derek groans, his bones creaking under the pressure. “Please be careful,” she says, her words muffled against his shoulder.

“You too,” Derek runs his hand over her hair in a soothing gesture.

Erica lets out a small whine and then she’s pushing Derek away. “I’ll see you in seven days,” she smiles through the tears running down her cheeks and darts away, leaving him alone in the back alley.

Derek turns around, his fists clenching and unclenching. He wants to go after his betas, he really does. But the pull he feels coming from Stiles is stronger. It’s not like he doesn’t have a choice. He does.

He picks Stiles.

Derek doesn’t even stop to think about it. He crouches down, wolfs out and runs into the night.

-

Stiles stirs in his sleep when the car catches a bump in the road.

He’s suddenly jumping forward, alert. He studies the inside of the car with wide eyes for a moment and then relaxes, falling back.

"Hey dude," Scott says fondly, turning around on his seat to smile at him. "Feeling better? You crashed hard."

"Uh yeah, I'm fine," Stiles rasps out before clearing his throat.

"Is your neck hurting? That's a pretty nasty bruise," Scott says in concern.

Stiles had forgotten. For a moment after waking up, he didn't think of Derek, of how Stiles had left him behind when he was most vulnerable. Stiles winces at that thought, tucking the collar of his shirt up, trying to cover the bite marks unsuccessfully.

"It doesn't hurt," he murmurs. And even if it did, Stiles knows he deserves it. He likes to feel the soreness, it makes him feel leveled in a way. His thumb runs over the bruises, and Stiles shivers with the memory of how he received them.

"He's going to come after him," Ms. McCall murmurs from the front seat, clearly trying to hide it
from Stiles.

Scott ignores her, though. "Are you hungry?" he asks Stiles instead, turning to face forward and searching in a bag he has between his feet. When he turns back, he's offering Stiles a sandwich.

"Starving, actually." Stiles grins before accepting the food. He eats the sandwich in record time and then Scott has a bottle of water for him that Stiles finishes, too.

"Do you want more?" Ms. McCall asks, eyes on the rearview mirror, looking at him.

"No," Stiles shakes his head as he rests against the seat and regards them. "Where are we going?"

"I told you, we-"

"Not who we're meeting with," Stiles dismisses with one hand. "The place. Are we going south? What city?"

"We-" Scott falters. "We can't tell you. Our contact depends on it staying a secret."

"Who am I going to tell?" Stiles jokes, but Scott grimaces and turns around. "Are you kidding me?" Stiles snorts, refusing to believe his best friend is actually being serious.

When no one replies, he leans forward, circling the front seat with his arm.

"I need to know because there's something I have to do," he speaks in a whisper. This is hard to say. "That's why I asked. You don't have to tell me where exactly, but I need to know if it's close to Beacon Hills."

“You want to go back? I don’t think that’s a good idea, man,” Scott says as his mom speaks over him.

"Why Beacon Hills?" Ms. McCall asks.

"My father is alive, I need to find him." There. Stiles just dropped the bomb. "Derek lied about it to protect him."

"He did that for you?" Scott asks in disbelief.

"We- we had a deal. He protected me because I told him all I knew about the Argents."

Scott turns around on his seat so fast it startles Stiles.

"Why would he want that?" Scott asks with impossibly wide eyes.

“He wants revenge on his family.” Stiles arches a questioning eyebrow.

“Revenge?” Ms. McCall asks, looking back at him a moment.

“Don’t you remember?” Stiles asks in surprise. “They torched his place down, killed everyone inside.”

There's a pregnant silence in the car and then Ms. McCall is pulling over with a screeching noise. Stiles hears all the other cars stopping too, blocking the road behind them.

"Mom! You know the rules," Scott hisses. "We can't just pull over or stop until we're in human territory."
"This deserves an exception," she says calmly. "I'm going to talk to the others, you deal with this," she says, pointing back and forth between them.

Stiles and Scott observe her leaving the car and jogging to the closest one, where she bends over and talks to a werewolf through the rolled down window.

"So?" Stiles says after a moment.

"Did you know the Argents run the human front?"

Stiles’ heart skips several beats before it starts thundering out of control. “How did you find out?” he breathes out.

"Our new friends told us," Scott says evasively. "How did you know?"

"My dad is the sheriff of Beacon Hills?" Stiles questions mockingly in answer.

"Right," Scott nods solemnly.

"He never told me," Stiles explains. "But I always knew. You just confirmed it."

"I wonder if Derek knows," Scott says in wonder.

"I never mentioned it, just in case," Stiles shrugs.

"Why didn’t he tell me about his plan? Why didn’t Isaac- uh," Scott clears his throat.

"I can’t believe you didn’t remember the fire on your own." Stiles shakes his head.

"This changes things." Scott’s eyes rise and he looks at Stiles with a half smile. "If Derek finds out, maybe he will join us."

"Derek is back at the den," Stiles says out loud, forcing himself to accept this as the truth, no matter how much his heart jumps every time he considers the idea of seeing Derek again. "And my dad is still out there."

"Your dad." Scott frowns. "Why didn’t you tell me?" He sounds hurt.

"I was protecting him." Stiles runs his fingers through his long hair, a still-weird sensation. "Peter and all the Alphas thought he was dead, I had to protect the lie."

"So why are you telling me now?" Scott frowns.

"He knows," Stiles says simply. "Peter found out and was ready to kill me when the attack happened."

At the words, he realizes something for the first time. What's going to happen to Derek? He can't stay in the den, can he? His uncle seemed ready to get rid of him, too.

"Fuck," he murmurs, hands rubbing his face.

Stiles abandoned him behind in a place Derek can’t stay anymore. A wave of conflicting emotions leaves Stiles dizzy. Fear, because he has no way to predict what’ll happen next. Guilt, because he abandoned Derek. Hope, because Stiles may see him again.

"What's wrong?"
"Nothing, I- I'm worried about my dad. I don't know where he is," Stiles explains, hoping Scott won't be able to pick on the fact that he's not telling the whole truth. He's really worried about his dad, but that's certainly not all of it. "And he's in danger. I don't know why Peter wants him dead but I know he won't stop."

"We are going south," Scott suddenly says. "I can't tell you where, but it's not close to Beacon Hills."

"Then..." Stiles trails off, looking up to stare at his best friend. "I can't go with you."

"Don't say that," Scott leaps forward.

"I have to find him, okay? My dad won't stop until he finds me, I have to do the same," Stiles says nearly pleading, hoping his friend will understand. "Once I'm with him, we'll travel south."

"I can't leave you alone here! You wouldn't survive! Derek'd kill m- I mean," Scott stutters, flinching uncomfortably and pausing a moment before continuing more calmly. "You're my best friend; I'm not leaving you behind again."

Stiles looks at him in surprise, taken aback by his words. "You're not leaving me behind this time," he says. "We just have different places to be, that's all." Stiles shrugs, trying to shake off the importance of the situation.

"Wait here," Scott orders before leaping out and running to where his mom and a bunch of people and werewolves are gathered together next to the cars.

"Where am I going to go?" he jokes alone in the car, snorting bitterly as he observes them talking.

Stiles looks at the clock in the dash. He wishes he knew how long they've been on the road. Has Derek awoken already? What's he doing now? Stiles wants to slap himself; he shouldn't be thinking of Derek. He's not going to see him again. No matter what happened between them.

What they did was... incredible. It was unforgettable and mind blowing and- Good lord, he's in the middle of wolf territory, his life on the line, and Stiles is getting half a stiffy just remembering Derek on his knees. That was, he was- Derek was... Granted, Stiles doesn't have anything to compare to, but in his humble opinion, Derek gives amazing head.

The sound of the trunk opening behind him pulls Stiles out of his thoughts. Ms. McCall is suddenly there, opening the door and gesturing for him to get out.

She gives him a fierce hug, nearly crushing all his bones. It's the kind of hug only a mom can give. Something catches in Stiles' throat at the thought and he hugs back as hard as he can without really understanding what's going on.

"Scott will keep you safe," she says hoarsely against his ear. "I'm sure your father is fine. He always knew how to take care of himself."

When she finally lets him go, Stiles looks wildly around him. "What's going on?" he asks in confusion.

"My mom will take everyone to the rendezvous point," Scott explains. "We'll meet her there in a month."

"Wait-" Stiles falters, his throat closing up. "You're going to let me go find my dad? And you- you're going to help me?"
Scott frowns and then he's hugging Stiles, just as fiercely as his mom. Maybe giving amazing hugs is in the McCall genes after all.

"You're my best friend," Scott says roughly. "Of course I'll help you."

Stiles buries his face on his friend's shoulder and breathes. Not gonna cry, he repeats to himself. He doesn’t blink for what feels like an eternity while his eyes burn with unshed tears.

Scott pulls back and they both look down at the dirt and kick their feet around awkwardly.

Ms. McCall breaks the moment by laughing. She gives her son another hug and a kiss on the cheek, and Stiles catches how quickly she wipes her wet cheeks. "I'll see you in four weeks," she says.

"Yes." Scott nods without moving. "Mom, are you sure-"

"Go!" She pushes him away lightly. "I'll be fine. I learned how to defend myself, remember? Had a good teacher, too." She winks at him.

Scott smiles and then he holds her hand reassuringly for a moment before going to the driver's side door.

Stiles follows him, waving goodbye to Scott's mom before getting in the passenger seat.

He sits quietly, watching out the window as Scott takes a detour and leaves the others behind. He just stays like that for a long time, thinking of his dad and Derek. Well, mostly Derek. He tries not to, but his brain has a mind of its own and likes to torture him with flashbacks of Derek asleep on that basement floor, nested in the comforter, completely out and defenseless.

"Where are we?" he suddenly asks, clearing his dry throat.

"Finally." Scott snorts as he keeps his eyes on the road. “I was starting to freak out.”

"What?"

"You've been sitting there without moving or saying a word for hours, dude," Scott explains. "I didn't know you could hold still for so long."

"Oh." Stiles frowns. “I was... thinking.”

"Ahh." Scott doesn't answer his question, just keeps driving along the deserted roads.

The sun has long since set and Stiles can’t see any lights, anywhere around them.

“Can I ask you a question that’s been bugging me?” Stiles asks.

“When did you start asking for permission to pry into people’s lives?” Scott teases.

Stiles ignores the joke. “Why are you running away?”

“When did you start asking for permission to pry into people’s lives?” Scott teases.

Stiles ignores the joke. “Why are you running away?”

“What do you mean? I told you.” Scott shrugs.

“Yeah, ‘the revolution’,” Stiles says with a mocking serious tone as he air-quotes. “I get that. But why now?"

“I don’t understand.” Scott looks at him sideways.
“Is this about Isaac?” Stiles blurs out.

“Don’t start.” Scott rolls his eyes.

“Scott, we’ve been friends as long as I can remember,” Stiles starts. “I know you, I know how you think. And, I know how much Allison meant to you.” Scott tightens his grip on the steering wheel and growls, but Stiles keeps talking. “I know you enough to know you must be thinking something stupid, like having feelings for someone else is some sort of betrayal to Allison and what you had together”

Scott growls louder at that, but Stiles finishes what he wanted to say anyway.

“Don’t get all wolfie on me, you know I’m right,” he continues. “I appreciate you taking me out of there, I really do. But I don’t want you to ruin your chance at a life among your kind because you were too scared to deal. And yeah, sure, there’s the whole revolution thing, and your mom seems to be really into it, but come on dude, I know you better than her. I know when you’re running away!”

“That’s not- I just- I don’t feel like one of them. I don’t belong there,” Scott stutters out.

"But what about Isaac?” Stiles presses.

“Isaac...” Scott trails off. “I admit he makes me feel things I’m not ready to feel right now, but he’s not the reason I left.”

“Okay good, that’s good.” Stiles nods. “So you’re really all for this alliance stuff then?”

“Yes,” Scott snorts. “You thought I was lying about that and just wanted an excuse to run away from Isaac?”

“Well...” Stiles shrugs. “I mean, I wouldn’t be surprised... if that was the case?” he says almost questioningly, hoping Scott will understand.

“I can’t believe what a moron you are sometimes.” Scott snorts.

“Hey!” he protests. “Dude, I’ve seen you in denial before. Remember when Allison broke up with you that summer and you insisted she had just gone away with her family on vacation and you guys could still fix things?”

“And we did!” Scott exclaims defensively.

“Not the point,” Stiles huffs. “Tell me I don’t have reasons to believe you’d do something stupid just to put space between you and the irresistible puppy eyes of Isaac?”

“I-” Scott falters. He runs one hand through his hair, the other holding the steering wheel. “Alright, touché, okay asshole?”

Stiles snorts, patting his shoulder. “Just calling it as I see it.”

“Can we stop talking now?” Scott cringes. “God, this is awkward.”

“You werewolves are so emotionally constipated.” Stiles rolls his eyes.

“Said the pot to the kettle.”

“Mine is genuine, yours is just a side effect,” Stiles points out and Scott just rolls his eyes.
They travel in silence for a while, and Stiles even manages to relax and enjoy the company.

“So,” Scott ventures a bit later. “Are you going to tell me what happened with Derek before we left?”

“Speaking of awkward conversations we want to avoid,” Stiles quips.

“Come on, dude.” Scott wrinkles his nose. “I have werewolf senses, which means I have a pretty good idea of what went down between you two. I just want to know if you’re okay.”

“Peachy.” Stiles grins sarcastically. “I never thought my first time would be with a battered and bloody werewolf in a semi-buried basement, but I can’t really complain. Derek gives-”

“Woah!” Scott groans. “I’m gonna stop you right there, man!”

“You asked!” Stiles laughs, showing his palms.

“You know you have the worst taste, right? I can’t believe you gave it up to Derek, after all that. And by the way, I can’t believe you were actually still a virg-”

“Alright!” Stiles cuts him in. “Why don’t we just forget I ever said that? Let’s just pretend I was an equal opportunity man back in Beacon Hills after you left. I don’t know, I can even make up some good stories about crabs if you want.”

“I don’t think anyone wants crabs,” Scott comments.


“Not really in the mood.” Scott shrugs.

“Lucky me.” Stiles glares.

“Actually,” Scott falters. “Isaac told me something you need to know.”

“I hope it’s not about crabs.”

“It’s about Derek.” Scott deadpans.

Stiles shrinks back. He’s not sure he wants to hear whatever it is Scott has to say. “Uh, how about not?” he ends up suggesting.

“He- wait, what?” Scott glances at him a moment before looking back at the road.

“I don’t really want to talk about Derek and the betas just yet,” Stiles admits, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Uh.” Scott seems lost for words. “Yeah, sure. We don’t have to discuss everything now.”

“Cool.” Stiles pats his shoulder. “Let’s leave a little mystery for the rest of the trip.”

Scott snorts as Stiles closes his eyes and leans back in his seat.

He has dozed off by the time Scott pulls over.

“Why are we stopping?” Stiles asks, still half asleep.

“Even werewolves need a break,” Scott says as he opens the car door and gets out.
Stiles follows him, stretching and yawning as Scott opens the trunk and grabs a few backpacks.

“We’re hiking to a more secure place and crashing for the night,” Scott explains as he tosses one of the backpacks to Stiles, who stumbles backwards before securing it on his back and following Scott uphill.

“You know,” Stiles points out. “I can drive.”

“I know,” Scott snorts. “I just need a few hours of sleep in a secured place and I’ll be good. Those assholes left me right next to a set of windows where hunters threw in grenades. I barely made it.”

Stiles stutters on the path, almost tripping over a root and falling face first to the ground.

“You okay?” Scott turns to wait for him.


“Oh, I wouldn’t call it that.” Scott rubs the back of his head.

“Dude!” Stiles’ eyes widen, gesturing wildly with his arms in the universal what the fuck gesture. “Are you still hurt?”

“Like I said, a few hours of sleep and I’ll-”

“You werewolves are all so fucking dumb,” Stiles snarls, marching over and pulling the backpack from Scott’s shoulder.

He starts walking, not bothering to see if Scott follows him or not.

“There’s no need for that,” Scott huffs a moment later before hiking after him.

“Sure there is,” Stiles dismisses. “Now, where do you want to nest to get your beauty sleep? I’ll keep watch.”

“There is definitely no need for that,” Scott insists.

“Just shut up.” Stiles rolls his eyes. He spots a small cave in the hill, covered by bushes and starts toward it. “Can you smell if there is anything living inside?” He points at it as he keeps hiking.

“It seems clear,” Scott comments as he ducks and moves inside.

Stiles follows him, dragging the backpacks inside after him.

There isn’t a whole lot of space, but enough for them to unroll their sleeping bags and lay over them.

“Are you still bleeding? Should I patch you up or something?” Stiles asks, unsure of the protocol here.

“No.” Scott smiles as he snuggles inside his sleeping bag. “I’m already healing.”

“Alright.” Stiles opens his pack and grabs something to eat and more water. “A snack then?”

Scott gives him a look.

“Come on dude, I know werewolves need food to fuel their super healing abilities.” Stiles passes him
He looks at Scott, but his eyes aren’t seeing him. Instead, his mind replays the moment he looked at
the sleeping form of Derek. Stiles sighs, rubbing his temple as he tries to clear his mind. So what if, according to them, he does affect Derek.

Stiles rolls over with a groan. He knows exactly how he affects Derek. But come on. That doesn’t mean they are soul mates, like Scott’s mom wrongly suggested. Stiles is not expecting Derek to show up and sweep him off his feet like this were a romance novel. Not that Derek couldn’t rock the whole bare chested, dangerous yet tormented pirate thing. He-

“Oh my god,” Stiles groans. “What’s wrong with me?”

He’s glad Scott is too asleep to be able to reply to that.

A few hours later, Stiles is fighting sleep when Scott bolts up.

“Wh-what? I’m awake!” Stiles mumbles, as he blinks several times, trying to clear his head.

“We have to go,” Scott says, moving out of the sleeping bag and rolling it in a quick movement.

“Why? What did you hear?” Stiles insists as he does the same, much slower than his supernatural friend.

Scott huffs, shoving him out of the way to finish packing Stiles’ backpack in a flurry.

“No time to explain,” Scott whispers as he crouches and moves outside.

“Sad thing is, I’m used to this,” Stiles complains to himself as he follows Scott outside.

His friend is already darting through the trees, carrying both their backpacks, and the way he’s moving, Stiles knows those few hours of sleep did him wonders.

“Hurry up,” Scott hisses, looking back at him, before he resumes hiking down the hill.

Stiles rolls his eyes and throws his arms in exasperation, but he tries to keep up with Scott anyway. He keeps looking down at the ground to avoid tripping over something and falling on his face when he runs into Scott’s back.

“Dude,” Stiles starts to protest, but there is something in the stillness of Scott that makes him quiet.

He hears something approaching them seconds before the figure appears in front of them. Stiles’ breath catches in his throat as he observes the person on the other side of the clearing.

”Derek...” he breathes out, eyes never leaving the form still in shadows, even as Scott places himself between them and bares his fangs.

Stiles’ heart is thundering in his chest. His whole body is taut, ready to dash forward. He's been lying to himself all along, trying to convince himself he was ready to never see Derek again, preparing himself for the possibility that Derek wouldn’t come for him after all. But here he is, right in front of Stiles.

He takes an involuntary step forward and that seems to break the moment. The figure moves toward them, leaving the shadows behind until Scott and Stiles can see Derek in the moonlight.

Their eyes lock and Stiles grows impatient, his need to reach out is so great his palms tingle with anticipation.
"Scott," Derek growls. He's not wolfed out. He's not flashing red eyes or sprouting fangs or claws. But the way he says the name is enough to make Scott step aside, submitting to the Alpha.

Derek is suddenly there, pouncing on him. Stiles is expecting roughness but Derek's hands are surprisingly gently as he runs them all over Stiles, apparently trying to make sure he's not injured.

"Derek, I'm fine," he breathes out, his own hands inspecting him in return without even realizing, cupping Derek’s face.

Derek makes a noise in the back of his throat and he's suddenly burying his face in the crock of Stiles' neck, scenting him. He nudges his nose up and down the line of bite marks and then nips Stiles’ throat carefully.

Stiles fists his hair, pulling him closer. He doesn't care if Scott makes a choking noise and turns hastily around. Stiles wraps an arm around Derek’s back, holding him close. Derek murmurs something against his throat, and Stiles finds himself nodding even though he can’t hear him.

Derek pulls abruptly away then. He holds Stiles’ shoulders and keeps him in place as he steps back and looks hard at him.

"What were you thinking?" he asks in a demanding tone, shaking Stiles slightly.

"What?" Stiles blinks, confused. Then he registers Derek's pissed off face and reacts. "Me?!" He squeals indignantly. "What were you thinking? We had a deal! You were supposed to take me out of that place weeks ago!"

"I was working on it!" Derek shouts back.

"Uh, guys," Scott says tentatively, turning toward them again.

"Working on it? Don't bullshit me," Stiles snaps, completely worked up. "Admit you didn't want me to go."

"Admit-" Derek’s eyes grow wide. He clearly did not see that coming. He huffs and the corner of his mouth lifts slightly. "You think I wanted you all for myself? Is that what you’re saying?"

"No," Stiles snaps quickly back. He feels his face burning up as he breaks on a full body blush and curses inwardly. "No. This is about me having to leave that place to find my father."

"We had a deal," Derek growls.

"That conveniently didn't include finding my dad."

"Fine," Derek growls, his tone this close to an eye roll. "Let's make a new deal then."

"Fine," Stiles smiles sarcastically. "I'm all ears."

"I'll help you find your father if you help me find the Argents." Derek deadpans, clearly not impressed by Stiles’ attitude.

"Guys," Scott insists.

"Are you serious?" Stiles asks, eyes never leaving Derek's.

Derek nods, leaning forward. He doesn't seem to realize he's pressing Stiles against his body.
"Alright," Stiles licks his lips nervously, and Derek’s eyes follow the movement, still leaning forward. Stiles’ eyes flick back and forth between Derek’s eyes and mouth, expectantly.

Scott groans somewhere close.

“We have a deal then,” Derek breathes out, hovering right over Stiles’ lips as he speaks.

“We do,” Stiles whispers back, suddenly unable to swallow.

Derek seems to realize what he’s doing and takes a hasty step back, letting go of Stiles, who stumbles a little.

Scott sighs loudly, releasing a big huff of air.

“Let’s go,” Derek answers instead. “If we’re fast, we can reach the border tomorrow night.”

Scott goes to retrieve the backpacks when Derek speaks again. "You're not coming with us.”

"You can't stop me," Scott snorts.

"I’m not going to," Derek says calmly. “Remember that fake lead you set up to confuse me?” he asks. “Well, Isaac bought it. I have Erica and Boyd following him, to make sure he survives.”

Scott’s eyes widen and for a moment Stiles isn’t sure what his friend is going to do.

“That’s on you,” Derek shrugs. “He’s in danger because of you. Isaac left everything behind to find you.”

Scott doesn’t reply. He keeps staring at Derek, completely still and silent.

“Scott,” Stiles murmurs, unnerved by his silence. He tries to reach him before realizing Scott is actually shaking, trying to control himself.

“Stiles,” Derek warns, throwing out an arm. “Step back.”

At that, Scott growls and flashes yellow eyes, making Stiles startle and scramble back.

“Isaac is going to be fine,” Derek speaks as he steps closer. “Because you’re gonna make sure.”

Scott grows, crouching down as he wolfs out.

“Good.” Derek nods at Scott. “Let it out.”

Scott throws his head back and howls as Derek pulls him back to his feet and holds him, pulling his back to his chest and pinning his arms. Scott keeps howling and snarling until he seems to be exhausted and he collapses against Derek’s shoulder.

“Is he...” Stiles trails off, tentatively stepping closer. “Is he okay?”

“He’s better now,” Derek nods as he spins Scott around and clasps his neck.

Stiles watches his friend as Scott shudders and holds onto Derek in return.

“I had to get your attention,” Derek murmurs against Scott’s head. “Now you’ll listen to me.”

“I’m taking the car,” Scott finally says, low and roughly.
“Of course you are,” Derek reassures him, holding Scott at arms’ length to look him in the eye. “Now listen.” He grows serious, gripping Scott’s shoulder. “I told Erica to meet up with us in Beacon Hills in seven days. You have to find them and bring them to me.”

Scott nods along with Derek’s words. “I will.”

“I’m trusting you with this,” Derek says roughly, making Scott straighten at the tone. “You’re pack, so go find them.”

Scott clutches Derek’s arm, looking at him intensely for a moment before he clears his throat and moves away, searching for Stiles, who goes instantly to him.

Scott circles his shoulder, guiding him away from Derek, who regards them warily but doesn’t move.

“Are you okay with this?” Scott whispers, even though they both know Derek can hear the whole conversation.

"Go," Stiles breathes out, smiling reassuringly. "I'll be fine. I'll have an alpha with me. Just go find the betas and we'll meet up in Beacon Hills."

"I can’t." Scott’s throat catches. “I can’t abandon you again."

"You’re not," Stiles claps his shoulder. "I'm asking you to help them. I don't want anything to happen to them, either."

"Are you sure you'll be okay?" Scott insists.

"Positive," he says confidently, turning around and looking at Derek as he speaks. Their eyes lock and Stiles’ breath catches in his throat at the way Derek is staring at him.

Stiles pauses for the first time to realize that Derek is really there. He actually came for him.

“I’ll make sure to be back in time,” Scott is saying as Stiles has a small internal freak-out at the realization that Derek not only followed him, but they are going to be alone for the next week.

“Scott,” he says, looking at his friend. “After, well, that reaction, you can’t deny you feel something for Isaac. So go find him.”

“I-” Scott falters. “I don’t know what happened, but I- I have to find him,” he lowers his voice.

“I know.” Stiles nods. He can feel Derek’s eyes on him as he keeps talking. “I was right before. He can be your anchor, so don’t fight it.”

Scott looks at him in surprise. After a moment, he nods, casting his eyes down.

“I’ll see you soon.” Stiles clears his throat. “Okay? Find the betas and meet us in Beacon Hills.”

Scott nods and then smiles slowly. “Yeah. Be careful, okay?” He squeezes Stiles’ shoulder.

Stiles smiles back. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

Scott snorts and takes a step back. He looks at them both before turning around and disappearing through the trees.

Stiles doesn’t move, even after Scott is long gone. He just keeps looking at where he disappeared, realizing what just happened.
Derek observes Stiles for what feels like ages. He stares at him openly, knowing Stiles isn’t paying attention. He still can’t believe he found him. He didn’t stop running for almost a day, and now that he’s stopped, his muscles feel sore in a way not even his werewolf healing can fix.

Stiles frowns, lost in his thoughts as he keeps starting at the spot where Scott ran off. Derek takes a step closer, finally giving in to the pull he’s been fighting since he broke contact with Stiles.

His gaze keeps falling to Stiles’ naked neck, to the bite marks and hickies. Derek doesn’t miss the collar, or what it represents. He finds he prefers his marks there instead of the leather. He’s thinking of what it’d be like to run a thumb over Stiles’ slender neck, rubbing the bruises until Stiles made a small noise, when Derek realizes he’s raised his arm and quickly drops it.

Stiles seems to pick up on the movement though. He looks up and takes a step closer and Derek moves away instinctively. He isn’t sure he can handle Stiles touching him right now.

Stiles nods and clears his throat several times, rubbing under his nose before saying roughly, “I’m ready to go.”

They hike through the forest for the rest of the night in silence. Derek thinks of the first time they walked together through a forest, when they were attacked by the shape shifter. How different things are and yet, still, somehow exactly the same.

He looks back to Stiles, who is walking a few feet behind him, and wonders what he’s thinking. Stiles has never been known for beating around the bush. Derek supposes it’s only a matter of time before Stiles starts asking questions Derek is not ready to answer.

They walk until dawn is coming through the trees from the east and keep walking after that. Despite Derek’s heavy sleep recovering from the fight, the hours he spent running to find Stiles and Scott, and the hours they’ve been walking together are beginning to take a toll on him.

Derek notices he’s slowed down when he feels Stiles brushing him as they walk.

He’s been running on adrenaline, fueled by the need to find Stiles, but now that the adrenaline has worn off, Derek realizes he’s been in a daze for most of the hike.

But Derek can’t stop until he’s sure Stiles is somewhere safe. He can’t make camp in the middle of the woods, where they could be attacked while Derek is too weak to protect Stiles.

“Derek.” Stiles murmurs as he slides an arm under Derek’s arm and holds him. Derek grunts, trying not to trip as he keeps walking, accepting the help wordlessly.

He allows it when Stiles pulls him to a stop and nudges him toward an ancient tree, gesturing for Derek to wait between the big roots.

Stiles crouches down, rolls out his sleeping bag and pulls at Derek’s sleeve until Derek drops to his knees on top of it.

“Come on, time to charge the wolf batteries,” Stiles says lightly as he pushes Derek down.
Taking a tiring breath, Derek lays down on his back and opens his arm in an offering gesture, something they’re used to. Stiles seems to falter a second. He licks his lips nervously and then slides in next to Derek, pressing against his body.

Derek pulls him against his side, relaxing into the scent and warmth of Stiles. He knows this scent, has gotten used to falling asleep with it. It smells even better now that their scents are mixed up. Something in Derek’s chest loosens at the thought; he tightens his hold, pressing his face against Stiles’ hair.

Stiles tenses up and Derek runs his hand all the way down Stiles’ back, then up again, comforting him. When Derek’s hand closes on the nape of his neck, Stiles makes a small noise in the back of his throat and then buries his face in the crook of Derek’s neck. He throws an arm and leg over Derek, enveloping his body with his own in a protective way.

Derek finds the gesture amusing, but he can’t help snuggling closer and closing his eyes. They don’t speak, just cling to each other and Derek is so tired he’s out after a minute.

When he wakes up, Derek notices Stiles is gone before even remembering where he is.

Bolting up, he’s on his feet and looking frantically around when Stiles emerges from between two trees.

When Stiles notices Derek is awake, he smiles. Derek feels a lump in his throat. He was terrified that Stiles had left him again, and then that unguarded smile... Derek frowns. He grunts and steps back.

“I needed a bathroom break,” Stiles jokes when he notices Derek’s trouble face.

Derek clears his throat. “What time is it?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles shrugs as he crouches down and starts searching inside his bag. “Are you hungry?”

Derek shrugs as he sits down on a root and then Stiles is there, shoving food in his hand.

“Eat,” he says, smiling. At the contact of their fingers, Derek flinches back, making Stiles’ smile falter for a moment before he goes back to his pack to get food for himself.

Derek pauses, frowning before eating. He feels like it should be awkward, considering how hard they seem to be trying to ignore what happened two nights ago. But somehow Stiles seems to be his easy-going self and it’s unnerving Derek. He doesn’t know what to expect anymore.

He’s no longer sure Stiles is going to want to talk about it. It seems he’s happy with ignoring what happened and moving on. So maybe Derek should loosen up and follow Stiles’ lead, pretend like nothing happened and nothing would happen again.

But then, Derek can’t help being a bit disappointed.

Stiles takes a calming breath, trying to collect himself. Pretending everything is normal, or at the very least as normal as it could be between Derek and himself, is harder than expected. Stiles shakes his
head and stuffs his mouth with food in order to distract himself from that line of thought.

He can tell Derek is avoiding touching him, ever since Scott left. It was only when he was half out of it with exhaustion that Derek had reached for him. That’s why Stiles had faltered. But in the end his need to get closer won over the feeling that, in other circumstances, Derek would have never done something like that.

The hard part had been leaving Derek’s arms before he woke up. Stiles knows it’d be better if he wasn’t there when Derek’s defenses were up again. He’s not sure how much longer he’ll be able to pretend, but for now he decides to concentrate on getting to Beacon Hills and ignore how the distance between them literally hurts.

They are soon back on their feet. Fortunately, they’re going mostly downhill now, so it’s easier for Stiles to keep up. Even then, he’s still always a few feet behind Derek, no matter how hard he pushes himself. And more than once he finds himself thinking of reaching out to Derek, grabbing his arm, maybe holding onto his wrist- he’d slide his fingers down, thumbs pressing over his pulse point before moving down to Derek’s palm, where Stiles would lace their fingers together...

“We’re almost there,” Derek says, pausing to look back a moment before he resumes walking.

“The border?” Stiles asks, a bit out of breathe.

Derek nods. “We took a detour to avoid the wolf base.”

Stiles sighs in relief. That means they have one less problem to worry about.

The terrain continues to get steeper and steeper the closer they get to the border, to the point where Stiles starts to stumble, fighting to stay on his feet.

“You’re too slow,” Derek grunts.

“Well excuse me for being human,” Stiles huffs.

“Humans can go faster than that,” Derek points out.

Stiles opens his arms wide and makes an exasperated noise in the back of his throat. “Really? Then maybe you should just carry me.”

“Maybe I will,” Derek says with some sass.

Stiles snorts and a moment later he finds himself being thrown over Derek’s shoulder.

“Dude!” Stiles squeaks to Derek’s back. “I was joking! I didn’t like it when Boyd did it; it’s not any better now.”

“Shut up,” Derek says, although he sounds fairly amused. “We’ll get there faster this way.”

Derek rushes through the forest, jumping and running without making a sound. Stiles is concentrating on not slamming his face into Derek’s ass when Derek makes a sudden noise and Stiles is flying through the air until he hits the ground with a thud.

“This is what happens when you try to brag,” Stiles groans as he sits up and rubs his shins.

He looks around for Derek, finding him writhing in pain on the forest ground not far away.

“What happened?” Stiles exclaims, standing up and starting towards him. “What is it? What’s
“Silver barb,” Derek grunts out, holding his leg below the knee. Stiles drops down to inspect him, and sees a thin barbed wire tightly bound around his ankle.

“Oh my god,” he says as his eyes widen in surprise. “Okay, okay what do I do? Tell me what to do, Derek, come on this is not the time to be the silent type-”

“Stiles,” Derek grunts through gritted teeth. “Take a deep breath.”

“Right.” Stiles does as told, inhaling and exhaling exaggeratedly.

“I stepped on it,” Derek explains as he tries to grab the wire. Hissing, Derek moves his hands away. “I can’t touch it,” he grunts. “You’ll have to do it.”

“Okay.” Stiles licks his lips nervously. There’s only one reason why Derek can’t touch it. Hunters must have set up this trap for werewolves.

“Take the knife secured to my calf and wedge it between my leg and the wire,” Derek grits out through his clenched jaw. Stiles can tell he’s in a lot of pain.

With shaky fingers, Stiles does as told. He rolls Derek’s pants up his other leg and grabs a hold of the hunting knife. He tries to work without tearing the cloth under the barbed wire in his injured leg, but the barbs slice through it anyway until it’s no longer blocking wire from skin.

The moment the wire touches Derek’s skin, Derek cries out and his skin turns red and blotchy.

Acting on an impulse, Stiles searches on his bag until he finds a bottle of water and pours its content all over Derek’s leg, right over the wire

After a moment, Derek settles down on the ground. “How-” he pants out.

“I thought it might have wolfsbane,” Stiles explains as he tries to slide his fingers between the wire and Derek’s ankle and loosens it up, but it doesn’t give and Stiles gets a bloody finger for his effort.

That’s when they hear people close by and Derek grabs him and pulls him down, his body half on top of Derek.

“Hunters,” Derek breaths against his ear.

“What do we do?” Stiles whispers back, head tilted up so he can study their surroundings.

“I need you to take the wire off my leg,” Derek grits out. “Then I’ll take care of them.”

Stiles looks down at him, noticing the sweat beading on Derek’s forehead and neck, the pained expression on him as he tries to hold the protests in.

“No,” Stiles shakes his head. “I’ll do it.”

“Are you suddenly an expert in taking hunters down?” Derek asks with an attitude, despite the obvious pain he’s in.

“My dad is the sheriff.” Stiles snorts. “I practically grew up with hunters, I know how to deal with them. Just trust me this once.”

“No,” Derek grunts.
“What?” Stiles frowns. “I don’t know if you noticed but I’m trying to keep you alive, okay?”

Derek doesn’t answer, just groans, grabbing his injured leg as he squeezes his eyes closed. Stiles has never seen him in so much pain before.

“Alright, it’s settled.” Stiles nods as he gets up and starts walking toward the sound.

“Stiles!” Derek hisses after him.

But he doesn’t stop. Stiles moves through the bushes until he spots the hunters. They are a border patrol. Stiles knows the kind of training these teams have. Their priority is to spot and notify others of intruders. They won’t be well-trained in combat and only one of them even has a gun. The other is holding a walkie-talkie, which catches Stiles’ attention. That could pose a problem.

Stiles quickly runs through everything his father taught him about self-defense and he stumbles out of the bushes.

“Help!” he yells. “He’s following me!”

The hunters react quickly. They rush forward and assess him. The marks on his neck, busted lip and other wounds are apparently enough to legitimize him.

“Who did this to you, boy?” the older man asks, reaching out to him.

“A- a werewolf,” Stiles stutters, mentally pointing out he should win an Emmy for pulling this off. “He’s chasing me, you have to help me!”

The man pulls his gun out (loaded with wolfsbane bullets, no doubt) and pushes passed Stiles, as if trying to ambush the supposed werewolf.

*First mistake, Stiles thinks as he grabs the younger hunter before he can follow his partner. “Please don’t leave me, please!”*

The hunter looks back and forth between Stiles and his partner and then he grasps Stiles’ shoulder. “I’m not going anywhere, son.”

Stiles sighs in relief. He can’t hear the older man anymore, so he moves his hold up the hunter’s arm, as if he were still seeking comfort, and when the angle is just right, Stiles acts quickly.

Maybe he’s no match for a werewolf, but Stiles has been trained by the most famous sheriff in the country. He knows how to find a person’s pressure points and how to work them quickly and efficiently.

Stiles moves behind the hunter, circles his neck with one arm and pushes up against his jaw, blocking the flow of blood and oxygen to his brain. The man tries to fight him off but he faints within just a few short minutes.

Stiles looks down at the man and winces. This is nothing like training. He reaches down and grabs the walkie-talkie, popping out the batteries and throwing them into the forest. He throws the device in the opposite direction.

Then Stiles goes after the other hunter.

Moving carefully, quietly, Stiles ducks behind some bushes, watching the hunter as he studies Stiles’ tracks. Crap. He can't let him track his way back to Derek.
Stiles reaches for a large branch on the ground, then moves slowly to get behind the hunter. He stumbles over a root, his other foot slamming down loudly, but Stiles is on the man before he’s turned all the way around to investigate the noise.

He swings the branch back like a bat and it makes contact with the hunter’s right arm. The gun goes off, tumbling to the ground, the bullet colliding with a tree trunk. When the hunter swings around, left hand in a fist, Stiles hits him again, this time in the face.

The man stumbles back, holding his temple and Stiles doesn’t waste time, hopping forward and trying to get his arms locked around the man’s neck.

This man is bigger than the first hunter, though. And contrary to his partner, he’s figured out Stiles’ intentions. They fight for control, slamming against trees and rolling on the ground until Stiles has him pinned, his leg around the hunter's neck, blocking his airways until he passes out.

Stiles gives him a little shake and once he’s satisfied the hunter is staying down, he gets up. He rubs his hands on his pants and huffs, wiggling a bit to shake off the aches and pains. His back is bruised from ramming into a tree and there’s a cut on the back of his arm.

He grabs the gun and empties the clip, doing the same as he did with the walkie-talkie. Then he makes his way back to where Derek is still lying on the ground, noting the way his body is shaking.

“There.” Stiles gives him a shit-eating grin, making a dusting off motion with his hands. “Problem solved.”

“Are you crazy?” Derek roars. “They could’ve killed you!”

“I knew what I was doing!” Stiles protest.

“You didn’t even kill them,” Derek snorts. “They’re gonna go right back to their base and report us the minute they wake up. Help me up.” Derek reaches up with his hand. “I’ll go deal with them.”

Stiles looks at him in disbelief.

“What.” Derek arches an eyebrow, no question in the word.

“You’d kill them?” Stiles sighs. “They have no gun or radio. They didn’t even see you. There’s no reason to kill them.”

“We can’t risk it,” Derek shakes his head. “They wouldn’t have hesitated in killing you!”

“I don’t care!” Stiles spats back. “I dealt with the problem. I didn’t need your help and it doesn’t need your fixing now. I’m not some damsel in distress, you asshole!”

“You sure about that?” Derek asks with a mocking smile.

Stiles groans and shoves Derek with his foot. Before he’s even aware of what’s happening, Derek is falling away, grunting and groaning as he tumbles down the hill.

Stiles is frozen in place for about half a second, heart beating loudly as he sees Derek disappear. He didn’t realize they were on the edge of some sort of gully and now he can’t even see where Derek ended up.

“Derek!” He finally reacts, dashing forward and sliding down the small hill after him, flailing and slipping on leaves. He’s frantic, stomach all twisted up and he trips. He rolls a few times before he
hits the bottom hard enough to leave him dizzy. When he clears his head, Stiles spots Derek against the trunk of a dead tree not far away.

He’s not moving.

“Derek!” Stiles runs to him. He drops to his knees and turns Derek over, inspecting his wounded leg. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know-” his words catch in Stiles' throat. He’s starting to panic. Derek is looking paler. He's unresponsive as Stiles shakes him. It doesn’t look like the wire has done any more damage, but Derek still won’t wake.

“Come on,” Stiles begs. “Don’t do this to me, you fucking sour and unbearably grumpy douchebag!”

He holds Derek’s face with both hands, so desperate he doesn’t know what to do. Stiles rubs his fingers over Derek’s cheeks, feeling the stubble scratching his thumbs. “Please,” he whispers.

Out of other options, Stiles does the only thing left to do. He punches Derek straight in the face. Derek bolts up, unfocused eyes wide open as he takes a big gulp of air.

“Oh thank God,” Stiles breathes out, dropping his head down.

“What happened?” Derek coughs as Stiles leans over his chest, completely worn out now that the panic is over.

“I thought I had killed you,” he murmurs, making Derek snort.

Stiles falls back on his heels to look at Derek. He really wants to reach out and touch him again. Maybe cup his face with his hands and lean his forehead against Derek’s. But then Derek winces, sitting up to reach for his leg, and Stiles moves, grabbing hold of his injured leg.

“Try not to move,” Stiles says as he wedges the flat of the knife between the wire and Derek’s leg again.

Trying to ignore the obvious pain Derek’s in, Stiles turns the knife’s sharp edge towards the wire, but it’s not enough to get it loose enough to slip off Derek’s foot. So Stiles drops the knife and uses his hands instead. He's never been good with tools, anyway.

He can feel the barbs cutting into his palms, and Derek is shouting again, but Stiles ignores it, working the wire and pulling until finally the wire is loose enough to slide over Derek’s heel. His hands are bloody and torn and the skin on Derek’s ankle is shredded, but it’s finally off.

Derek sits up, breathing heavy, and grabs hold of Stiles’ wrists, pulling him until Stiles loses his balance and falls half over Derek, head smashed against Derek’s shoulder.

“What-what?” Stiles stutters out before Derek presses Stiles’ hands against his face.

Derek rubs his stubble against the outside of his fingers, the sensation a slow burn that makes Stiles quiver. Derek sighs and presses his lips against Stiles’ knuckles, not really kissing, just leaving the ghost of his mouth over Stiles’ skin.

Stiles’ eyes widen. He shivers and tightens his fingers instinctively around Derek’s hold, never wanting to let go. The stinging pain from the cuts on his palms has him exhaling in a pain-filled gasp, and Derek pulls back, inhaling sharply.
“Why did you hurt yourself?” Derek murmurs as the pain goes suddenly away.

Stiles leans back, pulling his legs underneath himself to regain balance and looks at his hands still locked in Derek’s grip.

“What did you do?” he breathes out.

Derek lowers their hands without letting go, and looks at him. At his gaze, something tightness in Stiles’ chest. He wants to reach out and touch him, but Derek is still holding his hands, so Stiles looks down and notices for the first time the black veins marking Derek’s own hands, going up his forearms.

“Dude!” he exclaims.

Derek lets him go and turns away, trying not to put weight on his hurt leg as he gets back to his feet. But Stiles is following him, sliding an arm under his and around his back to help him.

“We can still reach the town before dawn if we hurry,” Derek speaks through gritted teeth.

“You need rest,” Stiles says, moving with him as Derek starts to walk, allowing Stiles to help him.

“I’ll rest when we get there,” Derek dismisses.

“So, what was that thing you just did to my hands?” Stiles asks casually as they walk together.

“Hm,” Derek grunts. “I just took the pain away for a while. Be careful, though, you’re still hurt.”

Stiles looks down at his hand not supporting Derek and sees the bloody cuts, but can’t feel them.

Derek stops walking. He grabs the rim of his dirty shirt and tears the bottom couple inches off all the way around, ripping that strip in half.

“Give me your hands.” Derek gestures.

Stiles offers the hand he just inspected and observes how Derek wraps one piece of his shirt around it, like a bandage. He limps one step away, pulling at Stiles’ other arm until he has access to that hand, doing the same to it with the other piece of shirt.


“Stiles,” Derek says in his exasperated tone, sliding his arm over Stiles’ shoulders and resuming their hike. “Not the best moment to have a discussion about this. I don’t know if you noticed but I’m healing really slowly for some reason and—”

“The wolfsbane,” Stiles cuts in. It’s slowing the healing process.”

“Well then, you should know to lay off,” Derek huffs and Stiles can’t help but laugh.

After a while, Derek starts to support himself more on his injured leg and when they reach the borders of the town, Stiles suspects he could be walking without his help.

They stop at the sight of Beacon Hill’s sign. And as they lean into each other, Stiles realizes for the first time he never felt like he was going home.
Stiles' house doesn't feel like a home anymore. It's empty, dark in the night, a shell of what it used to be with a thin layer of dust covering every surface.

The main door is locked. Stiles looks dumbly at the lock, realizing he no longer has the keys to his own place. For a moment he doesn’t understand- doesn’t know what he’s supposed to do. No one locked it when he was taken away. Does that mean his father was here after him? That he closed the door to keep their house safe while they were away?

Derek limps past him and palms the knob, looking at Stiles strangely before he breaks the lock and opens the door for Stiles, who stumbles inside, followed closely by Derek. He goes down the hall, heart thundering in his chest and lungs burning up as he realizes he had kept the stupid hope all along of finding his father still there, waiting for him.

It is, in a way, the last straw. Stiles sags and his legs fail him. But Derek is there, catching him before Stiles can hit the floor. He doesn’t speak, just holds Stiles closer, giving him time. And Stiles supposes it’d be easy to cling back, to bury his face in Derek’s shoulder and close his eyes to the reality around him, but he can’t do that to his dad. Ignoring the pang of longing, he takes a step back with shaky legs and turns toward the living room, leaving Derek in the entryway and ignoring the worry he sees in his face.

The place is still how the pack left it. There is filth, empty bottles and dirty plates everywhere. A toppled over couch, a few broken frames. It looks like a gang trashed the place. Stiles sees the patches of mud in his mom’s favorite couch and he's suddenly furious.

This is not his home anymore, they took it from him. All his memories with his mom, and now his dad too, they don’t have a place anymore in between these four empty walls. There is no place to go back now, to pretend everything is still as it used to. How dare they, what right did they have to do this to him? Stiles has nowhere to go back to. Nowhere to go from here.

"Stiles," Derek whispers. It's barely more than a sigh. He runs his fingers along the inside of Stiles' forearm down to his wrist. "Come on, let's get your hands bandaged."

But Stiles can't move. Not yet. He's at the door of the living room, seeing the proof that it all really happened. That some strangers kidnapped him, threatened to kill his father, to hurt him. He remembers the closet in the hallway, the fear, the first time he saw Derek...

"You never apologized," he blurts out roughly, feeling Derek tense next to him, his fingers digging briefly into Stiles' wrist before letting go altogether.

"I thought we were past that," Derek murmurs.

Stiles turns around when he hears that. He takes a step towards Derek and points at him. "No one is ever past that, you asshole!" He hisses, because even now, he remembers the danger they are in. "You ruined my life!"

Stiles regrets those words the moment they are out. He’s clearly not thinking straight. As he opens his mouth to speak again, something in Derek’s troubled face stops him, making him think he’ll call defeat and apologize. But the illusion lasts just a moment. Derek snarls, shoving Stiles away from him. "You didn't have a life!" he growls back.

Stiles would have felt a sense of terror at the prospect of pissing off a werewolf months ago. Not
anymore. He’s actually considering hitting Derek. He heals fast, after all.

“You have no idea what I had!” Stiles exclaims, banging a fist against Derek’s chest. “You kidnapped me, forced me to leave and now my dad- he-” Stiles chokes on unshed tears. “He’s not here. And it’s all your fault,” he ends up saying roughly as his throat closes up. Stiles fists his hands, wincing when the wounds reopen, but ignoring it.

"Don't be a fool," Derek whispers, stepping closer and grabbing his wrist, forcing him to open his hands.

“You had no right,” Stiles grits through clenched teeth as Derek inspects his wounds.

“You’re right,” Derek says after a moment, surprising him. “We used your father to pressure you to come with us. But don’t idealize the life you had before. I know you were miserable, you used to stink of regret.”

"Is-” Stiles licks his lips nervously, because there is something in Derek’s tone that has drained his anger away and replaced it with uneasiness. “Is that some wolf slang to say I smelled funny? Because I used to be very careful with my personal hygiene, until you barged into my life and-"

"Shut up," Derek says almost fondly, making Stiles huff.

“You’re unbearable, I don’t know why I bother.” Stiles glares at him. “Or why I care,” he says tentatively, feeling Derek’s fingers still against his hands.

Yes, he was unfairly dragged away from his home and that’s the reason why he doesn’t know where his dad is now. But somewhere along the way, from that first day to now, something genuine was born. Stiles grew fond of the betas and Derek. Maybe fond is not the right word to describe what he feels for Derek, though. But Stiles doesn’t want to give it a better name. Because he’s so dangerously head over heels this grumpy, stubborn, at times snarky and sassy werewolf, Stiles can’t even deal with himself right now.

“It’s so infuriating,” he groans. “Talking to you is like trying to get answers from a wall. Why can’t we communicate like normal people?”

“Because we’re not normal,” Derek helps.

“Or people in your case, I guess.” Stiles pulls a face.

“We’re not that bad.” Derek shrugs.

“Man, you’re biased.” Stiles snorts as Derek lets go of his hands.

“We’re in this together now,” Derek says, looking him in the eye.

“Yeah, I guess.” Stiles falters, because those words seem to carry some weight, as if they meant something more.

“Are we done?” Derek opens his arms wide, in a please gesture. “It’s not safe here.”

Stiles knows he has a choice here. He can press on or he can let go. “I’ll go grab what we need,” he grunts after a moment. "I'll be quick."

He runs upstairs, escaping the sudden tension between them. Stiles doesn't stop to think of what he's about to do or he'll never do it. He goes into his dad's room, straight to the drawer where he keeps all
the paperwork, like the house deed, Stiles’ birth certificate, medical records, some old journals from his mom and the letters his dad exchanged with the Argents over the years.

Stiles grabs the letters, ignoring everything on purpose as he goes to his room on an impulse and grabs the folded piece of paper under his bed. It’s a letter he wrote to his father years ago, explaining what Gerard Argent had done. Stiles never showed it to anyone. He thinks of Derek when he takes it but then he realizes he wants to show it to his dad, too. The lies are over, Stiles doesn’t have a home to go back to anymore, and the lies have no place, either.

Derek is waiting for him outside. He’s holding the first AID kit from the second floor’s bathroom in his hands. "Let’s patch you up before we leave."

Stiles agrees wordlessly as he hurries downstairs, going to where he dropped the backpack and shoving all the letters inside. He supposes he’s not being very subtle because when he gets back on his feet, Derek is looking at him with an arched eyebrow and an amused expression.

“I’ll explain later?” Stiles kind of asks, unsure if Derek is going to want to see them now. But to his surprise, Derek just shrugs and walks to the kitchen. Stiles follows him in, kind of dumbfounded. Derek is being strangely... nice. And the fact that Derek and nice sound so weird together should mean something. But Stiles finds he doesn’t mind, he’s just intrigued.

“Hands,” Derek orders, leaving the first AID kit in the kitchen island and stretching his arms forward, gesturing Stiles to come closer. Stiles takes his jacket off, leaving in over a stool and walking over. Derek peels the pieces of cloth around his hands carefully, fingertips barely brushing Stiles’ skin as he works. Grabbing his wrist gently, he pulls him toward the sink and opens the tap, letting the water run.

“I can- uh do it myself,” Stiles stutters, moving his hands under the tap and hissing when the cold water touches his wounds. He has a moment to adjust before Derek steps closer, pulling at Stiles’ sleeves until they are over his elbows. “Th-thanks,” Stiles mumbles, startling when Derek’s warm hands wrap around his, rubbing the filth and parched blood away.

Stiles raises his eyes away from their linked hands up to Derek’s face. They are so close, Stiles can see him in the semi darkness. Derek doesn’t look away as he works in silence. He uses the soap for the dishes to clean Stiles’ hands and up his forearms until he finds the cut Stiles got fighting those hunters. Stiles hisses, startled by the sudden pain, and Derek tightens his hold, leaning closer to be as quick as possible. For no reason, the gesture makes Stiles remember the feeling of Derek’s stubble against his skin and he shivers.

Derek’s hand falters before he’s stepping away and closing the tap. He grabs a towel he must have found in the bathroom upstairs and wraps it around Stiles’ wet hands. “Sit.” Derek points at one of the stools lining the kitchen island, moving to open the AID kit placed right next to it.

“We should probably keep it.” Stiles nods at the kit as he sits, flinching when he grabs the stool with his injured hand without thinking.

“I had already thought of that,” Derek says in amusement. “Considering who I’m traveling with.”

“Rude.” Stiles pulls a face as he offers his hands when Derek gestures him to. Derek uses antiseptic in the small wounds in Stiles’ hands and wraps them carefully with clean bandages. His eyebrows are knitted in concentration as he works, and Stiles finds himself wanting to rub a finger between them to erase the frown away.

Derek grabs the towel, going back to the sink and wetting half of it. He moves back, stopping a
moment in front of Stiles before he steps right between his legs. Stiles straightens and blinks in
surprise, not expecting that but really not minding it either. He’s looking up, expectantly, when
Derek grabs his chin with one hand as presses the wet cloth against his face.

Stiles startles, flailing for a moment and almost losing his balance on top of the stool. He leans
forward into Derek’s body and regains control. “Wha-what uh-are you doing,” he speaks over the
wet cloth Derek is currently using to clean the blood under his nose.

“Your face looks disgusting.” Derek arches a sardonic eyebrow.

“Ha, ha,” Stiles fakes a laugh. “Says the one who smells like wet dog.”

Derek rolls his eyes at the joke. “That’s the best you can do?”

“I- yeah.” Stiles pauses, closing one eye as Derek runs the wet cloth over it. “Considering that you’re
distracting me.”

Derek snorts as he covers Stiles’ face with the cloth and rubs it all over, with the only purpose to
annoy him. “Ack!” Stiles pulls back, snatching the cloth away. “Enough! I’m good, thanks!”

Derek is still between his legs, hands resting on Stiles’ shoulders now that he grabbed the towel.
“You’re not bad,” he murmurs, somewhat fondly. Stiles doesn’t notice when he drops the towel,
eyes fixed on Derek. He feels his chest tightening, suffocating him, like the emotion is too big for his
ribcage. “Your punches are terrible, though,” Derek teases him.

“Dude.” Stiles arches his eyebrows, deciding to play along. “I don’t know if you realized it but I’m
the one who’s been keeping you alive. This baby here,” he brags, holding up his right hand, “woke
you up not so long ago.”

“From a fall you caused,” Derek points out.

“Details,” Stiles dismisses. “The point is that, my punches are fine.”

“You think?” Derek shifts closer and something in his stance makes Stiles shiver. He meets Derek
halfway, leaning forward and placing his hands on Derek’s sides.

“You’re grateful you have my punches,” Stiles teases, ignoring his sudden frantic heart.

"Really?” Derek hums as his eyes blend to red slowly, making Stiles’ cock twitch. “You think an
Alpha needs a human’s help?” Derek smirks.

“You think I was ever in danger before I met you?” Stiles teases back, almost gasping when Derek’s
hands slide along his collarbone up to his neck.

Derek leans forward. “I think you were always a menace to yourself.”

Stiles’ eyelashes flutter down when Derek hovers closer, his breath ghosting over Stiles’ face.
“Your terrible at flirting,” Stiles mumbles. “Why don’t you just shut up and kiss me already?” Stiles
tries to find his mouth, so close a moment ago, but Derek is suddenly backing away, letting him go
and disappearing.

“Hey!” Stiles protests, jumping off the stool.

“We should leave,” Derek says a bit frantically. “It’s not safe here,we-”

"Oh my god!” Stiles exclaims. “Are you fucking kidding me? You want to pretend nothing
happened? Keep with the teasing and the- the blue balls? Don’t get me wrong, even though you suck at flirting, I’m weirdly into it. But dude, is that really your plan?" Stiles throws his arms up. “I mean, news flash, just in case you forgot: we already had sex!”

"I know we had sex!" Derek snarls, turning around. "I also know I woke up and you were gone."

"That- that was-" Stiles stutters, completely taken by surprise. He stops in his tracks, unable to follow up that sentence.

"Yeah." Derek grimaces. "We’ve both made mistakes. I don’t see you apologizing for that."

"You want me to apologize for that?"

"No." Derek frowns. "I’m glad you got out of there."

There is a pause where Stiles doesn’t know what to say and Derek doesn’t seem to want to say anything else. Maybe it’s because Stiles hasn’t really rested since he left the den, maybe even before that. Or because being in his old house has broken a barrier inside himself that Stiles didn’t know was there. But for whatever the reason, he’s had enough. He decides he’s given Derek enough time, and if that isn’t the case, well then, like Derek said so himself, he’s a fucking Alpha, isn’t he? He’ll surely be able to handle a human.

"Alright," Stiles finally says as he takes his flannel shirt off.

"What are you doing?" Derek asks, an edge of desperation in his voice.

“I’m ending this...” Stiles gestures around them. “Whatever this is. I’m ending it. We’re over this,” he explains as he next takes his shirt off. “We’re over ignoring things.”

"You decided," Derek deadpans.

“I did.” Stiles nods as he unzips his pants. “I also decided we’re doing it again.”

“Really.” Derek arches an eyebrow.

“Like, right now,” Stiles says, voice shaking slightly. “But,” he breathes out. He wants to say this, but he’s suddenly insecure. “This time...” he trails off. “This time I’m not going anywhere, so- so you can relax. And enjoy this, which should be easy, because sex, duh. Unless I’m terrible at it, in which case I don’t want to know.”

Derek seems surprised by that. And Stiles loses his playful tone, growing serious.

“We’re in this together, remember?” Stiles says. "You’re annoying most of the time, but I still think we should do it.” Derek snorts and Stiles shrugs. “You know it’s true, buddy. I’d usually ignore it, but we’re talking about ignoring sex. What idiot does that? You’re still an asshole, though, no matter how good you are with your dick.”

Derek arches his eyebrows ridiculously high at that. And Stiles loses his playful tone, growing serious.

“We’re in this together, remember?” Stiles says. "You’re annoying most of the time, but I still think we should do it.” Derek snorts and Stiles shrugs. “You know it’s true, buddy. I’d usually ignore it, but we’re talking about ignoring sex. What idiot does that? You’re still an asshole, though, no matter how good you are with your dick.”

Derek arches his eyebrows ridiculously high at that, taking a step closer after the initial surprise.

"That's it," Stiles smiles when he sees Derek approaching him, hand cupping himself as he starts getting hard. He notices Derek's nostrils flaring and his breath catches in his throat. It's something good that Derek seems to be turned on by his running mouth because Stiles can't really change that. And he's come to the conclusion that he really likes a horny Derek.

Stiles bares his throat in a wordless invitation as he slides a hand inside his underwear. Derek
rumbles. He stops a few inches away and his eyes lower over Stiles’ body very slowly, his stare scorching a path down Stiles’ chest to his crotch.

"Show me." Derek nods at his hand.

There is a determination in Derek’s tone that makes Stiles go for it. He pulls his hand out and shoves his underwear down until he's exposed, fisting himself. Stiles fixes his eyes on Derek's face, registering all the little changes as Derek looks down at what his hand is doing.

"Fuck," Stiles moans, because this is strangely super-hot. All he can think about is Derek reaching forward and touching him. But Derek doesn’t, and the longer he stays there, close enough to touch without actually touching him, the more Stiles gets undone under his predatory stare.

"What are you going to do? You gonna stay there?" he asks, somehow out of breath.

"Yeah," Derek rasps out. "Keep going."

Stiles makes a small noise in the back of his throat, too close to a whine. He slumps against the counter and increases the rhythm of his hand, deciding he should be quick then.

"Slowly," Derek murmurs, taking a step closer. They are nearly nose to nose, and Stiles wants a kiss. He knows all he has to do is lean forward and capture Derek’s lips, but something stops him. Maybe the knowledge that Derek could kiss him too, and hasn’t yet.

"Spread 'em," Derek breathes out. And Stiles doesn’t even stop to think, he moves his legs apart. Derek rises a hand slowly to his face and licks it, eyes on Stiles' face now, before he slides it behind Stiles and presses it between his cheeks.

"Shiiit," Stiles hisses, his hand faltering a second before he starts pumping harder. He’s had his own fingers inside him before, but never someone else’s. The sensation is intrusive and overwhelming, and god, he’s going to come embarrassingly fast.

Derek makes a sound in the back of his throat and moves forward. "Slowly," he commands again, this time with his face pressed against Stiles' neck, his nose nudging his way up and down before sucking on the marks he left there days ago.

"I don't think I can-" Stiles starts to complain until Derek presses deeper inside him and he loses his words. His legs wobble and Stiles moves on instinct, his free hand reaching for Derek and holding onto him. Derek groans against his throat, his finger pulling out, making Stiles whine in protest, before he presses in again. Stiles yelps, bucking against him. He leaves his erection alone for a moment, reaching for Derek's pants and unzipping them.

"What are you doing?" Derek asks, amused.

"What do you think?" Stiles shoves his hand inside Derek's pants and palms his erection tentatively, relishing in the fact that he made Derek hard before pulling it out. Derek groans and tightens his hold on Stiles at the sensation, his fingers inside Stiles stuttering and then stopping for a moment.

"Kiss me," Stiles ends up asking breathlessly. Derek smirks against his throat and then kisses him right under his jaw. "Not there, moron." Stiles rolls his eyes.

There is suddenly a moment of tension where Derek goes completely still and Stiles believes he went too far. Until Derek curses, not in the sexy kind of way, and shoves Stiles to the floor.

“Ouch, what the fuck dude?” Stiles protests, holding onto his elbow where it slammed into the floor.
“Hunters,” Derek breathes out, right next to his face.

“Motherfuckers,” Stiles curses. He was so fucking close.

He lies down on his kitchen tiled floor, breathing heavily as he pulls up his pants, carefully tucking his still hard cock inside, before palming around until he finds his shirt. Meanwhile, Derek has zipped his pants and is crunched down next to the kitchen window, looking through the shutters.

“How many?” Stiles whispers.

“Six,” he says. “The two from the woods and four more.”

“Fuck.” Fuckfuckfuckfuck, Stiles chants inside his head. This is all his fault. He should have listened to Derek about those hunters. Fuck.

“Still thinking that letting them live was a good idea?” Derek smirks back at him.

“Don’t be an ass,” Stiles rolls his eyes, getting back on his feet and joining him at the window.

“What do we do?”

“We wait,” Derek says, looking at him. They are shoulder to shoulder, unnecessarily close.

“Worst timing ever,” Stiles jokes, feeling himself blush as he suddenly feels embarrassed.

“Yeah.” Derek leans over, nudging up Stiles’ hairline to his ear. “You were so close,” he whispers, low and hot against Stiles’ skin, his lips stretching with a smirk.

That’s when Stiles decides he’s had enough bullshit. He fists Derek’s hair and pulls closer until their lips meet, kissing him with all he’s got.

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For Derek, there is something about kissing, something that gives him pause. It’s just too intimate, too human... He thought he’d never kiss anyone after Kate. Over the years he’s became an expert at hurting himself with unnecessary memories. And in some way, he ended up associating it with things like betrayal and loss. You truly open up to someone when you kiss them, and Derek has never allowed it again.

That’s why when Stiles kisses him, Derek grows stiff. He doesn’t respond for what feels like ages, conflicted on what to do. He wants to kiss back, but- Then he remembers when he used to try to kiss Kate, how she’d turn her face away, how it hurt. And Derek realizes that, above anything else, he doesn’t want to end up being like her. He won’t allow Kate the power to do this to him, to Stiles.

In the end, he makes the decision to part his lips, allowing Stiles in. And something loosens inside him at the scent of relief coming off Stiles. Like he had been worried Derek was going to reject him. And that’s a thought that really gives Derek pause. Because he could never reject Stiles, not anymore. And somehow, he finds he wants Stiles to know.

So he laces his fingers with Stiles’ at each side of his own face and leans closer, nipping and sucking at Stiles’ lips while he’s alert to the sounds coming from outside. Derek runs his hands down Stiles’ arms to his shoulders, fingers sliding up his neck and tugging at Stiles’ hair.
Stiles groans, tilting his face down and breathing heavily a moment before smirking. “We should...” he laughs, shrugging.

“Yeah, later.” Derek nods before he steps back and away from the window. The hunters have moved and they’re about to enter the house. They aren’t sure if the intruders will be here, but apparently one of the guards in the woods recognized Stiles.

Stiles follows him, sporting a silly smile and Derek feels like laughing. It’s like there isn’t imminent danger awaiting them. It’s ridiculous and dangerous.

Suddenly there’s a flash of light inside the room, blinding them momentarily and Derek has Stiles by the collar, pushing him forward and away from where he can hear the hunters. Derek shoves him inside the first door he finds. “Stay here,” he barks before closing the door, keeping Stiles inside.

He has but a second to turn back before the first blast of bullets thunder inside the house. Derek jumps, using the walls in the hallway to move and dodge them as he darts forward, claws ready. He sinks them in the first man he scents, digging deep inside his chest and pulling back until he has half the man’s ribs in his hands, throwing him across the room.

“I’m not staying in here!” Stiles shouts as he kicks the closet’s door open in the hallway, stumbling out and supporting himself on the wall a moment, breathing heavily.

“The boy is back,” one of the other hunters speaks into a walkie-talkie, and Derek snarls. He turns, letting his wolf take over as he jumps the man, his jaws closing around the hunter’s shoulder and yanking back. As the man screams, Derek drops him, ignoring him as he crushes the walkie-talkie under his foot before he feels the bullets brushing against him.

Wolfsbane. The thought is instantaneous.

Derek snarls, turning around and registering Stiles fighting with a man. He wants to go to him, but then the hunter with the wolfsbane bullets fires again and Derek has to duck and find cover.

“Why are you siding with him?” the hunter fighting with Stiles asks. “Did he threaten you? We can help you!”

Derek hears them from behind the toppled couch in the living room. He can also hear the other hunter circling the room, finding the right angle, and a bit farther away, the last hunter still outside, awaiting orders.

“Why do people insist I need help?” Stiles nearly growls as he hits the hunter. Derek can’t see it, but he listens and imagines Stiles crashing something over the hunter, a small table or chair. “I. Don’t. Need. Help!” By the sound of it, Stiles seems to be punctuating each word with a broken piece of the furniture he’s trashed, hitting the hunter until he no longer reacts.

“Don’t move!” the hunter with the gun yells at Stiles when it’s obvious he’s won the fight. Derek huffs, leaning over the couch in time to see him with his arm stretched out, pointing the gun at Stiles.

And Derek moves on instinct. He jumps forward, landing in front of the human to block his path and, without hesitation, placing his hand in front of the barrel right before the hunter presses the trigger.

Derek feels the bullet going through his palm and hitting his shoulder, he hears Stiles screaming, but he doesn’t lose focus.

Using the other hand, he gets a hold of the human's whole face and shoves him down so hard, he hears the skull cracking. Derek steps on the hand holding the gun and presses until he feels the
fragile bones breaking under his booth and hand and gun turn into a mass together. The human is screaming in pain, so he bends down and with a simple movement breaks his neck, ending the noise.

He turns around, holding his wounded arm awkwardly against his chest to find Stiles fighting with the last man that has finally joined them. His first instinct is to protect him but then he sees Stiles stealing the gun away from the human and using its butt to knock him cold to the floor.

"Impressive," Derek mocks.

"At least I didn't use my own hand to stop a bullet," Stiles snaps back as he moves away from the unconscious man.

"That bullet was for you," Derek points out. He’s starting to feel the first effects of the wolfsbane entering his system.

Stiles seems to struggle for a moment, deciding what to do. He approaches Derek and raises his hands, fingers mere inches from Derek’s injured arm without touching. "Thanks, I guess," Stiles murmurs, studying the mass of blood and meat that is Derek’s hand with concern. “Although that was the stupidest move I’ve ever seen."

"I heal fast," Derek says through gritted teeth.

“It doesn’t seem to be healing at all,” Stiles points out.

“They weren’t regular bullets,” Derek winces, holding his shoulder when it starts throbbing in pain. “We need to get away from here before more hunters show up.”

“Derek, it looks really bad,” Stiles says nervously. “Are you sure it’s going to heal? If that was a wolfsbane bullet-”

“It was,” Derek interrupts him. “That’s why we need to go before I pass out.”

“Shit!” Stiles curses loudly. He surprises Derek by darting outside the living room. Derek stays there, holding his arm against his chest, concentrating on breathing and staying on his feet as a feverish sweat breaks all over his body.

Stiles comes back carrying his backpack. “Alright, let’s go. I took the AID kit and some stuff I could find,” he says out of breath. When he sees Derek, though, Stiles falters. “Derek!” he hurries to get a hold of him. “Are you okay? Can you walk?”

Derek is overwhelmed. It’s been a long time since he felt like someone else cared about him. Sure, he has his betas, his pack, and they’d give their lives for him. But he never let anyone in like he’s let Stiles. No, he didn’t really allow it this time, either. Stiles snuck in, he found the small cracks in Derek’s armor and pushed and pried until he was finally in. There was never an option, he realizes. Stiles is so under his skin it’s ridiculous.

“I’m fine,” Derek murmurs through the sudden lump in his throat. “Grab... the gun.” He points vaguely to the floor. He’s starting to shiver.

“The gun? Are you delirious?” Stiles asks, voice filled with worry.

“I need... the same kind of bullet...” Derek stumbles back, his legs giving in. Stiles tries to grab him but he hits the living room floor. Disoriented, Derek feels himself drifting off. Stiles is right over him, shaking him, his fingers digging in his face as he begs him to wake up, but Derek can’t, he can’t open his eyes. “Bullet...” he manages to mumble.
“Okay, bullet!” Stiles exclaims, exasperated. He’s suddenly gone, and Derek can hear him faintly, the sound oddly muffled, as Stiles kneels next to the dead hunter. “Oh my god, this is so gross, I’m going to pass the fuck out,” Stiles complains as he tries to peel the blood and meat away from the crushed gun. “You just had to fuse this dude’s hand with the gun, didn’t you? Oh my god I’m going to puke, this is so disgusting, I hate you so much, you hear me Derek? Derek, you still there? Did you hear me? I hate you, don’t you dare die while I’m touching this dude’s dead, mashpotatoed hand, or I swear I’ll fucking kill you myself- Oh my god is that a nail?” Stiles pauses to make dry heavy noises. “Okay, alright I got the gun, or what’s left of it. How the fuck do I get a bullet out of this?”

Derek doesn’t hear anything else, though. He supposes he passes out because Stiles is suddenly punching him in the face. Startled, Derek sits up, mindlessly reaching for Stiles, who is holding his hand and complaining. “Told you my punches were fine,” he snaps, shoving a weirdly shaped bullet into Derek’s chest until he’s able to hold it.

Derek tries to take his shirt off, but he only manages when Stiles helps him. He looks down at his arm, observing the black veins running from his hand up to his shoulder, where the bullet wound is still bleeding. He’s never bled for this long before. Usually his wounds close up before that.

“Oh fuck,” Stiles breathes out when he sees Derek’s shoulder.

Derek stumbles to the coffee table, miraculously still in its place. He bites the bullet, using his fangs to take it apart. Stiles is right next to him, observing everything with wide open eyes.

“I need... fire,” Derek rasps out, showing his palm. Stiles searches frantically inside his backpack and places a lighter in Derek’s hand.

Derek hates the next part. It hurts like nothing has ever hurt before. He burns the wolfsbane from inside the bullet and presses the ashes to his shoulder, and suddenly his body is in agony, fire running up his veins to flood his insides and make him pass out.

- 

Stiles supposes he shouldn’t find Derek writhing in pain so hot. But there is something purely animalistic and raw in him that calls to Stiles in ways he didn’t know he was into.

“Are you okay?” he asks dumbfounded when Derek finally calms down.

“Apart from the agonizing pain,” Derek deadpans as he gets back on his feet, still clearly unsettled.

“I’m guessing the ability to use sarcasm is a good sign of health.” Stiles huffs, stepping closer to slide an arm under Derek’s, helping him to move. “What about your hand? Shouldn’t you do the same with it?”

“No,” Derek speaks through gritted teeth. “It’ll heal on its own.”

Stiles suspects Derek just doesn’t want to go through that again, the thought strangely comforting because even Alpha werewolves have their limits apparently.

They walk slowly through the bodies, stopping only once to grab Stiles’ backpack and Derek’s shirt. He clenches his jaw, refusing to make a sound, as he puts it back on.
Before Stiles can open the kitchen’s door, though, Derek falters. “Where are we going?”

“It’s already light outside,” Stiles explains. “We need an empty house to spend the day at least, something close by.”

“They know you’re back,” Derek says through a clenched jaw. “We need to be careful.”

“Half this neighborhood is empty anyway.” Stiles shrugs. It’s been empty for years, it used to upset his mom greatly. And once she was gone, it used to upset him. “It shouldn’t be hard to find something.”

“They’ll search the empty houses,” Derek explains, closing his eyes and leaning against the frame of the door.

“What do you suggest then?” Stiles puffs.

“My house,” Derek nearly chokes on the words, making Stiles perk up.

“You mean the old Hale mansion?” Stiles steps closer, resting Derek’s weight against his side. “It’s too far away, we can’t make it on time before people start waking up and someone sees us.”

“There’s a...” Derek frowns, thoughts deep in concentration. “An old train station. The pack and I hid there when we came last time.”

“Really?” Stiles makes a face. “The old train station where homeless people used to live? Sounds delightful, alright lead the way,” he says, faking a cheerful tone as he opens the back door and they move outside.

The walk to the old tunnels is agonizing and slow. Stiles believes he hears something at least a million times, give or take. And Derek keeps losing his foot when they try to be quicker. He’s still limping from the silver barbs, and Stiles doesn’t know if it’s because the injury was really serious or because wolfsbane is like wolf kryptonite and it makes everything worse.

It’s almost noon when they reach the first entrance to the tunnels. Stiles is no longer worried about staying at an abandoned train station. He knows Derek needs rest, maybe food and water, and he wants to inspect Derek’s hand and make sure it’s healing and that he isn’t going to catch a weird werewolf infection from the wolfsbane.

They walk through the semi darkness of the tunnel, Derek guiding them whenever they reach a fork. When they finally reach the abandoned station, Stiles sags in relief. His back aches and his hands are throbbing. He’s never been happier of being in a post-apocalyptic looking place.

They walk through the semi darkness of the tunnel, Derek guiding them whenever they reach a fork. When they finally reach the abandoned station, Stiles sags in relief. His back aches and his hands are throbbing. He’s never been happier of being in a post-apocalyptic looking place.

Derek points to a train further inside the station, the one most isolated. Getting inside is harder than Stiles anticipated, though. Derek keeps stumbling, claws nailing the metallic doors as he pushes himself in, Stiles right behind him, helping.

Stiles sees the mattress a second before Derek falls face first on it. Surprisingly, it looks clean, like it was a new bed. And Stiles suspects Erica had something to do with it. He kneels next to Derek, helping him out of his boots and socks, huffing and complaining just for the sport of annoying Derek.

Getting Derek to turn around is kind of an adventure on its own. Derek grunts and groans, even flashes some teeth when Stiles pokes at him once. But in the end Stiles takes his clothes off and tucks him in the sleeping bag.
He’s thankful he used those minutes to refill their water bottles, grab the AID kit, some cans from his dad’s reserve supplies and forks. Because Stiles has learned that cutlery is strangely important when you’re out in the wild.

Stiles uses one of the water bottles to wet the still clean part of the towel Derek used on him. He sits next to Derek on the dirty floor and moves the sleeping bag away. He cleans the blood from Derek’s shoulder, still mesmerized by the smooth skin where there should be a bullet wound, the filth from Derek’s chest and arms before moving tentatively to Derek’s face.

Derek’s eyes flutter a moment but he seems to sleep through the whole thing. Stiles maybe should feel guilty for using these moments to openly ogle at Derek, but truth be told, he can’t be bothered. Derek is simply stunning, even now that he’s pale and queasy looking, with parched dirt and dried blood. Stiles runs his fingertips through Derek’s corded muscles along his collarbone before rubbing his jaw line, feeling the prick of his stubble.

Derek took a stupid bullet for him, he thinks, still stunned. Who puts his hand in front of a loaded gun and doesn’t even flinch when the bullet goes through their hand straight to their chest? Some lunatic, that’s who. Stiles tries to be mad, he tries to stop feeling like he does, like he can’t breathe at the mere idea of Derek dying because of him. But he can’t.

He takes extra care with Derek’s hand, disinfecting and bandaging it meticulously to the point of obsession. Then he moves down and takes Derek’s leg off the sleeping bag, following the line of his muscled calf up Derek’s thigh. Stiles presses a hand on his knee, fingers rubbing circles in the skin right above it. He inspects the old wound at the ankle, fingers tentatively moving down and pressing around it. It looks like it’s healing on its own just fine, but Stiles cleans it anyway, applying antiseptic and bandaging it for extra measure.

He’s tempted to take his clothes off and snuggle closer to Derek, but he wants Derek to rest and heal. So he grabs his pack and moves to one of the old train benches. He supposes he has time to read through Gerard’s letters while he waits for Derek to wake up.

Soon he’s engrossed in the letters, in the stories they tell. Stiles feels the hate as something real and tangible, like he could reach out and stroke it. Reading into Gerard’s mind is making him sick. He wonders how his father could put up with it. Stiles knows him enough to know he couldn’t agree with most of what’s written here. If only Stiles had his replies, he could push down the lump in his throat, asphyxiating him every time Gerard says something despicable. Because Stiles knows that, if his father could stomach this, it’s because of him.

It’s all my fault.

The Hale surname catches his eyes then. Stiles flattens the wrinkled letter in his knees and keeps reading.

“Kate has found another den to torch. I find her technique too tedious, but I can’t deny it’s effective. Plus she seems fond of it. Since she found the Hales using this method, she’s gained authority among my men. I like to see her in charge, following the family legacy. I know she’ll be the right leader once I’m gone. For a while I worried she might have developed an attachment to that Hale pup with the looks and the lack of brains, but she seems back to normal. I think doing this again will help her to see these things for what the monsters they are.”

Stiles pauses, lifting his eyes to look at the sleeping form of Derek. Is Gerard talking about... Stiles checks the rest of the letters, scanning quickly over the texts looking for more mentions of the Hales. After a few minutes, Stiles knows the story. His heart is beating frantically inside his ribcage. Derek and Kate Argent?

Derek and Kate Argent.
Stiles feels a pang in his chest. He never liked Allison’s aunt, but now he finds himself fucking despising her. Stiles isn’t new to jealousy, but this is different, the emotion strangely foreign and intense. Possessive, almost. Stiles wonders who else knows. How did Derek escape the fire, if he ever told Laura. If Kate made sure he survived for some twisted reason.

He supposes he’s made some sort of sound, because Derek wakes up startled and jumps off the bed, the movement awkward with his injuries. He grips Stiles’ shoulders with his good hand and searches his face. “What’s wrong? What happened?” he croaks out through a parched throat.

Stiles is shaking, he’s choking on hate and regret. He never investigated the situation surrounding the tragedy with the Hale family. After his mom died that night, Stiles didn’t want to go near it, didn’t want to think about it. The idea was enough to send him into a panic attack. He feels strangely guilty now.

“Breathe,” Derek says roughly. “Stiles, calm down.”

“You should be resting,” Stiles murmurs stupidly.

"Your heartbeat went nuts," Derek huffs, kneeling in front of him. "What's wrong?"

"I-" Stiles clears his throat. "I took the letters Gerard Argent sent to my dad." Derek grows instantly tense, but he doesn’t speak, just waits for Stiles to finish. "I decided to read through them because, you know, I thought I didn't have anything better to do while I waited for your werewolfie mojo to be done. Bad idea.” He shakes his head. “I read something Gerard said about your family and-"

Derek stands, frowning as he looks down at Stiles with an unreadable expression. His sudden defensive stance cuts through Stiles’ chest straight to his heart worse than anything else up until now. And Stiles understands. Derek knows that he knows. He didn’t get to choose the right moment. He didn’t get to be in control. Stiles just found out. So he can understand how Derek must be feeling. He’d feel the same way if someone found out about his mom like this.

"Gerard Argent killed my mom," Stiles blurts out. It is the first time since it happened that he actually says it out loud. Each word burns in the pit of his stomach and chokes him, but he says it anyway.

Derek seems to falter. His brows furrow impossible close together. Stiles runs his hands down his face when he feels the sting in his eyes, ignoring how the wounds under the bandages throb.

"The night she helped you and your sister escape. In that same alley. ” Stiles takes gulps of air, like a fish outside the water as he keeps talking. “He threatened to kill my dad, too. I’ve never told anyone. I shouldn't have been there, I was a coward who hid instead of saving her.” He yanks at his own hair. "I had never told anyone," Stiles repeats, looking up at Derek and breathing heavily.

“Why now?” Derek asks roughly, his question a mere whisper in the terrible silence after Stiles’ confession.

“Because I read about Kate,” Stiles breathes out. “And I thought it was only fair you knew this. I wouldn’t have wanted you to find out with some old letters, I know you must be mad now. I’m sorry, okay? I had no idea it’d be all explained there. But I couldn’t stop reading once I saw your name. You can be mad at me, I can take it. Just- you know, I just wanted you to know about my mom…” Stiles trails off, frowning. “Yeah, in fact I’ve wanted to tell you for a while. I really wanted to tell you when you found out she was dead. Like a lot. And that’s never happened before. I managed to keep it a secret from dad for years, and then I met you and look at me, babbling about her and saying things I had never said out loud before, while you’re probably thinking of ways to kill me for reading about you and Kate. And oh god, I wasn’t planning on saying that much but once I
started I couldn’t stop. I can’t seem to stop. I can’t- I can't breathe; I need to stop talking but I can’t and-

"Stiles!" Derek interjects, voice full of authority as his hands grip Stiles’ shoulders tightly, steadying him until Stiles’ limbs stop flailing and he stops babbling.

"I'm sorry." Derek’s voice is heavy, the evident guilt startling Stiles as Derek drops back to his knees.

"W-why?" He asks in astonishment.

"I was in that alley. I should have sensed Gerard. I could have stopped him."

"It wasn't your fault," Stiles says roughly. "You had just lost your family, I never thought- never blamed you or your sister."

"You blamed yourself instead," Derek says softly, cupping Stiles’ face.

"You blame yourself too," Stiles whispers. He’s suddenly embarrassed. He just lost it in front of Derek and told him his darkest secret. Stiles opened up, wanting Derek to understand that he gets it, the guilt and the resentment. But now Stiles is afraid Derek won’t see him the same way, that Derek will blame him, too.

"That's different." Derek leans over until their foreheads touch, making Stiles’ breath hitch in his throat. This is Derek trying to comfort him, after Stiles confessed he’s been covering up for his mother’s murderer for years. It’s absurd, but Stiles feels like crying. He doesn’t deserve Derek’s comfort. And yet, he can’t help but reach out.

"I know what she did. It was in the letters," he confesses, hands moving tentatively up Derek’s arms to his shoulders, fingers pressing against Derek’s nape when Derek grows tense. Stiles thinks he’s going to step away and close up, but then Derek sighs and seems to relax the tiniest bit.

"Then you know that what I did was unforgivable." Derek murmurs, leaning back and looking him in the eyes. And Stiles sees in them that Derek is completely convinced of what he’s saying. He blames himself more stubbornly than Stiles could have anticipated.

Anger flares inside Stiles, his nostrils flaring and jaw clenching. "I want to rip her apart for even daring to look at you," he nearly growls, taking himself aback by his own words, the fierceness behind them. “I mean it,” he says after understanding he truly, really does. “If we find the Argents, I will kill her for what she did to you.”

Derek’s breath catches in his throat. He always thought no one could respect him if they knew what he had done. He still blames himself. After all this time, he’s still afraid of the consequences, of coming clean. Kate still has that power over him. And he hates it, he hates himself for allowing it. And yet here stands Stiles, right in front of him, knowing what happened and still looking him in the eye. Stiles, who by all means should hate Derek for complicating his life, for hurting him, for the mistakes that led to his mother’s death.

And yet, Stiles wants to destroy Kate for what she did. And somehow that’s exactly what Derek
needed to hear. That she did something wrong. That, the fact that she did only what she was
supposed to doesn’t validate her actions.

Derek’s nostrils flare slowly. He takes a big gulp of air, shaking from toe to head, and then he's
crushing Stiles against him, embracing him so tightly Stiles may have bruises tomorrow. But he
doesn’t seem to care. Stiles embraces him back instantly. He presses back, arms clinging to him as
Derek moves on his knees until he’s flushed against the bench and between Stiles’ legs.

Derek buries his face in the crook of Stiles’ neck, scenting him. His whole body is taut, muscles
shaking with each new spam. He’s overwhelmed, choking on this need for more and closer.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Stiles whispers, voice choked and deep. And Derek makes a noise, like the
words hurt him, because they do. He has fought against those words for so many years, never giving
himself a break. He can’t say he’s ready now to accept them, but the way Stiles says them, fiercely
and protectively, makes Derek’s will falter. Makes him pause and consider them for a moment, at
least.

Derek presses his teeth against Stiles’ throat, making him shiver as he rubs reassuring circles with the
palm of his hand into Derek’s naked back. He tries to calm down, worried he could end up hurting
Stiles in his current state. When he does finally bite down, Stiles buckles, letting out a moan, and
Derek sinks his teeth into his flesh as a calming sensation washes over him. He stops shaking, his
body a warm cocoon wrapped around Stiles as he holds him with his teeth.

“I need- closer,” Derek murmurs against the bite mark.

Stiles seems to falter a second before he yanks at his hair until Derek protests, growling in the back
of his throat as he resists to let go. In the end, Stiles wins because Derek doesn’t want to hurt him. He
pulls back, looking at Stiles with a wild expression.

They look at each other for a moment and then Stiles kisses Derek, who groans and pulls closer
because yes- this is what he needed. He makes Stiles slide down right between his arms, straddling
his thighs as Derek grips his ass, leaning back to give Stiles space before he pins him against the
bench.

Derek fists Stiles’ shirt, pulling until Stiles makes an exasperated noise and lifts his arms, helping him
to take it off. They are instantly kissing again, and Derek can’t help but feel a bit strange about it,
because it’s been years since he let go like this. The thought is terrifying but also kind of liberating.
Like he could finally co-exist with the past without it causing him pain.

He runs his hands down Stiles’ back, circling his waist, his fingers running down Stiles’ happy trail
until they stumble upon Stiles’ pants. Stiles moans into his mouth, hands fisting his hair to keep him
closer. And Derek unzips his pants, pulling them as far down as their position allows it, hands
closing over Stiles’ ass and squeezing, feeling him shuddering and pressing his still clothed erection
against Derek’s abdomen.

“How are you feeling?” Stiles blurs out then.

“What?” Derek asks in confusion, pausing when he’s about to suck on Stiles’ throat again. There is
an odd pause, where none of them move or speak, just pant.

this, right now, with you so much, but I don’t want to push you-”

Derek snorts. “I’m fine.”
“Right,” Stiles licks his lips as he starts to grin. “You’re the alpha.”

Derek leans back, arching an eyebrow before tackling Stiles, who squeaks in surprise as Derek gets a good hold of him and lifts himself off the floor, moving backwards until he drops on the mattress, bracing himself with one arm and holding Stiles with the other as Derek lowers down slowly, bringing Stiles down on top of him.

Stiles runs his hands over the taut muscles of Derek’s abs, fingernails scraping lightly over the smooth skin as he runs his fingers up his chest. Derek growls, head tilted up to brush against Stiles’ collarbones as Stiles arches his back, hands grabbing at Derek’s underwear and pulling down. Derek hums, hips jerking up to allow the cloth to slide down his legs.

“Pants,” Derek groans, fingers yanking down on Stiles’ pants so hard he almost tears them. Stiles laughs, rich and loud, making Derek’s guts twist with want and something more. He leans back, away from Derek long enough to kick his pants off. “Everything,” Derek says huskily, nodding at Stiles’ underwear, who rolls his eyes and complies.

When Stiles falls down on top of him again, Derek sighs. He closes his eyes, relishing in the feeling of their naked bodies moving together. His hands run down Stiles’ back as Stiles slides down his chest, lips leaving a wet trail over Derek’s skin.

Derek pants, waiting patiently and letting Stiles slide away from him. When Stiles presses his palms on Derek’s thighs, trying to pin him down, Derek almost loses it. He moans, feeling all Stiles’ weight pressing on his muscles as Derek arches his back, allowing it. Stiles seems to hesitate a moment when he reaches Derek’s navel, but then he bites down, making Derek collapse under his weight.

“Shit,” Derek curses, hands fistimg the sleeping bag.

That seems the signal Stiles was waiting for, because he bites down Derek’s happy trail to his groin, where he licks the veins running under the skin.

“Now I’m gonna- you know.” Stiles licks his lips nervously, darting a look up once before he takes Derek in his mouth.

Derek groans, trying to stay still and allow Stiles the sense of control, but when Stiles swallows him, Derek just loses it. He rocks his hips up, moving Stiles up and down with his movements. Stiles doesn’t seem to mind, though. He presses his palms over Derek’s hips and takes it eagerly.

Derek sits up, reaching for him. “Turn this way,” he says throatily, hands grabbing Stiles’ thigh and pulling toward him until Stiles seems to catch on and moves over the mattress, his knees ending up at either side of Derek’s face as he lays on top of him, face in Derek’s groin.

Derek palms Stiles’ ass, fingers sliding down to play with his sack. He hums in appreciation when Stiles shudders and moans around his cock. The musky scent of Stiles’ arousal hits him stronger, making Derek whine. He buries his face between Stiles’ thighs, rubbing against Stiles’ erection, growling when he feels his chin damp with pre-come before he swallows Stiles’ cock.

“Fuuuuuuck,” Stiles lets out a long moan, face tilted to the side and wet lips speaking against Derek’s thigh. “You’re too good, fuck, Derek, fuck.”

Derek snorts, letting the vibration engulf Stiles’ cock. He uses his spit to finger Stiles, who stills and holds his breath before he pushes back against Derek’s finger, panting against his groin.

Derek can feel the moment Stiles is about to come. He grows taut, his legs shaking as he digs his fingers so hard into his thighs that Derek is sure he’s bleeding. He leans up, nose buried in Stiles’
balls as he swallows him, fingers working in him as Stiles finally comes.

“Oh my god,” Stiles pants. His legs start shaking and fail him. He leans forward, face ending up between Derek’s knees as he squirms, his muscles clenching and unclenching. Derek tries to follow his movement but Stiles ends up coming over his neck and chest.

He’s still spasming when Derek moves Stiles off him, laying him down on the mattress and spooning him. He slides an arm under Stiles, bandaged hand circling his throat, and the other palms his ass, opening him to press his still hard cock between his cheeks. Stiles moans, pressing back. His thighs are still shaking, and he feels mellow against Derek. So Derek takes his time. He doesn’t need to come just yet. He noses Stiles’ nape, his hand running down his legs and then up his flank, enjoying the feeling of Stiles’ flushed skin under his fingers, following the moles wherever they take him.

“Fucking werewolf stamina,” Stiles murmurs after a while, shoving his ass back to meet Derek’s lazy thrusts.

“Your stamina seems to be fine,” Derek whispers against his ear, hand circling his hips and fisting Stiles’ half-hard cock.

“You’re humping my ass, what did you expect?” Stiles’ chuckle turns into a moan when Derek starts jerking him slowly.

Derek snorts, back arched and face pressed between Stiles’ shoulder blades.

“You’re doing this on purpose to drive me crazy?” Stiles grouches. “Just- just do something, do it already.”

Derek groans, rubbing his face in Stiles’ neck. "Don't wanna hurt you."

Stiles huffs. He leans over, palming the floor until he finds his backpack. After a moment searching inside, he pulls out a small olive oil bottle. "Grabbed it at home before we left. Thought it could be useful..." He trails off, suddenly blushing.

Derek snorts. He snatches the bottle away as he pulls Stiles closer again. “You know we don’t really have to,” he speaks right next to Stiles’ ear.

“I want you to,” Stiles presses back against him. “I want to know how it feels when you fuck me, and then I want to know how it feels to fuck you.”

Derek’s hips pistol forward at that. He growls, nipping his way down Stiles’ neck, feeling somewhat triumphant when Stiles shivers and lets out a shaky breath. He’s intrigued by Stiles’ words. He hasn’t been with anyone for years; sex held no appeal for him. But suddenly Stiles makes everything seem hot and he wants it. All of it. Derek wants to try everything with him. He suspects Stiles doesn’t have a lot of experience, and the idea of being Stiles’ first makes him feel smug.

Derek opens the bottle and slicks his fingers. Moving his hips back, he slides his hand between Stiles’ cheeks and circles around his ring, teasing Stiles until he huffs and presses back. Laughing throatily at his lack of patience, Derek presses in, opening Stiles slowly, almost agonizingly. In that moment there is nothing but Stiles. His mind is right there, in the way his fingers work Stiles open and the way Stiles reacts to each little twist.

“It feels so much better when you do it,” Stiles breathes out. Derek makes a noise in the back of his throat, because damn it, his guts just tightened by those words.

“Let’s see how this feels, then,” he murmurs before he can come, fingers pulling out and grabbing
Stiles’ leg. He lifts it, sliding his arm behind Stiles’ knee and keeping it there. Stiles turns around, his hand reaching back for Derek’s nape and pulling him closer. And as Derek guides himself inside, Stiles captures his lips, kissing him.

Derek groans, moving until he’s buried to the hilt before they both stop, heavy breathing against each other’s parted mouths. Stiles grunts against his lips, nipping them as he arches his back while Derek pulls out and in again very slowly.

“Oh my shit!” Stiles stutters, hands fisting Derek’s hair as he curves his spine.

“Harder?” Derek asks against his cheek before he nips Stiles’ chin.

“Fuck yes,” Stiles breathes out, licking his lips.

Derek smirks against his mouth, hand sliding down Stiles’ knee to his groin, getting a hold of him before he thrusts sharply for the first time, making Stiles cry out. It’s a steady rhythm that picks up speed gradually, until Derek is rocketing back and forth and Stiles is making these noises in the back of his throat that are driving Derek insane.

"Fuck, you're gonna break me;” Stiles lets out in a stuttered breathe, making Derek snort.

"You'll survive.” Derek smiles against his neck.

"Asshole,” Stiles moans, thrusting back, moving faster, like he was challenging him, and Derek matches it. He rams into Stiles until they are both a panting mess. Derek feels the heaviness in his guts and he knows he’s close. He starts jerking Stiles off harder, faster, until Stiles is shaking and he knows they are both almost there.

“Don’t pull out,” Stiles whooshes, hand holding his hips closer when he tries to move. Derek squeezes his eyes shut and keeps moving through his orgasm, cock throbbing as Stiles tightens around him, making it almost unbearable. A moment later, he feels the come running hot down his fingers and Derek keeps moving, head against Stiles’ as he holds him through the whole thing.

They stay like that for a while, each catching his breath. When Derek finally pulls out, Stiles is dozing off. He moves careful, grabbing the towel and using it to clean them.

“We need another towel,” Stiles murmurs half asleep.

Derek chuckles, amused, and throws the dirty towel away as he settles down next to Stiles again. At first he lays on his side, head rested on his elbow as he stares at Stiles, who is snoring lightly. But then he realizes he wants to keep touching Stiles, and that he actually can if he wants. So Derek slides closer, placing a hand tentatively over Stiles’ hip. When Stiles doesn’t move, he leans over and lays his head on Stiles’ shoulder slowly, almost holding his breath. He’s never done this before, with anyone else. The feeling is foreign and exciting. Derek counts the moles his eyes can find, and then Stiles’ heartbeats.

He never falls asleep, making sure Stiles won’t go away this time.

-

Stiles stretches lazily, feeling his muscles mellow and relaxed. Derek is resting over his chest, arm
thrown over his stomach. For a moment he just stays there, sighing in contentment. Then Stiles remembers he told Derek about his mom. But there is nothing. No lump in his throat, no tension in his shoulders, no heartbeat skip. He just remembers he finally let it all out, after all the years of the secret weighing him down, and Stiles just smiles. Because he did it, he managed to tell someone and Derek is still there. He’s all over him, in fact. Stiles chuckles a little. It’s been years since he felt this good.

Derek snuggles closer and Stiles runs his fingers along the line of his back, up his neck, where he caresses his nape. “Everything hurts so good.” Stiles grins, eyes closed as he keeps combing Derek’s hair.

Derek makes an amused sound, pressing his cheek against Stiles’ chest, humming when fingernails scratch lightly over his scalp. “You were snoring,” he teases.

“Was not,” Stiles says without too much heat. He knows he snores. Whatever. “Disturbed your sleep?”

“Didn’t want to sleep,” Derek murmurs as he throws a leg over Stiles’.

Stiles lifts his head to look at him. “Huh? What did you do then? Stare at me while I sored? Dude, creepy. And kind of sappy.”

Derek makes a small exasperated noise and rubs his face back and forth over Stiles’ already sensitive skin, giving him a bad case of rug burn. “I was thinking,” he points out.

“Thinking and Edward Cullening me,” Stiles replies, smug smile plastered on his face. “It’s cool, dude, I understand.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Derek snorts before biting his peck.

“Ah!” Stiles startles. “Okay, okay!” he raises his arms, showing his palms at the ceiling before he circles Derek’s back again. “What were you thinking?”

“I was thinking that when we find your father,” Derek looks up at him once, determined glint in his eyes. “Because we will,” he adds before sliding down, running his stubble down Stiles’ body until he’s embracing his stomach. “That you should tell him about Gerard,” he mumbles, face rubbing right and left over Stiles’ navel, making him twist.

“I know. I will,” Stiles says as he struggles. “Ticklish!” Derek hides his smirk, pressing his mouth against Stiles’ muscles and sucking before pulling away to lay next to Stiles, elbow on the mattress supporting his head.

“I’ll kill Gerard for what he did to your mom,” he says, all trace of teasing gone. Stiles can’t breathe for a moment.

“Not if I kill him first.”

“We’ll kill them.” Derek leans closer until his chin is resting on Stiles’ shoulder. “Together.”

Stiles wants to laugh. This is strangely romantic. Plotting together to kill the people that ruined their lives. Very Tarantino. Kind of badass in a way that makes him feel exhilarated. He flops back on the bed, hands behind his head as Derek moves with his, resting his head in Stiles’ chest. Stiles is starting to suspect Derek is a big cuddler, and he loves it.

“You know,” he starts, smiling up at the train ceiling. “Not to kill the afterglow but don’t think I
forgot you never apologized,” he says in a teasing tone. Sometimes his motor mouth runs faster than his brain, if that’s even possible, and Stiles fucks up perfectly nice situations like this by saying something like that.

Luckily, sex seems to mellow Derek enough for him not to jump away in fury. He leans back to look at him, though. There is surprise and mild amusement in his face. “You want me to apologize,” he murmurs after a pause. “Or…” He captures Stiles’ nipple in his mouth.

“Ah-” Stiles buckles up. “Ah-apologize?” he nearly whimpers when Derek works his nipple carefully between his teeth.

“Are you asking me?” Derek bites harder.

“Fuck!” Stiles fists his hair. “No! I mean- Definitely not asking. Apologize!”

Derek sighs, letting go of his nipple and leaning back to look at Stiles. “I’m not going to apologize,” he says in a reasoning tone. The phrase is so unexpected, Stiles finds himself blinking slowly, completely taken aback. “A good person would apologize for what I did,” Derek says roughly, thumb caressing Stiles’ cheek. “But I’m not a good person. I’m selfish. I don’t regret taking you with me. I can’t apologize for that.”

“Huh.” Stiles frowns. He looks at Derek’s expectant face and remembers that this man, this badass Alpha werewolf, dropped everything and went after him. Shouldn’t that be apology enough? For some reason he remembers Derek in high school, all gawky limbs and awkward phase, how attractive he already was, in his own way. And Stiles suspects he always felt an attraction toward him.

He can’t move for a moment, realizing that Derek’s words mean more than it seems. Stiles feels... wanted. He feels like Derek would do anything to keep him. And he knows he’d do the same for Derek.

“You know,” he murmurs, throat suddenly dry. “I think you’re right for once. I’m not a good person either, anyway. No matter how it happened, I don’t regret being here with you now.” He shrugs as Derek stares down at him intensely. And suddenly, the realization that his mother is the only reason why Derek is now with him hits Stiles with force. “Oh god,” he widens his eyes.

Derek arches an eyebrow, face hovering over his as his thumb still strokes Stiles’ cheek. “What?”

“I don’t know, maybe it makes no sense but... my mother sacrificed herself for you,” Stiles explains, ignoring the small flinch Derek gives at the words. “And that should be reason enough to- well, it just makes me feel better... like she died for something, fighting for something worth it. So, maybe you're worth it.”

“I'm not.” Derek deadpans, moving back and laying on the bed.

Stiles follows him, leaning over Derek to look him in the eye. “Jury’s still out,” he murmurs before he smirks, trying to keep Derek in this open and playful way he seems to adopt after sex. Derek’s snort is muffled by Stiles’ kiss.

As they kiss again, this time slowly and soft, Stiles thinks for the first time of his past without guilt and the future without fear. He finally has something solid to hold on to, something real. He figures sometimes humans need anchors, too.
Derek has never done this before.

He's never broken into a stranger's house for shelter. He's never ranked through the kitchen cupboards for food. Never picked clothes from someone's else closet. Or put on someone else's underwear. He's never showered in someone else's bathroom. And he's never been rimmed before.

Yeah, that's definitely something he's never done before. So he can't compare, but for all he knows, Stiles is really good at this. Or at least it's working for Derek. Because he's panting, chest pressed against the tiled walls of the shower as the hot spray of water hits his shoulders.

Stiles is holding his hips back, making him lift his ass for a better access as Derek rocks back, pressing against Stiles' mouth. He's painfully hard, thighs shaking as Stiles fucks him with his tongue.

By the time Stiles is fingering him, Derek is ready to come. He fists himself, pumping fast and hard.

"Don't stop," he groans, pressing back and shuddering when Stiles buries his face deeper between his cheeks, his three fingers working him nice and slow as Derek comes all over the shower wall.

Stiles pulls out slowly, biting his ass cheek lightly as he moves up his back, circling Derek's chest.

"What was that?" Derek pants, concentrating on breathing and staying upright on his shaky legs.

"I thought you might like that," Stiles murmurs against his neck, smirking. "This might be our last shower with hot water for a while and I wanted to make it memorable."

"It... sure made for a good memory," Derek breathes out, teasing.

"Mmm, I bet," Stiles presses his cock against Derek's ass, making a case point.

Derek snorts, turning around to drag them under the spray.

Stiles captures his mouth, nipping his bottom lip before kissing Derek. Kissing is still new and strange. But Derek thinks he’s getting better at it. He doesn’t pause anymore when their lips meet, he no longer needs a moment to adjust himself to the situation. In fact, kissing Stiles may have become Derek’s favorite pastime in the last four days. Even though it’s still hard for him to admit it.

"Let's make it memorable for you too," he murmurs against Stiles' lips before nipping his way down his throat, stopping to play with his nipples long enough to have Stiles panting and squirming against him. Derek sinks to his knees, feeling the warm water over his body as he grabs Stiles' hips and guides him inside his mouth.

Stiles moans, loud and rich. He tilts his head back, pecks clenching and unclenching as he fists Derek's hair, breathing heavily. Stiles pulls him closer and Derek just opens his throat up and takes him, moving his hands down and allowing it when Stiles starts rocking them, gagging him with controlled thrusts until Derek leans in all the way to press his nose against Stiles' groin.

"Oh my god," Stiles groans out. "You're so good. I- ngh!"

His thighs start shaking in short spasms and Derek holds him up against the wall with his arms. Stiles comes in spurts shortly after, going taut and then limp against Derek’s strong hold. Only when he’s
already getting soft does Derek move up his body, leaving a path of bites and kisses behind. Stiles is smiling down at him, eyes half hooded and wet eyelashes fluttering over his cheekbones as he gazes at Derek.

They circle each other, hugging under the water spray, and Derek nudes his throat, teeth scraping lightly at the sensitive skin, making Stiles shudder.

“That was definitely memorable,” Stiles murmurs, making Derek snort against his neck.

Eventually, they have to leave the shower when they run out of warm water.

Stiles yelps at the sudden cold air in comparison with the steam inside the shower and hurries to put on a big bathrobe, already shivering and cursing about the stupid heater not working. And for some reason the scene makes Derek’s ribcage clench with fondness. It’s silly and terribly domestic. And also nothing Derek has ever had before Stiles. He steps out and wraps his arms around Stiles without a word, rubbing his back and ignoring the ache in his chest when Stiles sighs in contentment and snuggles closer.

Derek knows this is a fantasy. A nice one, but still just a moment. A pause while the real world waits for them. He knows they are deluding themselves, pretending like everything is okay as they spend only a few hours at the same house, going back to the train station to sleep, just worrying about finding food and a comfortable enough place where they can get naked and have sex. They are good at not talking, but they can’t do that anymore.

Not when the period of time he gave Erica expires tonight. They’ve been circling the Hale property all week, never getting closer than outside the woods. Derek didn’t want to visit if it wasn’t necessary, and somehow Stiles seemed to know without having to explain. So they’ve been wandering the forest near the property every day at dusk. Derek has been scenting the area for anyone nearby, everyday finding the same result.

There was nothing in Gerard’s letters, either. No lead to follow, no place to go. It was okay to ignore it for a while, but they have run out of time. The week is over, and if the pack doesn’t show up today they need to make a decision. Derek knows what they should do. And no matter how much he wants to just lose himself in this thing he and Stiles have now, he knows that sooner or later, their problems will find them if they don’t do it first.

Derek shakes the grim thoughts out of his mind and pulls the bathrobe hood over Stiles’ head, rubbing until Stiles is struggling and laughing. There is just something in Stiles’ laugh, a frankness in the way he smiles, that never ceases to amaze Derek.

“You’re such a bully,” Stiles jokes, hands over Derek’s.

Derek has a comeback ready, but gets sidetracked when a strange scent hits him. He stills, hands slipping down Stiles’ bathrobe as he moves them away.

“What? What’s wrong?” Stiles pulls the hood down, no longer laughing.

“You sure no one lives here?” Derek asks, frowning. He’s smelled something. Someone. Nothing recent, but if he can scent people, that means the place is still in use.

“I told you, no one lives on this block,” Stiles shakes his head, smiling. “Stop being paranoid.” He pats Derek’s shoulder and leaves the room.

Derek huffs, grabbing the first towel he can find and wrapping it around his hips. Wiping the steam off the bathroom mirror, Derek takes a look at his thick beard and frowns. He supposes that when
you rely on the food and clothes you can find on a daily basis, shaving shouldn’t be a concern. He can’t help but think this may very well be the last time they have access to a bathroom for a long time, though.

When he finally enters the bedroom, Stiles is cross-legged on the unmade bed. They spent the morning there, messing up the sheets before moving to the shower. Derek can’t help but smile a little at the memory.

“Still checking those?” he asks when he notices the letters spread around Stiles.

“I know, I know!” Stiles says a bit exasperated. Derek knows he’s frustrated. He was expecting to find something in those letters, after all. “We’ve gone through them enough times to know there is nothing here, but I can’t help to feel like I’m missing something.”

“Like what?” Derek drops the towel and goes to the stranger’s wardrobe to find something that fits him.

“I know my dad, okay?” Stiles gets up and opens the bathrobe as he walks over. “There has to be something that we’re missing.”

“Your father and Gerard were friends for years,” Derek says cautiously, picking some jeans and handing them over to Stiles. “Try these on,” he comments as he bends down to check the lower shelves.

Stiles scoffs, snatching the pants away from Derek’s hand and giving him a funny look as he puts them on. “I mean, yeah they were friends, but Gerard never said the things he wrote in these letters before. It’s like, I don’t know, like he decided to trust my dad and write down in paper things that no one else should know. Does that make sense? I just- my father must have a reason for all this.”

Derek nods as he grabs a pair of sweatpants, stretching them in front of him to see how big they really are.

“You’re wearing that?” Stiles arches an eyebrow.

“Nothing else fits.” Derek frowns. Not the best kind of clothes for their situation, but whoever lived here definitely didn’t share Derek’s size.

Stiles chuckles, dropping the bathrobe and pressing against Derek’s back. He nudges the nape of his neck, hands resting on Derek’s hips, who hums and leans back.

“That won’t fit you, either,” Stiles murmurs, his lips stretching into a smirk against Derek’s nape as his hands stroke his abs.

“What do you suggest then?” Derek breathes out, head rested on Stiles’ shoulder.


“I’m sure no one would complain,” Stiles insists, shrugging against his back.

Even though he’s getting hard again, Derek uses all his willpower to move away. They could easily spend the whole day in that room, but there are matters they have to deal with, after all.

Stiles holds him back, tightening his hold on Derek’s hips. “You’re no fun,” he pouts dramatically.
“You don’t seem to care,” Derek smirks.

“Touché,” Stiles concedes. “Why don’t you try the other room?”

Derek looks back at him, arching an eyebrow. He shrugs, in a *why the hell not* gesture and turns around to capture Stiles’ face in his hands.

“Stop worrying about the letters,” he says, leaning his forehead against Stiles’. “We’ll figure out another way to find them.”

Derek lets him go and walks to the room at the end of the hall, leaving Stiles to think about it in solitude.

The moment he’s closer to the stairs, though, the scent of someone else hits him again, stronger this time. Derek stops in his tracks and takes a defensive stance. After a moment of waiting, he hears the soft noise of a boot sole against the wooden floor downstairs and he moves quietly after that. Back against the wall in the hallway, Derek reaches the living room, where the smell is stronger, recent. But something is still off.

On instinct, Derek turns around in time to see the gun barrel and dodge before the bullet can hit his head.

The human curses, and the second it takes him to do so, Derek lunges forward and pushes him down so hard he knocks the wind out of the man, who drops the gun. Derek straddles him and pins him down with his body.

“Who are you?” he snarls.

“That’s my question,” the human breathes out. He regards him for a moment and then frowns. “Miguel?”

That’s when Derek recognizes him.


At the sound of the gunshot, Stiles drops the letter he was re-reading and rushes out of the bedroom.

“Derek!” he calls as he runs to the other room, not even considering if it may be dangerous. “Oh my god I heard a gunshot, what happen-” he stops talking when he finds no one there. Cursing, he doesn’t even think about it before racing downstairs, jumping the last four steps.

“Are you oka- *Danny*!!” Stiles ends the sentence with a squeak.

He stops in his tracks abruptly at the door frame. In the living room floor, Stiles finds a flushed Danny being pinned down by Derek.

Danny tilts his head back and looks at Stiles in surprise. “You’re back.”

“What are you doing here?” Stiles gestures dumbfoundedly.

“I live here,” Danny says, sounding like he didn’t have a pissed and naked werewolf on top of him.
“No one lives in this part of town,” Stiles protests.

“Stiles,” Derek huffs, pressing a clawed hand against Danny’s chest to make sure he stays there as he lifts his eyes to look at Stiles.

“Right, not the point, uh.” Stiles fumbles, not sure what to do next

“Bring me something to tie him up,” Derek says, rolling his eyes.

Danny uses the moment to struggle and spew protests, hitting Derek, but of course Derek is faster. He shoves

“Derek, don’t-” Stiles tries to protest.

“Go, I need something to secure him or I’ll have to knock him out,” Derek says as he looks down at Danny in clear warning.

Stiles rushes upstairs, to the bedroom where he left their backpack. He searches inside until he finds the tape they nabbed a few days ago. Good decision, Stiles thinks now as he goes downstairs two at a time and runs back to the living room.

Stiles finds Danny sitting on a chair, Derek’s clawed hands resting over his shoulder. Without exchanging a word, they start working together in taping Danny’s limbs to the chair, ignoring his complaints.

“So you’re one of them now?” Danny asks, grunting as he tests the holds.

“I’m still human,” Stiles explains with a confused frown.

Danny turns around to look at him in surprise. “I don’t get it then. Why are you helping him?”

“It’s complicated.” Stiles rubs the back of his neck. He feels kind of embarrassed all of a sudden. What he and Derek have, whatever it is, is still really new and fragile. He’s not sure he’s ready to tell someone else. Another human, one who may or may not understand.

“Do we have to gag you or will you stay quiet?” Derek asks then, grabbing Danny’s chin and turning his face towards him.

Stiles and Danny never were that close, it’s not like Stiles can say they were friends, or that he knows what Danny is into. But it’s plainly obvious that Danny finds Derek attractive. It’s not that Stiles cares, because he doesn’t. Really. But the way Danny’s eyes linger unnecessarily long on Derek’s naked body annoys Stiles for some reason.

A second later, the realization that Derek is indeed still naked, while threatening someone, startles him. Stiles has grown so used to seeing him naked over the last week that he hadn’t even noticed.

“Derek,” he hisses lowly. “Put on some clothes, man.”

Derek looks at him, still holding Danny’s chin, and then he nods pensively before stepping toward Stiles.

“Keep an eye on him,” he murmurs next to his head, nudging him lightly before going upstairs.

When Stiles looks at Danny again, he finds the boy regarding him oddly.

"He's not your cousin, is he?" Danny cocks his head to the side.
"Er... well, you see... About that, uh... Nope, no, he isn’t,” Stiles stutters, feeling incredibly awkward.

"That's actually a relief." Danny smirks.

“Huh?” Stiles makes a surprise sound that turns into a choke when he tries to swallow and not die of mortification at the same time. Thankfully they don’t have time to engage in any more awkward conversation before Derek is downstairs again.

“Those are my pants,” Danny comments, eyeing Derek to the point of ogling.

“Not anymore,” Derek smirks, pulling them over his hips commando and zipping them up.

Stiles watches their exchange, irritation bubbling up inside him. He storms to where Derek is standing, dark shirt hanging from his back pocket. Stiles grabs it brusquely and shoves it against Derek’s chest, who arches a questioning eyebrow before grabbing it and putting it on. Stiles nods, satisfied and turns around to conveniently block the view for Danny.

Danny snorts, frowning slightly. “So what are you gonna do with me now? I guess I’d already be dead if that was the plan.”

“We need some answers,” Stiles explains, stepping closer. They haven’t discussed it, but considering how they reached a dead end with the letters, stumbling over a hunter might well be the best thing to have happened.

“I’m not going to tell you anything, Stiles.” Danny shakes his head, like he couldn’t believe Stiles would be so stupid.

“It’s about my dad,” he says roughly. Stiles doesn’t want to think about it, but this could literally be his last chance to find him. “I came back to find him.”

“I don’t know anything about him,” Danny says, clenching his jaw.

“He’s lying,” Derek deadpans.

Stiles turns to look at him. He nods, knowing Derek is the best lie detector. Stepping closer, Stiles kneels in front of Danny, ignoring the noise of protest Derek makes.

“Danny,” he whispers. “I’m really worried about my dad. I know he’s been looking for me. All I want to know is where I can find him. I promise we won’t hurt you, just tell me what you know and we’ll leave.”

Danny snort. “You really believe I’ll buy that?”

“It’s the truth,” Stiles insists.

“Why should I tell you anything?” Danny shrugs. He doesn’t seem particularly bothered by being tied down and threatened by werewolf and co.

“Because we are asking you nicely,” Derek grunts. “And we only do that once.”

Danny snorts with disgust and Stiles jumps into action before things can get uglier. He places his hands on Danny’s knees, catching his attention. "Please, Danny. Do it for my dad. He could be in danger.”

"I know what happens when you trust a werewolf,” Danny says through clenched teeth. “I'm not
gonna make that mistake twice."

There is a resentment in the way Danny speaks that Stiles identifies with. He remembers when Scott disappeared, how bitter and angry he was for years. And suddenly Stiles sees it. Danny’s best friend was Jackson. Stiles was never close to them but everyone knew they were like brothers. He didn’t make the connection back then, but after Jackson was bitten, he left town with Lydia, leaving Danny behind. Stiles supposes his words make a lot more sense now.

“You know,” Stiles thinks his words carefully. “My best friend was bitten and disappeared, too.”

Danny recoils all he can against the chair, obviously taken aback by Stiles’ words. “I don’t know what that has to do with—”

“I know you and Jackson were close.” Stiles interrupts, trying to make a point. “I just wanted you to know I know what it feels like, when someone you trust leaves you behind.”

Danny doesn’t reply for a long time. “Nice try,” he finally says, roughly.

"He's not gonna talk," Derek interferes. "Let me try."

"Derek," Stiles protests. "He's my friend, we're not gonna hurt him."

"We were never friends," Danny points out.

"See? Not friends." Derek shrugs, taking a step closer.

Stiles jumps to his feet, placing a hand on Derek’s chest to stop him. “Just give me five with him. I can do this. No one needs to get hurt,” he says in a low voice.

Stiles doesn’t want to beg, not in front of Danny. But he’s willing to if that’s what it takes. He’s about to mouth the word please, when Derek nods, giving Stiles a slightly confused look before stepping back.

Sighing, Stiles turns to look at Danny, who is regarding him oddly.

"He listens to you." Danny sounds surprised.

"Yeah, we're partners,” Stiles says without thinking. “Oh my god, I didn't mean it like that, he- we're just working together. Uh."

“I’m not blind, you know?” Danny teases, expression a bit harsh.

“I- uh well.” Stiles gestures frantically, back and forth between he and Derek. “We... I trust him,” Stiles blurs out without thinking. At his own words, he pauses, eyes impossibly wide. Because it’s true. He does trust Derek.

Stiles can feel Derek’s silent stare on him. He looks back, shrugging dramatically. He wants to say, yeah buddy I’m as surprised as you are. But Stiles is a bit too shocked at himself to formulate words. He tries to speak, to add something to that three-worded bomb, but nothing coherent comes out of his mouth.

“Your father joined the Militia,” Danny suddenly says.

Stiles stops at the words. He stops talking, gesturing, breathing. He just holds on, letting the words sink in. His father. The Militia.
“When you disappeared, we managed to keep him hidden for two days,” Danny explains. “After that he went after you but lost the trail. It still hurts where he punched me, by the way. I think he messed up my jaw.”

“My dad hit you?” Stiles squeaks.

“When he found out I was the responsible for letting you cross the border with your kidnapper,” Danny says, jerking his head at Derek, “he kind of lost it. The rest of the hunters wouldn’t let him go into the No Man’s land alone, they were afraid he’d do something stupid.”

“Oh my god.” Stiles’ legs buckle.

Derek says his name, voice filled with concern, but Stiles barely notices. He feels Derek circling his waist and guiding him to the nearest sofa, but Stiles isn’t sure why. He feels numb, disconnected.

“He was determined to find you, no matter what,” Danny adds then.

His words sound muffled, though. And when Derek growls at him in a clear warning to stop talking, it all sounds far away for Stiles. He knew that things must have gotten bad for his dad, but he never expected something like this.

Years of being grilled about staying away from the Militia come crashing down on Stiles.

The Militia are a young group, only formed a couple years ago, when the war intensified and humans lost several cities. Some people thought the official routes were no longer enough, and they had the idea of offering prisoners a way to defend their country and obtain their freedom. Soon small Militia groups were formed and instructed by the most ruthless soldiers. Nowadays, any human can join forces. But the Militias are known for being harsh and cruel. They are a nomadic groups, in constant hunt of werewolves. They don’t take care of their fallen and never take prisoners.

“It was his only option,” Stiles murmurs, thinking aloud as the realization that his father was practically pushed into this hits him.

“Yeah,” Danny adds, apparently not intimidated by Derek’s warning. “Some of his friends from the police force tried to stop him. I mean, we all have heard the stories about the militia, they are fucking insane.”

“Yeah...” Stiles trails off. Distantly, he feels Derek rubbing his back, crushed next to him. But it’s like his body isn’t his own right now. He can’t feel anything, he can’t move. “He warned me about them, many times. Said they were dangerous, unpredictable.”

Stiles feels the sting in his eyes. Clenching his jaw, he wills the tears to hold back. He concentrates on breathing, that’s something he can do. Breathing is easy.

Inhale, exhale.

_Inhale, exhale._

Derek feels helpless. He can’t rely on his werewolf strength for this, can’t do anything to fix this. He
had forgotten what it's like to care about someone, to try to protect them. Because no matter how hard you try, life always finds a way to hurt the people you love.

He’s heard the stories about the Militia groups. He even encountered one once, years ago, and lost most of his military pack. They had something, there was something they used, some kind of technology that made them untouchable to werewolves. Even now, Derek isn’t sure what that was.

“When did he leave?” he asks the hunter when it’s obvious Stiles is not going to speak.

“Practically right after you guys left,” Danny explains.

“The militia was his best chance,” Derek whispers next to Stiles’ ear in a soothing tone. “They go into wolf territory all the time. He knew you were with us, he was trying to find you.”

Derek clasps the back of his neck, leaning him closer until Stiles buries his face in his neck.

“It’s okay,” Derek says roughly over the roar of his pulse inside his body. “This is good, Stiles, it’s a lead, we’re going to find him. It’s okay.”

Stiles fists his hands in the fabric of Derek’s shirt over his chest. He takes a big breath before leaning back and nodding, resolutely. Clearing his throat, he turns to look at Danny, who seems very busy staring at the floor.

“Where can we find the militia?” he asks, voice rough but not broken.

Danny snaps his head up to look at them. He seems clearly uncomfortable at the display of affection. Derek find this particularly amusing, considering the strong smell of arousal that was coming off of the hunter before.

“You know they’re constantly moving,” Danny murmurs.

Stiles gets on his feet, gesturing Derek to hold back. “Don’t bullshit me, Danny. Tell me where they were last.”

“I-” Danny falters. “I promise, I don’t know.”

Stiles makes a desperate sound with the back of his throat then. He leaps forward and punches Danny in the face without warning. Derek is instantly on his feet, moving closer. He doesn’t want to stop him, not yet at least, but he is going to be ready for whatever happens next.

Panting, Stiles grabs a hold of Danny’s shoulder and leans closer, ignoring when Danny grunts in pain. “Where! I know you know, just tell me or I swear, Danny. I will hurt you. You better believe me, because not even he,” Stiles points back at Derek without taking his eyes off Danny. “Will be able to stop me from breaking every bone in your body. I don’t care anymore, this is my only chance. So just tell me.”

“Stiles,” Derek says in concern. “What are you doing?”

“I’m improvising,” Stiles murmurs, still looking at Danny. “Like my dad was forced to do.”

“Alright, look,” Danny struggles against the tape holding him down. “I’m at the border control, I never hear anything from the city council.” Stiles holds his arm back, hand fisted, ready to hit him again. “But!” Danny continues in a hurry. “I can tell you where they’re meeting tonight to discuss what to do with you two.”
“With us?” Derek arches an eyebrow, suddenly interested.

“They assume you didn’t leave town.” Danny nearly rolls his eyes. “The guy you left alive didn’t recognize you, but council is acting like two rogue werewolves were in town.”

“That complicates things,” Derek murmurs, frowning. If the town is trying to find two werewolves and no one knows Stiles is here, it means tighter security and a higher chance of getting shot first and asked second.

“We’re leaving town anyway.” Stiles shrugs. “I mean,” he looks back at Derek. “Time’s up for us, right? We gotta go, and we finally got our lead.”

Derek considers it for a second before nodding. He remembers the last time he saw Erica, her scared face and how brave she had been anyway. Derek doesn’t want to leave without his pack. He picked Stiles and he doesn’t regret it, but his pack is still second priority. At the thought, Derek blinks in confusion. When did Stiles become so important?

Derek starved himself of love and affection for years, but against all odds, Stiles changed that. And he knows that’s reflecting on the way Derek is finally accepting his pack. Things like being responsible of other people, the emotional connections, it all used to terrify him. He allowed his pack closer, but still, Derek always maintained a safe distance. Until Stiles.

Stiles barged in and cut the safety net, and all bets were off now.

Derek hates the idea of leaving Beacon Hills without his pack. But he’ll do whatever it takes to help Stiles find his father. That’s a personal promise, something Derek feels the need to do to make amends for the things he’d done to Stiles.

He leaves the room, needing a moment alone. Derek leans against the wall next to the stairs. Once Stiles reunites with his father, though, Derek will go find his pack. Just the thought is enough to close his throat. But Derek knows that’s the right thing to do.

It’s *his pack*. He owes them that much.

-

When Stiles notices Derek has left the room, he stumbles a little, not sure if he should leave Danny alone. After a pause, he decides to risk it and walks to the hallway.

“What’s wrong?” he whispers, leaning down in a conspiratorial gesture.

“C’mere,” Derek murmurs. He stretches his arm out and Stiles slides under it without thinking, embracing him as Derek buries his face in his throat, nose nudging his suddenly frantic pulse.

“Are you okay?” Stiles breathes out, arms circling Derek’s back as his fingers run through his hair in a soothing gesture.

“I hate the idea of leaving without them,” Derek mutters against his neck, his words so low Stiles almost misses them.

“I know, me too.” He tightens his hold, bringing Derek closer.
“You have to know I’ll do whatever it takes to take you to your father,” Derek continues saying after a pause.

Stiles grows still. That wasn’t part of their deal. And while he’s suspected the deal was no longer really in place and they were just pretending because it made things easier, admitting to this says a lot about their relationship.

Derek leans back, eyes guarded as he looks Stiles in the face. “But the moment you’re with him, I’ll go find my pack.”

Stiles looks back and forth between Derek’s eyes, suddenly so keyed up he believes he’s going to spontaneously combust. He’s not sure he understands what Derek is trying to say, but a small part of him just knows.

“You’ll leave?” Stiles breathes out, swallowing the word me before saying it out loud.

Derek swallows, his Adam’s apple bowing up and down. He makes a small frustrated sound in the back of his throat before nodding. “You’ll be where you want to be, and you know something must have happened to them. I can’t abandon my pack.”

Stiles drops his eyes, suddenly unsure. It’s not like he thought they’d stay together from now on, but putting an expiration date on this is making his chest ache. Eyes still casted down, Stiles nods, absentmindedly. He takes a big breath as he circles Derek’s neck and presses their lips together. Derek tenses for half a second before embracing him closer.

“Wait here,” Stiles rasps out, letting him go before he’d like to. “I’ll get the address from Danny.”

With numb legs, Stiles walks to the other room, where Danny is still waiting for them, secured to the chair.

“Trouble in paradise?” Danny jokes, but he must see something in Stiles’ face because he drops the smug smirk fast and regards him with concern.

“I...” Stiles tries to speak, but he loses his line of thoughts. A few minutes ago, he couldn’t wait to get this information and find his dad. But now, it feels like no matter what happens, Stiles will have to give up on something. It’s either his dad or Derek.

He could never abandon his dad, though. He needs to find him and make sure he’s okay. But Erica, Boyd, Isaac... Scott... they are his friends, too. Stiles can’t just stay with his dad in some place safe (does that even exist anymore?) while Derek goes back to wolf territory on his own. Derek is too stubborn and there is no time to discuss this now, but Stiles decides he’s not allowing this to happen. He’ll talk to his dad. After all, he’s known Scott since he was a kid. And Stiles... Stiles is not abandoning the pack.

“Meeting is in less than an hour,” Danny says, pulling him out of his thoughts. “Old Argent house.”

Stiles blinks. “I didn’t even ask you yet.”

“Call me a sentimental.” Danny shrugs. “It’s not like you can just barge inside and hurt someone, anyway.”

Stiles chuckles lightly. He steps closer and clasps his friend’s shoulder. “Thanks, man.”

“They may not even talk about the Militia,” Danny adds.
“That’s fine.” Stiles grins. He notices the clear hesitation in Danny’s face. “What?”

“Did you...” Danny trails off. “Did you ever see Jackson in wolf territory?” He surprises Stiles with the question.

“No, sorry.” Stiles shrugs, uncomfortable. He knows what Danny must be going through. He’s angry at Jackson for leaving, but he still cares about him.

Derek appears then, leaning against the doorframe as he crosses his arms over his chest and tilts his head down. “We have to go.”


“I’ll take care of it,” Derek murmurs, looking up and rolling his eyes when Stiles looks horrified. “Not like that.”

Danny snorts, startling Stiles. And suddenly he can’t get out of this house quick enough. Stiles has dreaded this moment since they caught Danny. After all is done and said, now that they have a place and time, there is a decision to make in regards to their prisoner. And in all honesty, it’s something Stiles doesn’t want to deal with.

He walks past Derek, nodding as he gestures with his arms, indicating he’ll be in the other room. He runs upstairs, filling the backpack with extra clothes for both before he puts on his boots and grabs Derek’s. Once downstairs, he drops Derek’s boots and socks at the door frame, not even looking inside the living room.

Stiles goes to the kitchen, rattles through the cupboards for food, fills their bottles with tap water and just busies himself as he thinks of what they should do next. Once he puts on the backpack, Stiles goes back to the hall, where he finds Derek sitting down on the stairs, putting on his boots.

“Moved him to the basement,” Derek says as he laces them. “He’ll be out for a few hours.”

“Huh, okay...” Stiles murmurs, fumbling a little with his backpack. “I uh, I had an idea. Wanna hear it?”

“Do I have another option?” Derek teases, smirking up at him before getting back on his feet.

Stiles pulls a face, mocking as they go to the back door and walk outside. Twenty minutes later, they stop between two small storage buildings, right at the edge of a back yard a few houses away from the old Argents’.

"This is a bad idea," Derek insists.

"It's a great idea," Stiles deadpans.

"Eavesdropping? Really?" Derek arches an eyebrow.

"You have super hearing!" Stiles explains in a duh tone. He really doesn’t see the problem.

"You're ridiculous." Derek shakes his head, smirking.

"Look.” Stiles grabs his arm. “I got us back here and we almost died. And then, there was nothing in those letters to help us find the Argents or my dad so we have to be creative."

"Desperate times, desperate measures?” Derek offers, and Stiles believes the words are more for Stiles’ convenience than his own.
"Exactly." Stiles grins. "Now go there and be the creepy stalker I know you can be."

"Shut up." Derek rolls his eyes in a playful way.

Before he can move, though, Stiles grabs his sleeve. "Be careful."

"I always am." Derek gives him a small smile. Not a smirk or a grin. It's a tiny, open smile that leaves Stiles feeling like there is not enough air in the world.

When Derek is gone, Stiles paces back and forth. With every little sound he crunches and looks around, until he's so keyed up, the minutes start dragging until they feel like hours. Stiles has never been good at being patient and staying still. But fear of Derek never coming back has him close to madness by the time someone approaches him.

Stiles doesn't even try to hide. He recognizes Derek even when he’s just a shadow between buildings.

“Let’s go,” Derek hisses as he gestures Stiles to turn around and start walking.

They jog in silence, running through deserted streets until they reach the forest. After a while, Stiles stops, doubling over and breathing heavily.

“What happened?” he asks.

“Militia is close by,” Derek says. He hasn’t even broken into a sweat and Stiles can barely breath. “They called them for help.”

“Help with what?” Stiles squeaks.

“Apparently, two rogue werewolves killed several people in the last week,” Derek deadpans.


“Can you keep running?” Derek asks then, stepping closer to clasp his neck, thumb pressing on Stiles’ pulse.

“Yeah, yeah I’m fine,” he agrees. “Where are we going?”

“We need to leave a message for the others,” Derek explains, hand sliding to the back of Stiles’ neck, fingers running through his hair as Stiles leans closer, hands resting on Derek’s stomach for support.

Stiles knows instantly where they are going. He doesn’t say it out loud, though, knowing Derek prefers not to name his old house. He grins, trying to reassure Derek. “Why are we running, though? Wanna see me puke?”

Derek seems to falter a moment, his lips twisting before he smirks a bit apologetically. “They may or may have not noticed me.”

“What?” Stiles squeaks. His eyes widen and he pauses a moment before darting forward. He doesn’t look back, knowing Derek is following him, and soon he proves him right by passing Stiles.

“I’ll go ahead.”

“Yeah...” Stiles breathes heavily as he runs. “You... do... that...”

Stiles supposes it was a good idea to wander around the Hale mansion during the last week. He can
now find his way without much trouble. And by the time he arrives at the back of the house, Derek is waiting. He’s still, staring at the house, a piece of paper in his hand.

“What’s wrong?” Stiles asks as he stops next to him, bending over to breath.

Derek doesn’t speak, he stretches his arm, offering Stiles the paper. And even though he feels like he’s going to pass out, Stiles quickly understands.

“I’ll do it,” he murmurs, grabbing the paper and walking into the charred and half demolished house.

As he enters what used to be a living room, Stiles can’t help but think of his mom. He imagines her visiting the Hales when they were happy, little kids running around this same place, Derek most probably close by... lurking. Stiles smiles at the thought, swallowing through the sudden lump in his throat as he keeps walking.

There is burned furniture and charred wooden floors still in some parts of the big room. Stiles walks over to a big destroyed couch. Bending down, he slides the piece of paper between the cushions and, not knowing what to do to make sure they will notice it, Stiles runs his hands all over the couch, getting covered in filth and ash. He supposes the thing smells enough of him now.

Stiles pats the sides of his thighs, trying to clean his hands off before he emerges from the shell of what used to be a home for eleven people.

-Derek can’t make himself go through that. Maybe in another life, in another time, it’d have been a cathartic punishment. Maybe he’d even have lived there, just for the daily reminder that his family died because of him. But Stiles has changed that. Derek is too raw, too exposed right now. He can’t go inside without losing it, without opening up and maybe mourning the loss of the people he loved. And they don’t have time for that.

Derek doesn’t know how the hunters found them so quickly, but he can hear them approaching through the woods.

When Stiles emerges, he looks shaken. Derek reaches his hand out, and he knows Stiles is still thinking of the house, of what he encountered inside. Derek can see the dirt in his hands, he can smell the old ash, and his stomach turns.

Steps sound closer then, snapping Derek out of it. He darts forward, grabbing Stiles’ arm to drag him away faster.

“Hunters,” Derek huffs when he sees the confused look Stiles gives him. He interlinks their hands together before running to the border of the forest, where Derek lets him go to darts forward, scenting the area. There is no one ahead of them, so Derek guides him west, to the Militia camp. There is no time to waste, considering they have hunters chasing their heels.

Derek wants to snort. When did his life turn into this? He’s running away from hunters so he can find other hunters, worse ones.

He suddenly senses movement and crunches, taking Stiles down with him so they can hide.
"So they really followed you?" Stiles hisses in a hushed tone. "Then why didn’t they attack sooner? How did they know we’d come here?"

"My guess is your friend ratted us out." Derek shrugs as he scans the area. He really doesn’t know if that’s the case, but he doesn’t care right now.

"Danny couldn't have don’t that," Stiles says stubbornly. "And he didn’t even know your real name!"

"There's no time to find out, we have to get out of here," Derek huffs as he crawls forward when he senses the area is clear.

Stiles follows him, and after a few steps an arrow goes flying next to his ear.

"Stiles! Down!" Derek growls, pushing him flat against the ground before jumping to his feet.

Derek transforms as he moves into the night, darting through trees, chasing the noises until he finds the first hunters. He can hear more closing in, so Derek doesn’t waste time. He uses his claws to knock them down before going after the others. After a while he’s run out of hunters to hunt, so he turns around, running back.

Stiles is still where Derek left him, the only difference is that he’s fighting someone. Derek notices the other hunter unconscious laying on the ground next to them, and the fresh blood in the side of Stiles’ head. And something inside of him snaps. Derek roars, leaping onto the standing human and knocking him down.

When he’s sure the hunter won’t get up anymore, Derek turns to search for Stiles. He can only imagine how he looks like by Stiles’ expression. Derek retracts the claws and fangs, calming his eyes. He knows he’s covered in blood, the metallic reek is everywhere around him. But he can’t do anything about it.

"What happened? Are you-" Stiles tries to speak, his voice shaking.

"Let's go, they are still coming," Derek says roughly, circling his back and turning Stiles in the other direction before hurrying him up. After a few steps, they feel a few arrows flying past them, but they don’t stop to crunch this time.

Soon after that, they encounter more hunters. Derek suspects they circled them, coming from different angles.

Stiles has found a sturdy branch that he uses as weapon. And Derek had never noticed before, but there is something in the way Stiles moves, how he dodges hits, that doesn’t seem quite normal. It’s like he’s really lucky. For someone so clumsy in his daily life, Stiles is extraordinarily graced when he fights. And for some reason Derek thinks of Deaton, and his strange interest in Stiles.

Derek only has a moment longer to observe how Stiles fights before two hunters attack, keeping him busy for the next ten minutes.

He hears the thud of Stiles’ body hitting the ground even before Stiles can protest. Derek turns, alert, but a hunter uses the moment to tase him. As the electric bolts run through Derek’s body, he roars, hands fisting the metallic darts buried in his chest and pulling them out.

Any rational thought is lost in the pain and the need to make sure Stiles is okay. He fights his way with claws and fangs, not even stopping to think.
When he finally kneels next to him, the hunters are dead and the night silent around them.

Stiles has received painful blows in the last couple of months. But nothing like a direct blow from the butt of a gun to the side of his face. His ear is throbbing and there is a low buzz in that eardrum. He clutches his own head, trying to contain the agonizing pain. He feels so dizzy he’s nauseous.

Warm hands close around his head then, starting him.

"Are you okay?" Derek asks, his voice raw and frantic. He tightens his hold until it hurts and then Stiles feels nothing. He sighs, leaning closer. Even with his eyes closed, he can picture Derek’s arms and hands sporting black veins.

"Fine," Stiles murmurs, snuggling closer to Derek’s hands. He finally opens his eyes when he hears Derek sigh. Stiles looks up at him, concerned. “It was just a lucky blow. I’m fine.”

Derek snorts, leaning back. And that’s when Stiles notices the state he’s in. "Oh my god," he says a bit more alertly. “Derek, there’s a lot of blood, is it yours? Are you okay?"

"Mostly not mine," Derek says without paying much attention. He's studying Stiles' every inch, making sure he's okay.

"Derek, you’re bleeding," Stiles babbles as Derek pins him down on the ground. His hands are moving under Stiles' shirt now, his fingers stroking more resolutely, with a new purpose that makes Stiles start getting hard.

“Derek, oh god, what are you- **oh fuck**, what are you doing?” Stiles shivers, squirming under Derek’s hands. “You think this is the right time for this?” Stiles arches his back, allowing Derek to ruck his shirt up over his pecs. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m not complaining. I’m just- ngh, just making an observation, that’s all.” He bucks when Derek twists his nipples lightly. “I may have a concussion and you’re still bleeding, and uh... what- oh yeah, hunters!” he manages to say dumbly.

"Shut up," Derek grunts as he clutches Stiles’ face with both hands. “There are no more hunters, we’re alone. And I need you.”

"Shit, Derek, **shut,**" Stiles tries to protest but then Derek is nipping his way down to his throat, where he sucks over his frantic pulse, baring his teeth and marking his skin as a show of what could be.

"Jesus, okay, **fuck it,**" Stiles squirms, hands moving to Derek’s belt.

Derek groans right against his pulse as he noses his way to Stiles’ shoulder, where he bites down hard. Stiles gasps, pulling him closer as he opens his legs, inviting him in between.

His fingers fumble a little before he has both their pants undone and his hand wrapped around them. Derek makes a low noise, like a whine, and then he stops biting enough for Stiles to find his lips. They are suddenly kissing, messy and furiously, desperately clinging to each other.

Fuck everything, Stiles thinks frantically. They’re still alive, aren’t they?
Derek is overwhelmed by his need to mark Stiles. He thrusts against his hold, going back to biting Stiles’ shoulder. He needs reassurance that Stiles is alive, that their time isn’t up just yet.

There is an edge of desperation in the way they both cling to each other, in the way Derek bites just a little bit harder, in the way Stiles jerks them fast and hard. Derek suspects Stiles may be thinking the same, this could be their last time together. The thought is enough to make the risk of stopping in their escape worth it.

Derek supports himself on his knees, holding Stiles’ thighs up and rutting against him. And after several firm strokes, Stiles’ body grows taut, his hold tightening around their cocks a moment before he comes. And the wetness and scent is enough to help Derek find his own release.

He settles down, pressing their bare torsos together and rubbing, marking both of them with their come.

“Is this a werewolf thing?” Stiles asks, still out of breath.

“Don’t clean yourself,” he murmurs against Stiles’ neck. “I-” but he doesn’t know how to explain. He just needs Stiles to bear his scent, even though he’s the only werewolf around to notice. But somehow, the idea of Stiles carrying his mark while in the Militia camp, once they are apart, soothes Derek a bit.

He gets up, helping Stiles back on his feet. There is a brief, awkward moment, where Stiles looks down at his messy stomach. He lifts his eyes to look at Derek, and Derek’s expression must have given something away because Stiles sighs and pulls his shirt down, only cringing slightly.

Then, Stiles looks back and forth between his dirty hand and Derek, making one of his faces. “I can’t believe this is my life,” he murmurs before wiping his hand on his jeans.

Derek gets a hold of his wrist, bringing Stiles’ hand up to press it against his face. Derek nudges the palm, eyes pinning Stiles as he rubs his cheeks back and forth, drowning in their mixed scents.

“That…” Stiles licks his lips. “That shouldn’t be so hot.”

Derek snorts against the palm and drops Stiles’ hand. They are still alone in the woods, but Derek doesn’t know for how long.

“We should keep going.” He smirks, resuming the hike.

He decides to go slower than he’d like to, thinking of Stiles and the hit to the head. They walk together, shoulders bumping as they ignore all the things they should be talking about before reaching the camp.

After a while, Derek feels another presence nearby. He curses, speeding up his pace. “There’s more,” he says, gesturing to Stiles to hurry up.

They are so close to the Militia camp, Derek thinks frantically. All they need is a bit more of time. He knows the camp means certain death for him, but he can always hide his track for the hunters once he brings Stiles close enough to the Militia.

As they moves through the forest, Derek notices the number of hunters has increased. He hears the
Jeeps in the distance, can feel the hunters closing in, narrowing the circle around them. And he knows in that moment that they won’t make it to the militia camp. That’s why Derek makes a decision. He was never good at saying goodbye, anyway.

“Keep running!” he shouts. “No matter what, don’t stop.”

“What?” Stiles turns around, startled.

“Find the river,” Derek explains. “Militia is there!”

He holds Stiles’ gaze a second too long before darting in the opposite direction.

And as he runs through the woods, Derek feels the pull, like physical pain taking him to Stiles, but he fights it. Derek howls, because it hurts, because he wants the hunters to go after him. He howls as a promise of blood. He squeezes his eyes close, images of Stiles running wild in his mind as Derek wolfs out and attacks.

-

Stiles has a moment of doubt before he starts running again. Soon, he’s tripping over branches, colliding against trees, completely lost. He grew up in this area, but that doesn’t mean he used to pay visits to the woods, like he suspects Derek did.

The fifth time he trips, Stiles groans in frustration. He tries to calculate how long it’s been since Derek left and that’s when he realizes something.

Derek... The bastard is not coming back, is he?

Stiles stops in his tracks, understanding what Derek just did.

“Fucking martyr werewolf complex,” Stiles curses.

He turns around, determined. He’s not letting Derek sacrifice himself for the greater good or whatever other ridiculous reason he may have. Problem is, the forest is silent around him. Stiles runs in the other direction, but he has no idea if it’s the right one.

“Derek!” he hisses, hoping it’s low enough for a human to miss, but loud enough for a werewolf hearing.

A moment later, he hears something close by and Stiles straightens up, looking around. “Derek?” he whispers, suddenly unsure.

“You have nowhere to go,” a voice sounds to his right then. Stiles crunches on instinct, searching for the source. He can only see a shape in the shadows.

“Drop your weapons,” the voice says.

“I’m not armed, man.” Stiles licks his lips nervously, mentally listing his possibilities.

The shape moves forward and soon Stiles can see the hunter. He’s pointing a big rifle at Stiles. “Drop the act,” the man says.
“Look,” Stiles shows his palms. “I’m not a werewolf. And I have no weapon, see?”

Stiles knows the moment the hunter startles. He’s young and nervous and when Stiles moves to get back on his feet, his hands lifting his shirt to show he’s not packing, the boy jumps. Stiles can almost see it in slow motion when he shoots, his eyes closing from the blast, before Stiles feels the bite in his side.

He looks down, surprised. And then, he’s suddenly hitting the ground.

After that, there is nothing.

-

Derek was ready to let Stiles go. He was going to go back to wolf territory, track his pack, do what he was supposed to do, and not what every cell in his body was screaming at him to do. But his plan doesn’t stick.

He hears the blast first, and shortly after the smell reaches him. Stiles’ blood is heady, dizzying Derek as he roars and turns around, chasing him. Derek doesn’t remember the run, all he remembers is the smell, choking him. He finds the hunter, standing over Stiles. His slack arms still holding the rifle. He looks terrified and Derek suspects it’s not because of the werewolf running at him, but of what he just did.

Derek doesn’t feel any pity, though. He slits his throat and throws the body as far away from Stiles as possible.

He drops on his knees, hands closing around Stiles’ fresh wound, pressing down. At the contact, Stiles flinches, whining a little. The sound makes Derek’s whole body grow cold.

“Stiles,” he murmurs, patting Stiles’ cheek with his hand drenched in his blood. “Stiles, wake up.”

Stiles’ eyes flutter open. He looks pale, not pale like usual. Sick pale. The blood Derek smeared in his cheeks looks bright and alive in comparison.

Stiles murmurs something unintelligible and Derek starts to take the pain away instantly. But he realizes Stiles is not feeling any pain when his pinched expression doesn’t change. That’s bad. That’s really bad.

Not knowing what else to do, Derek makes a decision.

“Stay with me,” he rasps out as he lifts Stiles off the ground.

Stiles makes a noise of protest. He squeezes his eyes and clenches his jaw at the sudden movement, and somehow that allows Derek to breathe a little bit more. He’s still conscious, still feeling something, still there.

As Derek moves through the woods, still tracking the movement of the hunters behind them, he realizes he thought he was ready to never see Stiles again. How could he be such a fool? He was running in the opposite direction, he had left Stiles alone. This is his fault, he thinks numbly. Once again, he failed the people he cared about. The guilt almost chokes him.
Derek takes them as close to the militia camp as possible. He knows what being discovered by them means, but Derek doesn’t even care right now. He ignores his instinct, ignores reason. All he cares about right now is Stiles. And the still bleeding wound in his abdomen.

As he gets closer to the edge of the forest, the sounds of the hunters behind them grow muffled and the sound of the hunters ahead of them grow louder. But even then, Derek doesn’t stop.

Only when he feels people approaching, Derek hides behind some bushes running on instinct. He presses Stiles against him, his hand reaching for Stiles’ face, fingers caressing his stained cheeks slowly. Derek knows the time is now. He says his goodbye, pressing his lips against Stiles’ forehead, and then rises.

His instinct is telling him to run, he knows if he goes out there he won't make it, but then Stiles whines in pain, and Derek steps out of cover, letting them see him.

There are several armed men in the path.

“Stiles...” the closest one to him breathes out, eyes pinned on Stiles.

Derek holds him closer to his body, moved by an irrational protectiveness. But he recognizes Sheriff Stilinski almost instantly. Derek looks down at Stiles, wishing he’d open his eyes to see his dad. He wants to whisper, I kept my promise, I took you to him. But his vision is getting blurry and he can’t speak. Derek swallows through the lump, fighting the sting in his eyes.

“A hunter shot him,” is all he says. His voice is rough, breaking at the end.

He’s so centered on Stiles and his father that Derek only hears the electric buzz a second before the cold metal closes around his neck.

A strong shudder runs down his spine, making Derek drop to the ground. Even as the current runs up and down his body, drowning him in agonizing pain, Derek protects Stiles from the fall. He lays Stiles down careful before a new, stronger wave has him writhing next to him.

Someone approaches them, reaching for Stiles, who’s still unconscious. Derek bares his fangs, flashing red eyes although he can’t see anything. Muffled in the distance, he hears Stiles’ steady heartbeat, the scent of sickness coming off of him.

“Don’t-” he says through gritted teeth. He tries to reach forward, to hold onto Stiles before someone takes him away from him. But it’s too late. Derek can’t find Stiles.

"Derek?" A feminine voice calls then. "Is that you honey?"

Even through the pain and the numbness, Derek feels a stab at that voice. He raises his eyes to Kate, who looks down at him with a smug smile before pressing on the control to send another discharge through the collar around Derek’s neck.

Before passing out, though, Derek doesn’t think of her. He thinks of Stiles and how he has failed him.
Derek wakes up to a world of pain.

His hands are handcuffed over his head with wolfsbane laced cuffs, so high up that if he tries to struggle too hard his shoulders protest in pain. His feet barely scratch the floor, sore toes his only balance to keep him upright. He's also shirtless, wires connecting both his sides to a voltage machine. And then there's the collar. It's programmed to send electric shocks through his body every few minutes, making healing nearly impossible and leaving Derek too weak to concentrate on anything.

The worst part isn't physical, though. It's the psychological aspect that hurts the most. Before he even opens his eyes, Derek thinks of Stiles. He remembers the smell of his blood, the feeling of his hands on Stiles' torn flesh, and Derek thinks he's going to be sick. Blinking slowly, he tries to bring himself out of the memory. He doesn't know where Stiles is. Or if he even made it alive. Derek yanks on his restraints, growling in sudden desperation, welcoming the flare of pain that runs down his arms to his shoulder blades. He struggles, ignoring the protest of his joints until he's close to pulling his shoulders out of their sockets. Only then, the pain is sharp enough to snap him out of his thoughts.

It takes him a moment to register his surroundings after that. He's inside a tent, the white-sheeted walls flapping in the wind. Derek can hear the camp enclosing him. He senses the humans moving around, clueless to his presence. But not all of them; Three hunters have apparently been patiently waiting for him.

“Princess’s awake,” one of them says, snarl distorting his face as he palms a club with his hand.

Derek doesn’t reply. Even when the first hit connects with his jaw, he doesn’t protest. He knew this was coming, he’s ready for it. He almost welcomes it, embracing the oblivion the pain gifts him with. The smell of his own blood brings flashes of memories of the last time he saw Stiles back to the front of his mind and Derek wolfs out, snapping his fangs at the hunters, hoping it will motivate them.

It does.

Derek loses track of time after that. At some point, he loses consciousness and they throw a bucket of cold water on him. Derek gasps, awaking instantly to the burn on his sides, where the skin is already flared alive by the charged wires.

That’s when Kate makes her entrance. Upon seeing her, Derek’s insides freeze. He flares his nostrils, retracting his claws and fangs and closing his eyes. He tries to cast her out of his mind, of his senses. He won’t allow her in again. Still, Derek hears how she congratulates her men for their job well done. And then she’s moving closer. Derek has only a moment to brace himself before Kate grabs his chin and tilts his head up.

“Not so charming anymore,” she comments, moving his head left and right to inspect the state he’s in. “Anything?” she asks, looking back at the hunters.

“Not even a word,” one of them replies.

“Wasn’t expecting any less.” Kate grins. She faces him again and pulls something off her leg holster. Derek recognizes the electric baton almost instantly. He must have shown it, because Kate’s grin widens. "Remember this?” she asks. “I thought we could revive the good ol’ days.”

Derek doesn’t reply, he doesn’t even move one single muscle. The collar unexpectedly buzzes then,
the electricity sparking just beneath his skin, and he grits his teeth through it all, muscles popping in
his clenched jaw and down his neck.

"Why were you in the woods?" Kate asks, studying him as Derek breaks into a sweat because of the
sharp pain. She looks like a predator observing her pray. It’s fitting, Derek thinks.

At the thought, Derek remembers Stiles' words. He remembers how serious and intense Stiles
sounded when he said he'd kill Kate. Refusing to even consider that Stiles didn’t make it out of the
woods alive, Derek realizes that now that Stiles has supposedly gotten his chance, all Derek wants is
for him to run away. He doesn't want Stiles anywhere near this woman. He places Stiles' safety
higher than his revenge, and the revelation is enough to numb him and make the pain more bearable.

"You got nothing to say? Well then, I'll do the talking." She claps the baton against her palm,
pensive. “I guess you finally told your uncle what happened that night and he cast you out... Warm?
Cold? Come on, don’t be like that, give me a hint." Kate smirks.

Derek casts his head down, refusing to acknowledge her.

"He isn’t going to talk," one of the hunters says.

"Oh trust me," she sneers. "He'll talk to me. Won't you, sweetie? After all you used to be quite the
talker." Kate laughs, obviously delighted with her joke. "But you know, I gotta say, I’m really
curious about something," she continues saying, and something in her tone tells Derek she’s finally
getting serious.

"You were carrying the Stilinski boy... I mean, I can’t stop wondering why? He was dead weight,
and you were surrounded by hunters. It’s like..." she trails off, opening her eyes wide in a mocking
gesture. “Well, honey, it’s almost like you did it on purpose. You brought him to the only place
where he could be treated, but you must've known what would happen to you, right?”

Kate pauses then, eyebrow arched and eyes fixed on Derek. “Wait-” she gasps mockingly. “Don’t
tell me... Is that what all this is about? The boy? You risked your life for him?” She turns to the
hunters and chuckles. “He always was a romantic,” she tells them with a wink, and they all break
into laughter.

Derek knows it’s a trap, he knows he should stay quiet, but the words are out of his mouth before he
can even register the thought. “Is he alive?” he whispers, voice low and rough.

The four humans stop laughing instantly. Kate is still smiling, though, when she approaches him.
“Oh honey, you are so easy. It almost ruins the fun of torturing you. Not even a challenge.” She
clicks her tongue in disapproval.

Derek realizes it’s too late to pretend he doesn’t care. He knows everything he says will be used
against him, but right now he doesn’t care as long as they tell him. “Is he?” Derek insists.

"Oh my god." She smirks. "You and the boy... I mean, not judging, but you gotta admit your
standards have dropped since we were together."

"He was my slave," Derek snaps, trying to regain control of the situation, trying to protect Stiles.

"Oh, the mute speaks!" She claps her hands. "I finally found a topic you feel like talking about.
Excellent. So tell me more about your slave. How willing was he when you fucked him? I'm sure his
father would like to know that."

Derek grits his teeth and remains silent.
"Aw, you're no fun when someone else touches your toys." She pouts dramatically as she looks back at her men.

Derek is growling before he knows it. It's low and menacing. It's all he can't say in words. Kate turns around, regarding him with a smile, eyes narrowed in wonder. "Oh this is going to be even more fun than I thought." She ducks her head, searching for his eyes. When he finally meets her gaze, she smiles slowly, all teeth and menace. And as she holds his stare, she calls her men. “Break him again.”

Derek only has a moment to snarl at her before Kate steps back and the men are back with the clubs. It's systematic, organized and brutal. He holds out as long as he can, but the pain and the frustration become too much after a while and Derek loses it, wolfing out, fighting against the restraints.

"Yes," Kate says with disgust. "Show everyone how repulsive you really are."

Derek closes his eyes, disgusted by her words. He needs to escape her, escape the pain. So he retreats inwards, back into himself. Back to Stiles. He remembers the feeling of his body under him, the way Stiles moved as if they were always in sync. He can almost hear the way Stiles moaned when Derek was inside him. He loses himself in the memory and ignores the pain when they break his knee, and when they do it again after he’s healed. With every hit, he recalls Stiles' flushed face, lips parted and plumped, hooded eyes looking at him so intensely Derek had found himself unable to hold his stare for long. Derek uses the anchor to pull back, retract his fangs, hide his claws.

He’s still half out of it when someone else enters the tent.

“I thought you were going to call me before the interrog-” Stiles’ father falters, trailing off when he sees Derek.

Kates slaps her forehead, charming smile into place. “My bad, totally forgot.”

The men resume the beating and Derek closes his eyes again, clenching his jaw against the pain, casting everything out except John Stilinski. He can feel Stiles’ father’s distress as he paces the room, anxiety oozing off of him as his heartbeat becomes erratic and frantic.

Derek speaks without thinking. “Stiles,” he murmurs, the pain destroying his reasoning. He ignores the fact that John must hate him for taking Stiles. All he can think is that John cares about his son, that somehow he will tell him something. “Is he alive... tell me...” Derek mumbles, too far gone to make sense.

“That again?” Kate laughs. “Don’t stop if he asks about the boy,” she orders her men.

The hunters pick up their weapons again and start on the synchronized beating. Derek feels every blow, every break, knows which weapon comes before which. It's the worst kind of torture, the anticipation, knowing which of them is hurting him and holding his breathe whenever it takes them a moment too long to move.

“I didn’t know-” John starts to say and then pauses. “I mean, it looks like you might have beat him enough.”

“It’s never enough with an Alpha.” Kate grins, eyes pinned on Derek as he takes the hits.

“That’s not how it looks like from here,” John insists. He doesn’t seem insecure, but there is caution in his tone.

“Hm,” Kate hums. "Do I need remind you that you were kindly invited as an observer?”
“No, of course not.” John purses his lips in a thin line.

“I mean,” she continues. “We’re only allowing this because he had your son, and you have the right to see him pay for that. But you still don’t decide how we deal with an Alpha in here.”

John frowns and the way his face twists is like a punch to Derek’s stomach. Right in that moment, Derek sees the resemblance. He can see Stiles in the way John clenches his jaw and holds a defiant stance. And it’s immediate. Derek feels it in his guts, all the way down to the narrow of his bones. This man, this stranger, is pack. He is a part of Stiles, and Derek will protect him, even if it seems absurd, given their current situation.

"All I'm saying is that,” John insists. “If you hurt him too much he won't be able to talk. I want answers."

"Alright,” Kate concedes, huffing in annoyance. She turns to his men and shrugs playfully. “Why don't you catch a few to rest?"

Derek lifts his head again, his neck weak, trembling under the weight and the effort of holding himself upright. He searches the room until he finds John and then his cracked lips move. “Stiles... is he... I need... to...” Derek trails off, slumping against his restraints when he can’t hold himself any more.

Kate tilts her hips, hand resting on them as she regards Derek again. "I'll see you later, sweetie," she adds before walking out.

Derek notices everyone leaving after her and he starts to relax slowly, feeling his broken bones and disjointed limbs protesting with the movement. John is the last to go. He walks slowly, causally. But Derek still notices when he approaches him, cautiously.


Derek looks up to him, his left eye so swollen he can barely see the man. "Thank you," he whispers, ignoring the pain in his throat because those words - he’s still alive - mean everything right now. Something flashes across John’s face before he moves, bolting outside the tent and leaving Derek completely alone.

Now that he knows Stiles is fine, Derek has to make it out of this alive somehow. He needs sleep to heal and gain strength. Determined, with a new purpose, he closes his eyes and lets go for the first time in days.

-  

Stiles wakes up with the sun blinding him. Dazed, he frowns, groaning.

"He made it," someone whispers, voice full of emotion.

Stiles isn't sure who made what, but whatever it is, it sounds serious.

He rubs his eyes, stretching in his bed. A small tug in his side makes him wince a little, but Stiles ignores the discomfort as he turns on his other side. He wants to look through his window, see the tree outside. The view always soothed him. When Stiles opens his eyes though, there is no window
or tree. Only what looks to be a makeshift tent and a light focused on him.

Then, the memories come crashing down on him. Stiles remembers the hunters, relives the moment the man lifted his rifle in slow motion and shot. His hands fly to his side, where he’s been patched up with gauze.

“Stiles, son,” someone is saying next to his bed.

Stiles turns around, looking at his father in disbelief. Is he really there or is Stiles hallucinating? Is he dead? He could be dead, he reasons. It’d make sense after being shot and carried by-

“Where...” he tries to speak, mouth parched and raw. Stiles clears his throat and tries again. “Where’s Derek?”

That wasn’t what he wanted to say, was it? Stiles wanted to call for his dad, make sure he’s real. But the moment he remembered how Derek picked him up, realized that he carried him all the way to the militia camp, the words burst out of his mouth.

John frowns, hands faltering only a moment before he’s touching him. “Son, you’re awake.”

Stiles tries to swallow, eyes roaming all over his dad. “Dad, is that really you? Am I dead?”

John snorts, cupping Stiles’ head and leaning forward. “You’re most definitely not dead. Luckily for us, Deaton was here when you showed up to make sure.”

“He was?” Stiles asks dumbly. “Where is he now?”

“After the third night, he said he had to go,” John explains. “Said something about a previous appointment. No one was sure you’d wake up, but I never doubted you.”

“Dad...” Stiles chokes on the single word.

So it’s real, then. Stiles is alive, his side is starting to throb and his father is right there. He reaches up, trying to tug his father closer for a hug. The Stilinski men have never been awkward in their displays of affection. This is no exception. They cling to each other, John being careful to not press against Stiles’ wounds as they hug each other.

“I looked for you everywhere,” John whispers, voice rough. “I thought I had lost you.”

“Dad, I love you, I can’t believe I finally found you, and you’re okay, dad...” Stiles rambles. He’s still not sure this is real life, but he’s willing to ignore his doubts and enjoy the moment.

When John finally pulls back, he looks away once, rubbing his eyes quickly. Stiles is not so subtle, he feels the tears wetting his cheeks and does nothing to clean them. He sniffs instead, silly smile plastered on his face.

“Where are we?” he finally asks.

“Militia camp,” John explains. “They let me put you in my tent, and considering the circumstances, allowed Deaton to treat you.”

At his words, Stiles’ head starts to spin out of contro. *His circumstances.* Derek. Derek is his circumstances.

“Derek!” he breathes out, trying to rise from the mattress.
“Easy, kiddo.” His dad pushes him down. “You were shot, remember? You’re still recovering.”

“But Derek.” Stiles grits out through his clenched teeth at the sudden pain on his side. “Did they capture him? Please tell me you have no idea what I’m talking about.”

John grimaces. “Derek Hale, yeah. They captured him.”

“But he’s still alive, right?” Stiles asks, an edge of desperation breaking his voice.

“He is,” John nods. “Barely.”

“What does that mean?” This time Stiles slaps his dad’s hands away and sits up slowly.

“They have been interrogating him for days,” his dad explains. “Kate can be very persistent when she wants to.”

“Kate...” Stiles gasps. He can’t suddenly breathe. His vision goes out and as much as he tries to get a gulp of air in his lungs, he doesn’t seem able to. Dazed, Stiles feels his body dropping back down on the mattress and his dad calling his name frantically. “Argent?” he manages to croak out.

“Yes, Stiles. Kate Argent. Now breathe, you hear me?” John rubs his shoulder, reassuring him.

“You need to breathe. Just concentrate on breathing. Easy in and out, you can do it son.”

And slowly, Stiles manages to calm down.

“I need to see him,” he whispers, sitting up on his elbows, shivering when the sweat that broke down his spine a minute ago finally cools.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea-” his dad tries to say.

“I don’t care!” Stiles says more vehemently. “Take me to him.”

“I’ll have to ask for permission,” John says, sounding uncomfortable.

“Dad, please.” Stiles turns his face to look up at him and grabs his dad’s arm.

“Wait here,” John finally says after a long pause, eyes still searching Stiles’ face. “If someone comes in while I’m gone, don’t speak a word about the werewolf, understood?”

Stiles nods.

“No, son. Say it. I need to hear you say you won’t talk about Derek Hale with anyone else until you explain what’s going on to me.”

“Okay, dad.” Stiles frowns. “I won’t say a word until you’re back.”

John nods, suddenly very serious. “I just want to make sure you’re safe. I’m not losing you again.”

He bends down and kisses Stiles’ forehead before darting outside the tent.

Stiles squeezes his eyes shut. The need to see Derek is overwhelming, it almost hurts more than the bullet wound. He remembers their last time in the woods and Stiles moves his hand under his shirt, palming his stomach where Derek smeared their come together. He wonders if someone noticed, if Deaton noticed as he saved his life. Face flushed, Stiles sighs. Who cares about that when they have more pressing matters? Such as Kate Argent. Stiles clenches his fist against the skin of his abs, wishing he had werewolf senses to know where she was. He’d sneak out of his dad’s tent, find her and kill her on the spot, with his bare hands. It’s a nice fantasy to pass the time while he waits for his
As if summoned, Kate opens the tent and regards him with curiosity, making Stiles jump and startle. He winces at the sudden movement, holding his side.

“I’m sorry, sweetie, didn’t mean to scare you.” She smiles, but it’s all wrong. Stiles can tell by just a quick look that she’s not sorry at all. Maybe all the months he spent with werewolves helped him to pick a few tricks on how to read someone. Or maybe he just hates her guts. Stiles isn’t sure, but he bets on the latter.

“Where’s your father?” she asks, eyes searching the room. Stiles says nothing. “When did you wake up?” she asks then, trying with another question. Stiles still says nothing.

Looking at her, Stiles realizes his plans to kill her may have been a bit delusional. For starters, Stiles has never killed anyone, especially in cold blood. But more so, Kate Argent looks like a very resourceful person, tougher than Stiles expected. Stiles can’t deny the possibility of ending up dead if he ever tries anything. He hates to admit it, but she’s also very attractive. Perhaps in a psycho, dominatrix way, but still hot. Stiles hates everything in that moment.

“Another mute?” She tilts her head, stepping closer. “You may have more in common with your wolf pet than I thought.”

At the mention of Derek, Stiles can’t help but flicker his eyes and look at her. First mistake, he realizes. Kate shows her teeth in a wide smile.

“Oh yeah,” she purrs. “Derek is still alive, I’ve been keeping him for you. After all, he kidnapped you, made you his slave and who knows what else,” she says as her eyes look Stiles up and down, making him uncomfortable. “I thought you’d want to be there when we execute him.”

Stiles bolts, unable to control himself at those words. “You can’t-” he starts to say but soon zips his mouth shut, cursing inwardly.

“I can’t what?” She smirks. “Oh, you want the honors? Because that could be arranged.”

Stiles grits his teeth until his gums hurt. He hates Kate Argent more than he’s ever hated anything and anyone in his life before. Probably even more than Gerard. How is that possible? He thought he’d never meet anyone worse than Gerard, but somehow his daughter stole the glory. Stiles can see the implications in that, he knows the reason why. He’s not going to deny how much he cares about Derek after all they have been through. It’s just a matter of priorities. Derek’s pain is worse than his own.

“Hey, kiddo,” John enters their tent and pauses. “Kate,” he says with caution. “What are you doing here?”

“I was just passing by to see how your son was doing. I had no idea he was already awake.” She smiles charmingly at his father, and Stiles has to fists his hands to prevent him from launching at her.

“He just woke up,” John explains, words cautious and slowly. “I went to look for a paramedic, see if someone could take a look at him. But I couldn’t find anyone.”

“Gotcha,” Kate responds. “I’ll send you someone.”

“Thanks,” John says stiffly.

“Since I’m already here,” Kate continues casually. “I was asking your son about the alpha. You
know how uncooperative he’s been no matter how much we push him. I thought your son could help us put the pieces together.”

“What do you want to know?” Stiles asks before his father can do so.

“Everything.” Kate smiles.

“I’ll tell you what I know.” Stiles nods. He’s spent months surrounded by lie detectors with legs, coming up with a cover story to tell a bunch of humans shouldn’t be that hard after that. And it could buy them time, could buy Derek time.

“But not now.” John jumps in. “He just woke up, I want to make sure he’s okay before you interrogate him.”

Kate looks John with a glint in her eyes, but then she nods very slowly. “Very well, I’ll let him rest for now. You should bring him to the meeting tomorrow, that’ll be a good time to tell us his story.”

John doesn’t reply. He sets his lips in a thin line and nods stiffly.

“Take care, Stiles. Can’t wait to get to know you better.” Kate sends him a kiss and walks outside without another word.

John raises his hand, in a gesture to stay quiet. He walks over and rubs Stiles’ shoulder, as if reassuring himself that his son is really there, that he’s okay. After a while, he whispers. “If you want to see him, we should leave now. Can you walk?”

“To see Derek? I will.” Stiles moves his legs off the mattress and sits slowly. A flare of pain breaks in his side, making him falter a moment before he’s on his feet. Everything seems to shift for a second but with the help of his father, Stiles takes the steps out of the tent. Around him, there are only more and more tents of different sizes and colors.

They walk in silence, Stiles supporting himself on his dad more than he’d like to admit. By the time they reach the edge of the camp, he’s breathing heavily and his side is on fire.

“We’re here.” John points to a tent.

“Can I go inside alone?” Stiles asks between breaths.

“Stiles,” his father scoffs. “You can barely walk, I’m not letting you go in there alone.”

“Guess that’s fair.” Stiles shrugs, ignoring the discomfort.

When they step inside, the tent is empty except for a figure on his knees and handcuffed behind his back to a metallic column. He's covered in blood, his face is swollen, and one of his knees is bent at a weird angle. Stiles registers the wires attached to his side and he snaps.

"What did you do to him?” he squeaks, pushing away from his dad, only to stumble and have to be caught again. He looks at his dad in disbelief a moment before returning his stare to Derek.

"I convinced the boys to take a break, he hasn't had a chance to start hea-" John tries to explain.

"The boys?!!" Stiles asks with disgust, trying to pull his dad toward Derek to no avail. "You mean his torturers?"

"Stiles, I tried to stop it but he's an Alpha and-"
"I don't care," Stiles dismisses it. "Let go, I can walk on my own."

Stiles pushes slowly away from his dad and walks carefully toward Derek.

*Look at me,* he thinks in his head, the three words becoming a chant as he approaches the unmoving Derek. When he finally stirs, though, and their eyes meet for the first time, Stiles’ knees buckle underneath him.

"You're alive." Derek's cracked and bloodied lips lift in a smile and Stiles finds himself rushing the last steps, dropping on his knees to cup Derek's cheeks.

"Sorry I'm late," he croaks out.

"I wasn't sure if you were... No, there's no time..." Derek murmurs. His skin burns hot against Stiles' palms to the point to make him wonder if werewolves can run a fever. He seems delusional enough, that's for sure. When Derek nudges Stiles’ palm between his shoulder and his face, Stiles has to fight back the tears.

"I'm getting you out of here," he says through the lump in his throat.

"I can’t lose you again- I need to tell you," Derek whispers, voice rough.

"You're not losing me." Stiles feels the sting in his eyes. He fights the urge to blink, looking down to Derek's bloodied body and seeing his own tears falling on Derek's thighs. "I'm not going to leave you again. I did it once and I won't make that mistake again."

Derek sighs, leaning his head on Stiles' shoulder. “There’s something about you...” he whispers, voice almost disconnected, distant. “At first I tried to fight it... At first I thought it was the instinct, thought it wasn’t real. But I know now.” Derek nudges him lightly. “It’s not because we were pretending, it’s because it was real. You are real. And I don’t regret anything."

At Derek's words, Stiles stills for a moment, reading between the lines and understanding Derek must believe this is the end. Stiles doesn't care how bad the odds are against them, Derek Hale just gave him what amounted to a love confession, and Stiles is not going to let this be it for them.

"Then you should know something, too." Stiles wipes his nose with the back of his hand and gives Derek what hopes is a reassuring smile. "I made up my mind a long time ago. I lied last week during our first night in, you know, the abandoned train station..." Stiles pauses, heavy breathing his anxiety as he musters the courage to say it. "I always knew you were worth it, you hear me? So don't you dare say goodbye. I forbid you. We're getting out of here. *Together.*"

Derek smiles, a genuine smile Stiles has never seen before, and then he tilts his head and kisses Stiles’ jaw. Stiles holds back a sob at the tenderness of the gesture. A gesture that seems to be saying Derek knows what he’s talking about, that he remembers their conversation not so many days ago. That Stiles is worth it, too.

John clears his throat loudly behind them, breaking the moment. And Derek leans back, blinking slowly, like he’s coming out of a daze. And considering all the blood lose, that might not be so far off.

"I have to go now," Stiles whispers, catching Derek's glassy eyes to make sure he is listening. "But I'll come back for you."

Stiles runs his fingers over Derek’s sticky-with-blood stubble before getting back on his feet. It’s the hardest thing he’s ever done, the conscious decision of putting space between he and Derek. Every
step he takes away feels like a death sentence. And when his dad claps his shoulder and guides him out of the tent, Stiles feels numb, disconnected. As if whatever is anchoring him to this world was left behind in that torture chamber.

Derek is not sure if he really saw Stiles or if it was a vision. He’s so weak he supposes he could have made it all up. He remembers Stiles saying he won’t leave, remembers the words they exchanged. He understands the meaning behind them, and somehow that seems to calm him enough to breathe slowly, close his eyes and let his body melt back together.

His joints are still protesting when a while later a familiar smell alerts him. Derek doesn’t react, though. He casts his head down, ignoring it when Stiles’ father enters the tent.

The man paces nervously, hands clenching and unclenching. “I know you’re awake,” he finally says, standing in front of him, hands on his hips. “What was that?” he asks after a pause. Derek is conscious enough to understand what he means, to realize what he thought was an hallucination was real, but he remains silent anyway. “With my son.” John adds, crouching down. “Are you two- No,” he stops, pursing his lips. “It doesn’t really matter right now,” he dismisses with his hand. “But if someone else finds out he wasn’t... Well, if they notice anything unusual, I won’t be able to protect him anymore. Not here in a militia camp.”

At those words, Derek finally lifts his head and looks at him.

“Ah, that caught your attention? Good.” John huffs. “Because if you two pull... that, whatever that was, again tomorrow, Stiles will be in trouble.”

“Tomorrow?” Derek asks, parched throat hurting as he speaks

“That’s why I came,” the man explains. “Kate Argent is going to interrogate Stiles tomorrow at the meeting. I’m certain she’ll bring you, too. She wants Stiles to explain what happened since you kidnapped him.” The last part is said harshly, but Derek doesn’t blame him. He did kidnap John’s son, after all. “That’s the only reason why you’re still alive. She wants information. But if she, or anyone else at the meeting discovers, as I suspect, that you didn’t force him to stay at your side, they will charge Stiles with treason. It won’t be only you in danger anymore.”

“How did you-” Derek tries to ask, but stops when he breaks into a dry cough that flares in his throat.

“I’ve been looking for months,” John says roughly. “I risked my life plenty of times, did things I’m not proud of, all to find my son.” He pauses, shaking his head. “Do you know the first thing he said when he woke up today?” John is grinning in a sad, broken way. “He asked about you.”

Derek supposes he shouldn’t feel the pang of longing at those words, but knowing Stiles asked for him... Derek drops his head, trying to hide the emotions he suspects are showing in his unguarded face.

“I know you care enough about him to deliver him personally to a place that means certain death for you.” John frowns, clearing his throat. “And I guess I should feel in debt and leave it at this, but-”

“Tell me,” Derek murmurs. “What do I have to do?”
“So you’ll help? Even now?” John asks. He sounds surprised, as if he didn’t expect Derek to want to cooperate so easily.

Derek lifts his head, enough to look him in the eye. “Always.” It’s just a word, but he thinks it says enough. He hopes it does, because he’s too weak to say more.

“When...” John seems to falter a moment. “If they ask you tomorrow, just make sure they believe my son means nothing to you. Make sure they believe you forced him. I know Stiles will try to protect you, even after I talk to him, but maybe if we work together we can still save his life.”

Derek hears what John doesn’t say. They might be able to save Stiles, but his own life is already forfeit, has been since he set foot in this camp. There is no way he’s getting out of this alive.

Derek nods, or at least he thinks he does. He closes his eyes, suddenly dead tired. He hasn’t given up yet, not exactly. He’s a survivor by nature. He survived the murder of his entire family and then years later, the death of his only anchor, his sister. Derek has never lost his will to live, not even then. And this is no different. He’s not ready to die. But he’s even less ready to see Stiles die. It’s a matter of priorities, of what he’s willing to live with. And Derek realizes, calmly, that he is not willing to live with Stiles gone.

“I’ll do it.” He looks at Stiles’ father to make sure the man understands how serious he is. “Whatever it takes to make sure he’s safe.”

John seems to deflate after that. He looks dubious, as if he isn’t so sure this is a good idea anymore. He’s a good man, Derek thinks. Stiles is going to need someone like him when Derek is gone.

“You have to leave,” Derek says determined.

“Are you kicking me out?” John asks skeptically, eyebrow raised.

“Leave the camp.” Derek rolls his eyes. “When they execute me, you have to take Stiles and leave. No one will notice. They will be too busy celebrating my death.”

“What makes you think there will be a celebration?” John asks cautiously.

“I’m a Hale,” Derek scoffs. “Executed at the hand of an Argent. Trust me, there will be one.”

John licks his lips nervously, nodding as if he knew what Derek meant. The action reminds him so thoroughly of Stiles that it almost rips Derek’s heart in two.

“Tell Stiles...” Derek falters a moment. He hates doing this, but it must be done. “Tell him we have a plan to escape the camp, that way he will cooperate tomorrow.”

“You want me to lie to my son?” John asks, incredulous eyebrow arched in a way that makes Derek think of Stiles.

“I want you to keep him alive,” Derek deadpans.

John sets his jaw in a tight hold. He seems to consider it for a moment before he nods. They don’t say anything else. Derek, because his throat feels torn in shreds. John, Derek suspects because he has nothing left to say. And as to prove it, soon after that, he’s gone.

Hours later, Derek is alone in his torture tent with only the company of his body slowly healing, and his thoughts. He gets a full night alone, uninterrupted. He expects the hunters to be back at any moment, but they leave him alone to his recovery pains and maddening thoughts until sunrise. Derek
is calm and ready when they finally show up. He’s still covered in blood, his sides scotched by the volt wires. But he’s managed to heal almost all of his wounds by then.

“Don’t try anything stupid,” one of the men says as he steps closer.

Derek feels strong enough to lift his head and look defiantly at him. He fists his hands behind his back, muscles in tension as he awaits for the first blow. But it doesn’t happen like that. The hunter opens his hand in front of Derek’s face and blows a purple dust at him. *Wolfsbane*, Derek thinks frantically before passing out.

The next time he wakes up, Derek is in the open. He’s standing on his feet, although he can’t feel the ground under him. He’s being kept upright against some kind of public stock. The wires connected to his sides are gone, and enough time has passed for his skin to have started to heal. He’s groggy and disoriented, though. Derek feels weaker than before, his mind numb, his limbs uncoordinated; he’s still under the effect of the wolfsbane.

His hands are cuffed to a metallic belt around his wrist. It seems to be a bigger version of the collar, and both have been set to send shock waves through his body at different intervals, although the power seems to be set lower than before, Derek suspects to ensure he stays conscious. A long chain connects the collars down to the cuffs around his ankles. Even through the fog in his mind, Derek understands that if he tried to move, he’d probably trip and fall.

He’s utterly and completely helpless, stripped of his power as Alpha. His instinct is to test the strength of his restrains, to wolf out and howl for his pack. But Derek would never lead them to this trap. He takes a few big breaths and calms down enough to take in his surroundings. He’s never seen so many hunters together before, forming a wide circle around him.

He doesn’t pay their threats or insults any attention, though, as he studies the crowd, searching for Stiles. When he finds him, he’s standing at the edge of the circle, his father right next to him. He still looks sick, somehow paler than he used to be, but Stiles is standing upright, sure on his footing, and he doesn’t look to be in pain. John, though, looks ready to catch him if at any moment Stiles’ legs decide to give out under him.

When their eyes meet, Derek instantly knows that Stiles has been let in the plan. He can feel the anger in the way Stiles sets his jaw and narrows his eyes. He’s never seen Stiles so angry. That’s good, though. Other hunters will think his fury is directed at Derek. It would be the natural reaction to seeing your kidnapper and torturer.

A hunter Derek doesn’t know calls them over and Stiles and his father move forward, away from the crowd.

“Is it really necessary to do this in front of all these people?” John asks when he approaches the man.

“They want to see the alpha,” Kate calls then, stepping through the flaps of her tent and approaching them. She shrugs, apologetically, as if saying, *what can I do?* and Derek growls low in his chest. The mere sight of her next to Stiles is enough to drive him to the brink of madness.

Kate laughs in response, stepping closer and grabbing his chin, shoving his face left and right forcefully. Derek sees through the corner of his eye how Stiles tenses up, and he acts without thinking. Derek roars, trying to bite Kate’s hand off. Everyone is suddenly so focused on him that no one notices when Stiles’ father holds him back and whispers something in his ear.

“Look at him, the mighty alpha!” Kate shouts, turning around and smiling at the other hunters, proud of her boldness as everyone roars around him. “Reduced to nothing but a pet, like you’d domesticate
“a wild animal.”

“Take these off,” Derek suggests, shaking his arms against the restraints. “Let’s find out how domesticated I really am.”

Derek transforms slowly, neck tilting and turning as his eyes turn red and his fangs and facial fur appear. He feels his claws poking at his own palms because of the way the set of the cuffs and he grins ferociously, going for a full display of what he could be capable of if they set him free in this crowd full of hunters.

Quickly, the night is filled with the voices of men who want to take him up on his offer. Good, Derek thinks smugly. He needs to keep them distracted away from Stiles no matter what. If he has to play the wild animal card, he will.

“Enough!” Kate roars. “Don’t you see he’s playing you? For god’s sake, don’t let a beast trick you.” At her words, the murmurs of voices die slowly down until there is only silence in the room. “We are not here to judge him,” she continues. “We all know he’s guilty, and he will pay.” She turns around. “In fact, I think now is the perfect time to announce that his execution will take place tomorrow!”

The crowd bursts into applause and Derek feels sick. Tomorrow they will cut him in half and expose his remains as they celebrate. And all he can think about is Stiles and his father being as far away as possible by then.

“Now.” Kate points to Stiles. “I want to hear your story.” She calls him over with her finger, and Stiles stumbles over his feet the first time he tries to move. Kate moves back toward her tent and Stiles and John follow her. Just as he’s crossing the threshold, though, Stiles looks back straight to Derek’s eyes. There is a resolution in his gaze that catches Derek’s breathe in his throat.

Closing his eyes, Derek tunes everything out except what’s happening inside the tent. He concentrates on Stiles’ frantic heartbeat as he moves from one foot to the other inside the tent. Kate sits instead, her heartbeat even and calm. She doesn’t speak, though. Derek knows what she’s doing, knows she’s playing with Stiles.

“What- what do you want to know?” Stiles finally asks, nervously. Derek can imagine him licking his lips, hands balled in fists as his father holds his shoulder. He knows Stiles enough to notice he’s less nervous and more angry than it seems.

“Why don’t you start from the beginning?” Kate asks. “Why did a werewolf pack go after you?”

“He- they were after my dad,” Stiles explains. Derek hears him shifting nervously, he pictures him looking back at his father nervously a couple of times as he gestures.

“So what happened?” Kate insists.

“Uh, I got kidnapped?” Stiles deadpans. Derek has to fight to stop the grin from showing on his face.

“Allright...” Kate grits through her teeth. “Why did they want your father to begin with?”

“I don’t know, ask him.” Stiles’ heartbeat skyrockets as he shrugs it off. “All I know is that they dragged me all the way across the country.”

“Convenient,” she murmurs.

“Oh yes, lady,” Stiles mocks. “It was very convenient. I lost count of the times I almost died. It was all a fucking picnic for me, I assure you.”
Derek would be impressed at the disgusted tone Stiles is speaking with, if he couldn’t hear his heartbeat. Stiles is good, though. He’s solid, his voice strong and determined. He sounds beyond pissed.

“Duly noted,” Kate says, and Derek can hear the amusement in her voice. “Why didn’t they wait for your father then?”

“I think they were in a hurry, I didn’t really care,” Stiles explains. “I was just glad they didn’t find him, you know?”

Kate hums. “So, what happened when you left with them?”

“I’m not tell- I mean,” Stiles stutters. “They put a collar on me, okay? Made me wear it at all times. It’s not something I want- I... don’t want to talk about it.”

“I’m still not sure why you’re interrogating my son,” John interferes. “He’s the victim in all this. He was shot, and he’s still recovering. I think he’s been on his feet long enough.”

“We’re not interrogating him,” Kate explains lightly. “We just want as much information as we can get. I thought you two would want that, or did you forget we’re at war?”

“No. We do,” John says fast, assuring her. “But as you can see Stiles doesn’t have much to share. He’s been through a traumatic experience, and right now my priority is taking care of him.” Derek listens to the rustle of fabric as John circles Stiles’ shoulder. He has to fight to stop the grin from appearing in his face when he hears Stiles faking a hiss and the crinkle of bandages as he grabs his side for show.

“Hey.” Kate shows the palms of her hands, rising from where she is sitting and approaching them. “I get it. We are on the same page. And trust me, the monster responsible for what you’ve been through is going to pay.”

“Then I’m taking Stiles back to our tent,” John affirms, dragging Stiles with him as he starts moving.

“Before that,” Kate says. Derek can hear how she clasps her hand on Stiles’ shoulder to stop him and he growls low at the thought of her touching him. “Just one last question. Where is the rest of the pack?”

“I don’t know.” Stiles shakes his head. “We all got separated in the woods.”

“So they could still be out there somewhere?” Kate asks, suddenly more interested.

“I- I don’t know,” Stiles falters. Derek can almost see the scene. Stiles must be looking like a deer in headlights, just realizing what Kate must be thinking.

Derek is gritting his teeth, not because of the electric shocks currently running through his body, but because he left his pack a note. They could very well be on their way to the Militia camp, or close by. Derek can’t even think about it. All the ifs running wild inside his froggy head. As Stiles and his father leave Kate’s tent and walk away, they look at each other and Derek knows they are both thinking the same. He may as well have given Kate his betas on a silver platter.

Hours later, when it’s already too late for anyone to be around and look at the Alpha, they move him back to his tent. The stench inside is so overwhelming, Derek dry heaves as they chain him to the post, back on his knees. They don’t offer water or food, and he doesn’t ask for it either.

Derek closes his eyes, allowing his body to relax as much as possible. His only regret is his betas as
he awaits the morning.

Stiles is shaking. His dad thinks it’s because he’s still recovering, and he doesn’t say otherwise. But the truth is that seeing Derek again was like a punch in the gut. Seeing him tied up, bloody and shaking... Stiles is sure the memory will haunt him for years. Especially the moment when Kate touched him. Stiles had been so close to blowing their cover, his blood boiling just by looking at her. How dare she? That’s all he could think while his father held him back. How dare she?

He’s still raging, worse now that he’s left Derek there alone- Stiles closes his eyes for a moment, letting his father guide him. He’s left Derek there. He despises himself, it doesn’t matter if it’s part of their plan. The only thing keeping him going is the promise of seeing him soon, of escaping together from this place.

“I hate that woman!” he spits when they enter his dad’s tent later that night after eating something in the barracks.

“Shhh,” John admonishes him. “Quiet.”

“I’m serious, dad,” he insists as he allows his dad to guide him to the mattress, where he winces a little as he sits down. “You have no idea what she’s done to Derek. If you knew-” He stops talking abruptly, realizing what he’s saying. He looks up at his dad, who is regarding him oddly. He can’t really explain until he has a talk with him first. "God, and what are you doing with these people anyway?” he asks instead.

"They were my last resort," John tries to explain, gesturing. "When you were gone, I couldn’t even think and I didn't have time, I just had to find you. Joining the Militia was the only way to get in to wolf territory so I could look for you."

"Wait." Stiles gives him a curious look. "You've been to wolf territory?"

"Yeah, a couple of times." John crouches in front of him, hands clasping his knees. “Last week we had a tip about Chicago and decided to attack. I was hoping to find you there, but then I'm glad you weren't because the whole building ended up collapsing, and-"

"What?!" Stiles exclaims. "Tell me you're kidding, oh my god... So everyone... died? The slaves that stayed behind and the werewolves?"

"Not everyone-" John frowns. "Son, what do you know about the den in Chicago?"

"I was there!" Stiles grabs his shoulders. "I didn't want her to know, but I escaped with Scott. We didn't know- I didn't know the rest died."

"Some... escaped." John sounds dumbfounded as he explains. "Wait, did you just say Scott?"

“Yeah. Not important.” Stiles waves the question away. “Did you guys find Peter?”

His father grows serious and regards him suspiciously. "Are you talking about Peter Hale? Alright, son. Just spit it out. What else do you know?"
"What?" Stiles squeaks. "I don’t know much. He wanted to kill me and Derek. Guy’s a total psycho."

"Why would he want to kill his own nephew?" John frowns.

"Because Derek was helping me," Stiles sighs, deflated. He’s tired of this. His side is killing him and all he wants to do is go find Derek. "Because we had a deal, dad. Derek and I, we were working together and his uncle found out."

"Working together? But he sent Derek to kill me, right?" John asks, unsure.

"Yeah." Stiles nods. "I don’t know why. But you have to understand, at first I made a bargain to keep you alive but then-"

"Wait, hold on." John gestures for Stiles to stop and go back. "A bargain? What kind of bargain?"

"We don’t really have time for this, dad." Stiles runs his hands through his hair, ignoring the protest on his side.

"Make time," John deadpans.

"Fine," Stiles huffs. "Derek spent years searching for the Argents to avenge his family. He found out they were our old neighbors and we made a deal. They’d leave you alone if I told him everything I knew about them."

"And did you? Tell him, I mean," John asks, odd expression on his features.

"I tried." Stiles shrugs. "But dad, you don’t understand. It changed. We- I don’t know, I got to know them and they’re my friends now."

"They?" John arches an eyebrow.

"My pack-" Stiles stops, back-pedalling. "I mean his pack. Derek’s pack. They are my friends."

"I-" John falters. "Did not expect that. Not after..." he trails off.

"Not after what?" Stiles frowns. He knows his father enough to realize he’s missing important here.

"After your mother," John says, uncomfortably. "I know it was a hard blow for you, knowing a werewolf had killed her. I could tell it changed you. I never thought I’d see you, well, talking like that about a pack." John pauses as if waiting for Stiles to speak up, but he’s stunned into silence, so after a moment John continues. "But you’ve always found ways to surprise me. I’m not going to pretend like I understand what happened between you and those people, but I guess we have time to talk about it once we get out of here. And maybe then I can explain myself, so you understand what’s been going on."

Stiles’ heart is thundering inside his chest. This is the lead he’d been waiting for. All these years of pretending, all the lies, the deceits that had torn him and his father apart. He can finally see a bridge.

"I read the letters Gerard sent you," he hears himself saying. "Dad, I can’t believe- I mean, the things he says in those letters... How could you after what mom fought for?"

"Son..." John chokes in the single word. Stiles doesn’t think he’s ever seen him like this. Not even when his mom died and the pain was too much. They mourned alone, drifting slowly apart until this day. "I thought- I never told you anything because I thought you wouldn’t understand. I thought you
blamed the werewolves and I didn’t know how to... reach you.”

“I don’t.” Stiles shakes his head, fighting the lump in his throat. “I never did. I’ve never hated werewolves.”

“Me either,” John smiles sadly. “When your mom died, I realized how unfair I’d been with her. I blamed myself for not helping her more, thinking that was the reason she got murdered. I knew I needed to carry on her mission, preserve her legacy. That’s why I kept in touch with Gerard, why I tried to get closer to him, even though I hated all he stood for. I couldn’t look at him without seeing your mom, and oddly that always helped me to keep going.”

Stiles feels the wetness in his eyes and doesn’t even try to hide it. He moves closer to the edge of the mattress, ignoring the protest in his side, hands reaching out to his father, who meets him half way.

“Dad,” he manages to croak out before they are hugging. In the safety of his father’s embrace, Stiles finally finds the courage to say the truth. “It wasn’t a werewolf,” he chokes out. John’s arms tense up around him, but he doesn’t interrupt Stiles. “Mom didn’t die like you think. I’ve- That’s the reason why you thought I’d changed.” Stiles buries his face in the crock of John’s shoulder, speaking in a rush. “It was Gerard.”

John pulls back at those words, hands gripping Stiles’ shoulders as he stares at him. “What did you just say?”

“Gerard killed mom,” Stiles whispers, voice shaking. He realizes his whole body is shaking. “He threatened to kill you if I ever told anyone.”

“I don’t-” John’s voice breaks. “I don’t understand.”

“Mom helped Derek and his sister escape after the fire,” Stiles blinks the tears away. “She’d been helping the Hales for a long time and, well,” Stiles snorts. “It’s obvious they were the Argents’ target all along. I guess Gerard grew tired of her interfering...” Stiles trails off, suddenly unsure of what he’s done. He feels his heart seizing by the weight of the uncertainty. What if his dad doesn’t understand? What if he blames Stiles? On instinct, Stiles tries to grab his dad. “I’m so sorry, dad. I know I lied to you. I know it was wrong, but I’d have done anything to protect you. Please, you have to understand- you have-”

“Stiles, hey.” John is suddenly sitting next to him, pulling him against his side. “Breathe, okay? It’s okay, I’m not angry. I don’t blame you-” his voice breaks then, forcing John to make a pause. “Stiles, it was never your job to protect me. I’m your father, that’s my responsibility, not yours. I’m- I’m so sorry you went through that.” John looks down. “I failed you.”

“No.” Stiles shakes his head, fingers clenching around his dad’s sleeve. “No, don’t. You couldn’t have known. It’s just- it’s a relief to finally let it all out. Even more knowing you’re not on the Argents’ side.”

“I was never on their side.” John frowns. “Maybe I made some wrong decisions when they first arrived in Beacon Hills. But I’m with the resistance now. I’ve been acting behind the Argent’s backs for years now, always dreading the day I’d have to tell you. I was afraid you’d reject me for aiding the race that killed your mom.”

Stiles can’t say anything to that. His throat closes up, and all he can do is hug his father as tightly as he can and hope he understands what Stiles is trying to express.

John clears his throat after a moment, leaning back a little. “Wish we had more time to talk about this
but we should go.”

Stiles clears his face with his sleeve and sniffles as he sits back. “Yeah, we should go get Derek.”

John looks everywhere but at him for a moment. He shifts nervously, unable to keep his eyes in one place longer than a few seconds.

“Dad?” Stiles asks, suddenly wary.

“When I talked to Derek,” John finally explains. “He wanted us to scatter tonight, take advantage of his situation.” Stiles feels his father’s eyes sizing him but he refuses to acknowledge what he’s saying. “Son, do you understand what I mean?”

“No.” Stiles shakes his head. “I don’t care what he said. Derek is clearly not in his right mind. He’s been tortured for days, starved, too. Who knows what else. He thinks he’s doing the right thing but we both know that’s not true. He’s- what? Sacrificing himself so we can escape?” Stiles makes a pause, snorting. “Over my dead body! No, Dad. That’s not happening. And trust me, you wouldn’t like me very much if that ever happened. I wouldn’t- No, it’s just not happening.”

“It’s what he wants,” John reasons.

"I'm not abandoning him, okay? We had a plan!" Stiles practically shouts the words.

"Lower your voice,” John hisses. “If anyone hears you talking like that, they’ll be convicting you, too. It wouldn't be the first time they execute a human for being a traitor."

"Traitor?" Stiles almost chokes on the single word.

"You have to understand that this Militia is very extreme. I knew what I was getting myself into when I joined them. They knew me from Gerard, it was easy to infiltrate, to gain their trust so I could search for you. But if they find out my son is befriending werewolves... They will kill us both. No hesitation."

"I'm not abandoning Derek," Stiles grunts out, determined.

"Stiles," John snaps.

“At least let me see him again," Stiles asks cautiously, praying his dad won’t realize he only wants to see Derek to convince him to come with them.

“It’s too dangerous,” John tries to say reasonably.

“Everything is dangerous, dad.” Stiles gestures with his arms, nearly rolling his eyes. “I only need five minutes with him. That’s all I ask.”

John huffs, clearly exasperated, but after a moment he’s back on his feet and gesturing for Stiles to follow him. Stiles grabs the bottle of water he hid in the barracks and goes after him, knowing Derek will need the boost to heal.

“This is a bad idea,” John whispers as he stops Stiles behind a tent and goes to see if there is someone else with Derek.

Stiles realizes his legs are shaking. He’s so nervous, he’s close to losing his dinner. He hadn’t tasted the food anyway, feeling guilty and sick for eating when he knew Derek had been denied even
water. His mind is a frantic mess of disconnected thoughts as Stiles waits for his father to come back.

He remembers his promise and curses inwardly. He had his chance to kill Kate, to free Derek of her forever. But Stiles couldn’t do it. He supposes it doesn’t matter right now, when there is a big possibility of them all dying, but if they make it out alive, Stiles will owe Derek an apology.

When his father comes back, they don’t even speak. Stiles walks behind him, limbs trembling and pulse frantic as he enters the tent. He feels the weight of his responsibility as he lays eyes on Derek again. He knows Derek believes what he’s doing is the best solution, it’s now all in Stiles’ hands to make him see that Stiles couldn’t go on if Derek did this for him.

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Derek raises his eyes to see Stiles and his father entering the tent. For a moment he believes he’s hallucinating, like one last wish before everything is over. But then Stiles is kneeling next to him, pressing a bottle against Derek’s cracked lips and when the water hits his parched tongue, Derek opens his eyes wide, awakening suddenly. The realization that this is real makes him move closer, drinking eagerly.

“I’m sorry,” Stiles murmurs. “I couldn’t snatch any food.”

Derek doesn’t reply, too busy drinking the water, feeling it awakening him from the inside out. Once the bottle is empty, he leans back to look at Stiles. He’s mesmerized, can’t take his eyes off him. “I thought I wouldn’t see you again,” he rasps out, his throat feeling better after the water.

“Derek.” Stiles sighs, leaning closer, trembling fingers brushing his stubble before he’s cupping his face. Derek realizes in that moment that Stiles is actually exhausted. He looks pale with circles under his eyes, and a tightness over his cheeks that speaks of unhealthy weight loss.

"You should take your son away," Derek says, head cast down, shoulders slouched forward. He feels Stiles shifting in front of him, his hands never leaving his jaw, his neck, fingers stroking his way up to the side of his head as Derek rests his forehead on Stiles’ shoulder.

"I plan on it," John finally replies, approaching them.

Gathering all the energy left he has, Derek lifts his head to looks at the man. "Tonight."

"We're not leaving without you," Stiles says. He sounds desperate, the acrid smell reaching Derek. He curses inwardly, hating the idea of Stiles hurting because of him.

"It's the only way one of us can make it," he reasons, voice breaking against Stiles’ shoulder.

"Fuck that!" Stiles curses.

He leans back, pushing Derek away to grab his collar. His fingers curl around the metal and Derek shivers when he feels Stiles’ fingers touching his skin, even though the collar has charred it. He closes his eyes, exhaling, letting himself enjoy for a second the last time he’ll be this close to Stiles. And then he struggles, trying to push Stiles away. But it's too late. Stiles' grip is strong and secure. He pulls, trying to take the collar off Derek's neck and the charge hits both of them.

Derek grits his teeth and let's the high voltage run down his body, burning his body from the inside
out. Meanwhile, Stiles gets shot back, hitting the ground. He convulses, body twisting and turning until his dad is there.

"Stiles!" He holds his son, securing his head until the spasms are over. "It's useless, you can't take a collar off like that."

Derek is panting. He drops all his weight forward, too weak to stay on his knees. Slowly, he straightens and takes a look at Stiles. He can smell the burned skin of his fingers and it's enough to make him struggle, to try to break the chains holding him there. He wants to push the man away, no matter who he is, and hold Stiles himself.

"Stiles," he barely mouths, desperate with irrational need.

Stiles is leaning against his father, legs at odd angles as John holds him. He looks stunned by the shock, eyes unfocused until he looks at Derek a moment later. He blinks, slowly coming back and then, without a word, Stiles scatters forward, arms circling Derek and pressing against him.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers. “That was stupid, I didn’t think.” He pants, trembling against Derek, but doesn’t break the hold.

“You have to do something for me,” Derek says roughly.

“Anything,” Stiles rushes to answer.

“I won’t be able to go find them,” Derek manages to say. “I know I promised you’d be out of this after we found your father, but I need you to find the pack, make sure they are okay.”

“What? No!” Stiles shouts. “You will do it yourself, Derek! You’re getting out of here, you hear me?”

“Stiles,” Derek insists. “Promise me.”

“I’m not promising you that,” Stiles says stubbornly, leaning back to look him in the eyes. “I won’t do it.”

“Stiles, dammit.” Derek’s voice breaks slightly. “You’re going to fight me up till the last moment, aren’t you?” he smirks, amused against all odds.

“Of course I am. Especially when you’re acting stupid.” Stiles huffs. “What? You’re not fighting? You gonna let this happen to you? You could kill them all, I know you could.”

“I’m not hurting anyone,” Derek says calmly, feeling the metal moving around his neck as he speaks. “Not when it’d put you in danger.”

“I won’t allow this!” Stiles shouts, shaking so badly Derek is worried he’ll hurt himself.

“We should go,” John says.

“I’m not leaving him,” Stiles protests. Derek notices him looking back at John, silent plea breaking his face. But Derek knows what the man will do. He’s counting on him to do what he must to keep Stiles safe.

“Stiles, do as your father says, he’s trying to protect you.”

“I don’t care about my protection! I’m not the one wearing a bomb around his neck,” Stiles nearly pleads as he runs his hands frantically up and down Derek’s arms, trying to grab him, to secure his
hold on him. Derek wishes he didn’t have his hands secured behind his back, because he just wants to hug Stiles against him. He wants a last moment of them together, a last moment to comfort him.

“It’s fine,” he says instead, his voice low and reassuring. “Everything is going to be alright.”

“Don’t say that.” Stiles’ voice breaks as he shakes his head, closing his eyes and leaning his forehead against Derek’s.

“You need to let me go,” Derek says through the lump in his throat. “They can’t see you like this.” When Stiles doesn’t move, Derek tilts his head back, ignoring how Stiles just rubs their cheeks together, and looks at Stiles’ father.

John nods in understanding, stepping forward and grabbing Stiles. He thrashes and protests, but his father doesn’t give in, doesn’t stop even when Stiles tries to hit him to free himself. Derek smells the chloroform before John clasps a hand over Stiles’ mouth, forcing him to breathe in it. The last image Derek has of Stiles is of him wide eyed, half his face under his father’s hand as he stretches his arms toward him.

Derek can’t take his eyes off him as the light fades slowly from Stiles’ eyes. John holds him against his chest when Stiles finally passes out. He pauses, looking at Derek one last time, and Derek clenches his jaw, determined to look resolved until the end, to make things as easy as possible on this man, this stranger who is now all Stiles has left.

When John finally drags Stiles out, his feet leaving trails in the dirt, Derek sags against his holds. Closing his eyes, he tries to bask in the residual warmth of Stiles’ body a bit longer. He’s strangely calm when he thinks he only has hours left. He knows it’s the only way to make sure Stiles lives, so he’s willing to accept this fate. Even if that means he can’t carry out his revenge. He’d like to believe his family would be okay with this, with him finally moving on even if it’s in the strangest way. Derek feels in peace within himself for the first time since the night of the fire. His heartbeat is even and his breathing is calm as the time moves forward, and the closer to the dawn he gets, the more resolved he feels.

Derek is giving Stiles the ultimate gift a person can give someone else. He’s giving Stiles a life with his father, maybe even with the rest of the pack. He’s young, he will heal and find someone else. He will be happy without him. Derek is giving Stiles a second chance. And what more can he hope for while caught in the middle of a war?
Derek counts the minutes, knowing he has one less before he’ll be gone, but that it’s one more that Stiles and his father will have to get farther away. Death is no longer an abstract idea, and for a werewolf with such power and control, this realization is life shattering. Suddenly, things that mattered all his life seem kind of pointless. Even silly. There’s no time for regrets or hopes. There’s just no time. That gives him the kind of freedom he’s been denying himself for a long time.

He grits his teeth as his body knits back together slowly, painfully. Taking deep breaths, Derek distracts himself with the idea of Stiles out there in those woods, escaping unnoticed and being safe with his father. He’s careful with what he imagines, though, circling around the edges of the memories he can still feel. Derek evokes Stiles’ eyes, his mannerisms, the way he moves, speaks, sounds under him, how he feels against Derek... But it’s a dangerous game, it makes him feel desperate, press back instinctively against his restraints.

At some point, he must have lost consciousness, because Derek only hears the steps a moment before the man enters the tent. He tenses up, getting ready for what’s inevitably coming. Derek looks up, determined to be defiant until the end, to not give in, to die chin up. When he sees the man, though, Derek blinks in confusion.

“Am I hallucinating?” he asks weakly.

In front of him, Stiles’ father seems to falter a moment before moving to kneel in front of him.

“Don’t speak,” John whispers. Derek tracks his movements, stunned, vision blurry without understanding what he’s seeing. John pulls a small bag out and deposits the contests in his palm, crushing the dry herbs with the hills of his palms. “Now, don’t be difficult.”

Before Derek has time to process those words, John is pressing his palm to Derek’s mouth, tilting his head back and forcing him to swallow around the lump of dust against his parched throat. Derek snarls, moving his head away as much as his restraints permit it.

“That should help you heal faster,” John explains, already working on the chains around Derek’s ankles and hands.

Derek is about to protest again when a sudden and sharp pain blooms in his chest. He twists, turning and writhing in agony as his bones snap back into place, the gaps closing around his wounds. It’s agony, his body’s healing speed suddenly three times its regular rate, and he has to bite back a shout. When it’s all over, Derek is gasping, palms on the ground as he supports himself.

“What was that?” He breathes out, leaning back slowly until he’s looking at the man.

“Comfrey,” John explains. “It’s a herb Deaton told me about. Werewolves are immune to its toxin. I think you should be able to stand now.”

Derek nods, because... damn, it’s true. He flexes his muscles in wonder, standing slowly back on his feet, still cautious. He feels weak, though. Not like before, but he knows he’s still not fully recovered. This is just a patch to keep going.

“Now the hard part.” John sighs, throwing a bottle of water at Derek, who drinks it down without a question as John keeps talking. “You can’t move from that spot without the collar alerting them. And they’ll know the moment I take it off.”
When Derek finishes with the water, he throws the bottle away and snarls. “Why are you back? You should’ve taken Stiles away from here, as far as you could!”

“My son is safe,” John punctuates the words slowly. “I left him in a secure place. We just need to move fast the moment I unlock the collar. The guards are changing shifts, that should give us a bit more time. Come on.”

He reaches forward to grab the collar but Derek dodges him. “I’m not going to risk your escape, I told you!”

“Look.” John sighs, face hard and determined. “I have never seen my son the way he was with you. I have never seen him need someone the way he needs you. I’ve watched him break before, and I won’t do it again.”

Derek looks stunned at him. He opens his mouth, ready to snap back, but no words come out.

“The moment you hear the safety’s off,” John continues, stepping closer. “You run. Don’t look back, just run into the woods, follow Stiles’ scent. I left him still unconscious behind a fallen trunk. Find him and start running. I’ll be right behind you the whole time.”

Derek doesn’t reply, he pins the man with a stare, nostrils flaring as John circles his neck and starts working on the lock of the collar. When Derek knows John is about to unlock it, he shows his teeth in a resemblance of a grin. “I won’t watch him break either.” He speaks slowly, to make sure John understands his meaning as the collar clicks open.

John is still holding it when Derek moves forward, grabbing hold of him and rushing out of the tent. “Hang on!” He’s running so fast, everything around them is blurry, and by some miracle, John knows exactly what to do and actually helps him to move faster. They have reached the tree line when the first alarms go off.

“West! Stiles is West!” John yells over the roar of their fast movements and Derek nods. He already knew, he could track Stiles’ scents even from inside his torture tent. Derek can pick his scent out over anything else, even half dead. Determined, he dodges trees and jumps fallen obstacles until they reach the small clearing where Stiles is.

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Stiles wakes to the silence of the forest. It’s loud in a white noise way. His head is throbbing and there is a bitter taste in the back of his throat. Coughing, he winces at the pain in his side and sits up, rubbing his temple while trying to figure out where he is.

There is only still darkness around him.

“How-” he asks roughly, throat hurting.

Still confused, Stiles sits on a log, rubbing his eyes. That’s when he remembers. It’s a sudden memory, like a flash in front of his eyes of Derek on his knees, bloodied and weak. Stiles gasps, startled, and that’s when the alarms start sounding not so far away.

He jumps to his feet, no longer dizzy, and takes a few steps toward the sound. He knows that’s where the militia camp is, that he shouldn’t go back there. But he can’t just stay here. Where’s his
dad? Where’s Derek? Stiles is unarmed and still recovering from that gunshot, but he’s ready to spring through the forest back to the hunters when he hears them.

Someone is coming, and fast. Breath catch in his throat, Stiles waits. He hopes. And each second that passes feels like an agonizing eternity until the branches to his left move and Derek is suddenly in the small clearing, carrying Stiles’ dad.

“Oh my god, thank god,” Stiles says in a rushed breath, almost collapsing and sitting back on the log with a hiss from the sudden movement. His side is starting to throb but he ignores it.

“Stiles!” John calls, rushing to him, a reassuring hand clasping on his shaking shoulder. “Are you okay? Does it hurt?”

“No Dad, that’s not it,” Stiles says. The pain from the wound is not the problem right now. “You just scared the crap out of me. I lost a few years off my life. Oh my god, what were you thinking?”

“I was thinking today’s as good as any to be reckless.” John winks, squeezing his shoulder before he steps to the side, opening Stiles’ line of sight so he can see Derek standing just behind him.

Stiles’ breath catches in his throat. He can’t move, too mesmerized by Derek, who still looks in bad shape, but at least he’s standing up without a limp. The wife beater he’s wearing is torn, hanging off his body, and his now smooth skin is caked with dry blood, speaking of what happened to him.

“Your father came back,” Derek says, voice rough and low. He doesn’t seem sure of what to do with himself, and in that moment Stiles takes his first deep breath. He wants to run to him and take Derek in his arms. But instead he frowns, standing up.

“You idiot!” Stiles shouts, jumping forward and shoving him. Derek staggers a bit backwards and Stiles understands he’s nowhere near recovered yet. “How could you think that martyr’s route was a good idea? Holy god, you are so dumb!”

“Stiles,” his dad interrupts. “Not the time. We need to-”

“No, seriously, both of you!” Stiles snaps back, pointing back and forth between his father and Derek. “You plotted behind my back, thinking I could ever be okay with surviving thanks to this idiot sacrificing himself. How could you be so fucking dumb?”

“Stiles.” Derek takes a step closer. “We were just trying to protect you.”

“Fuck you,” Stiles almost yells. “You can just- go fuck yourself, okay? You do that again and I swear, Derek, I’” Stiles pauses when Derek turns his head sharply, looking back to where they came from. “What?”

“They’re following us,” Derek says. “Come on!”

They are suddenly running, the three of them together through the woods, trying to reach the clearing on the west side of the forest before the hunters can catch up.

“I’m still angry at you both!” Stiles shouts as he runs, out of breath and clutching his side.

“I can live with that,” John replies, giving him a shit eating grin before passing him by.

“We’ll talk about this later,” Derek concedes, palm pressing on Stiles’ lower back, helping him to move faster. Stiles feels the relief on his side practically instantly and he knows what Derek is doing.
“Shut up,” Derek whispers right next to him before Stiles has had the chance to protest.

“I wasn’t,” he starts to say, turning to look at Derek, who is smirking. Stiles huffs indignantly but stops talking anyway. He can’t hear anyone approaching them, but the way Derek is pushing him is enough to understand they are in danger. Stiles runs so fast, his muscles burn and his side aches. He concentrates on the sight of his dad’s back and the feeling of Derek’s hand, using them as his compass.

The first time he hears something behind them, Derek tenses up and turns, his hand leaving Stiles’ back for the first time. Stiles knows, he can tell Derek is getting ready to rush back and buy them some time, but he’s not letting that happen anymore.

“Don’t!” he pleads. Derek seems to hesitate and Stiles talks without thinking. “Don’t go, we can outrun them together. Please.” Stiles reaches forward, clasping his hand around Derek’s wrist. For a second, he ponders sliding it down and linking their fingers together, but then his father is turning back, asking what’s taking them so long, and Stiles startles, dropping Derek’s arm and moving away.

Derek looks at him funny, hand clenching and unclenching a few times before he huffs and darts forward without looking back again. Stiles feels like apologizing for no reason. After all they went through, he isn’t sure where they stand right now. He knows it’s ridiculous, and so not the time, but he can’t make the thought go away as they run. When the trees start to thin out, the terrain changes and they are suddenly running downhill.

“Hold on,” Derek says, hand reaching out and stopping Stiles, who is out of breathe when they reach the bottom. His dad bends over, panting as Derek looks right and left, suddenly very alert.

“What is it?” Stiles asks confused. He bounces on the balls of his feet, anxious to keep running. That’s when he notices Derek is also out of breathe. Stiles stares at him in surprise, thinking it’s probably the first time he’s looked that way. The fact that hunters are chasing them and Derek is still recovering worries Stiles enough to make his heart clench.

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Derek snaps his head to look at Stiles when his heart rate turns erratic. He’s going to ask him what’s wrong when he senses it. If he looks forward, Derek can see past the line of trees into the ruins of some abandoned buildings. But looking back up to where they came from, he can hear the hunters still in the distance.

“Why did you stop?” John asks when he catches his breath, uprighting himself. But Derek doesn’t answer. He’s just stunned, feeling them before hearing them.

His pack.

Coming from their left, roaring, they rush through the woods until Derek can finally see them. He seeks out each of them, needing to be sure they are all okay. There’s Boyd, yellow eyes flashing as he jumps forward, rushing toward them. Erica is right behind him, she looks fierce and beautiful as her hair floats behind her. Derek lets out the breath he was holding when he finally sees Isaac again. He looks dangerous, features wolfed out, claws ready, but all Derek can notice is how his hair is longer, and how different the way he holds himself is now, more confident in a way.

Right next to him, Scott seems to be his shadow, roaring as he leaps right and left in a clearly
protective stance and Derek knows in that moment that he needs to have a talk with his beta.

He sees the human the last. A girl seems to be running inside the circle the four betas have formed. She’s unharmed but there is something in the glint of her eyes that gives Derek pause. Her red hair is a wild mess as Derek observes her moving smoothly through the gaps between the betas.

“Is that Lydia?” Stiles squeaks next to him.

“Lydia Martin?” John asks, confused.

“Yes, it’s totally her. What the heck?” Stiles takes a step forward but Derek stops him. They wait, instead of going to them, observing the betas getting closer. Derek knows they don’t have time for this but he’s itching to reach forward, touch them, scent them after all this time. He knows Scott won’t allow it, but Derek has missed them so much he’s willing to risk it.

“Derek!” Erica calls, bright smile on her face as she bounces right into his arms. Derek reacts without thinking, lifting her up and embracing her. He’s buried in her scent, breathing deeply and feeling the tightness in his chest finally, finally giving in. It feels like he can take the first real breath since he separated from them. Derek feels whole. He finally has Stiles and his pack next to him. He doesn’t have to pick anymore.

Dropping her down carefully, Derek smiles openly at his betas. He reaches forward until Boyd and Isaac step into his arms and they are all hugging, holding each other. Derek’s throat closes up, a lump choking him. He feels the power of being an alpha with his pack at his side rushing through his veins and Derek sighs, closing his eyes and leaning on his betas.

Stiles can’t stop smiling as Scott runs to him. He doesn’t care that Derek held him back, when Scott is still a few feet away, Stiles rushes toward him and they meet halfway, clutching each other fiercely.

“You’re alive!” Stiles exclaims.

“And you smell like blood,” Scott replies, stepping back and trying to lift Stiles’ shirt.

“Yeah,” he snorts, ready to brag a little with his friend. “I got shot.”

“You what?” Scott asks in disbelief. “Where was Derek when that happened?” His head snapped to the alpha, eyes flashing.

“Dude, no.” Stiles shakes his head, still smiling. “He saved me. Like, you have no idea how crazy it all was. He was going to let the militia kill him. I still can’t believe he’d- And like, that we somehow made it out alive... And with my dad, too!”

“You found him!” Scott grins.

“Yeah.” Stiles smirks, looking back at where his dad is talking to a very withdrawn Lydia. “What’s Lydia Martin doing here, by the way?”

Scott laughs, but it sounds a bit bitter. “You’ll think I’m crazy, bro.”
“Dude, you can trust me on this,” Stiles says. “There is nothing that you can say to me that’ll make you sound crazy.” When he turns to look at his friend, though, Stiles notices Scott staring at Derek with the betas. Stiles sighs fondly. “Look at them,” he whispers. “They look so happy.”

Scott nods. Something in his face, in the way he holds himself, tells Stiles he wants to join in.


He grabs Scott and drags him to the circle of werewolves, who part to welcome them. There’s a moment where they all hold each other. Stiles touches all of them, ruffles Isaac’s curly hair, holds Erica’s face, even circles Boyd’s back. It’s perfect. He’s looking at Derek, smiling, wanting to get closer, when Stiles hears the hunters in the distance for the first time.

“We should go,” Derek says, voice still calm and content. He holds Stiles’ stare a second and then steps back, breaking the circle.

“Here.” Boyd gives him a gun and Derek nods, small smile on his face.

“Can I borrow one of those?” John speaks then, making Stiles almost choke in surprise. Boyd arches an eyebrow, but when Derek nods, he reaches forward and gives John another gun. “Thanks, son.”

Boyd falters at that, but he recovers quickly as they start running through the clearing. There are fallen trees all around them as they move into the area of abandoned buildings, trying to find a place to hide. The noises are getting closer by the second. Derek sniffs the air, looking ready. Looking strong. Somehow having his whole pack back together seems to have given him renewed energy.

“There’s no time. We need to hide,” he explains as he guides the group inside a ruined building. The back part of it has been completely torn down, even though the front still resembles a functional building. The gaping hole opens to a slope made of the fallen part of the building, leading to what looks like a road and more ruins. They all take shelter at the back and wait. Derek crouches, body ready as he watches through a gap in the concrete, and his three betas circle him, as ready as he is. Stiles wishes he could get closer, ask him how he’s doing, but there isn’t time so he sits down next to his dad and Scott joins him shortly after.

Lydia sits a bit away from them. Stiles has never seen her anything but perfectly groomed and pampered. A far cry from what she looks like right now. Her face has mud caked on it, her hands are dirty, nails broken, her usually lush and perfectly brushed hair is a mess. She even has leaves stuck in it. But the most haunting thing by far is her lost stare. Lydia sits alone, arms around her knees, and she’s never looked more troubled.

“I know it’s not the best time but dude, you didn’t tell me about...” Stiles ask Scott, trailing off as his nods his head toward her.

“Found her in the woods,” Scott whispers urgently. “She was alone but said she was looking for Jackson.”

Stiles snaps back to look at Scott so fast his neck cracks. “Jackson Whittemore?”

“Yeah, man. I don’t even know.” Scott shrugs, craning his neck to look over their cover. “She said we had to help her find Jackson because he was dangerous.”

“Kids,” John hisses, gesturing for them to keep quiet.

“Dad, not now,” Stiles whispers before looking back at Scott. “Dude, dangerous? We knew he was a dick, but dangerous?”
Scott grimaces, nearly rolling his eyes before sitting back against their cover to look at Stiles. “That thing you met on the way to Chicago? The lizard thing? That was Jackson.”

“Oh my god,” Stiles nearly squeaks before covering his mouth with his hands and ignoring when his dad slaps his arm to keep quiet. “Oh my god,” he whispers this time. “Seriously?”

“Dead serious. We tried to find him. Lydia insisted. A lot. And you know how she can be when she wants something.” Stiles snorts, agreeing.

“For the love of—” John laments, covering his face.

“Sorry, Mr. Stilinski,” Scott whispers, leaning over Stiles to look at his dad.

John dismisses him with his hand. It’s a bit unreal, but Stiles feels nostalgic all of a sudden.

“We tried, man,” Scott murmurs. “But we couldn’t afford to lose more time, you know.” He shrugs, head cast down. He looks like he regrets it, and Stiles understands. They had to prioritise, no matter how unfair that was.

“Thank you,” Stiles says sincerely. When Scott looks up at him in surprise, Stiles smiles. “You guys found us, I’m glad you’re here.”

“I’d have never left you.” The moment the words are out, he can tell Scott regrets them. “I mean—” He stutters, unsure.

“I know,” Stiles hurries to say, giving Scott a reassuring shoulder squeeze. Thinking of the years Scott was gone still hurts, but Stiles doesn’t want to let that rule their friendship. Scott nods, looking relieved. They fall into an anxious silence, still waiting. Stiles looks at the betas, the three of them talking in a hushed tone to Derek, who seems to be giving them all his attention. Stiles can tell, though, by the tension in his shoulders, that he can hear the hunters closing in.

“By the way,” Stiles whispers. “How did things go with...” he trails off, waving his hand discretely toward Isaac.

Scott catches up to what he means a second later and his smile widens significantly, which Stiles decides to interpret as a good thing. “I have to tell you something,” Scott whispers so low Stiles has a hard time hearing, even when he leans closer. He frowns in concentration, trying to hear. “But not now,” Scott finishes. Stiles leans back, nodding and winking at him. He’s turning to his dad to ask him how he’s doing with all this when the werewolves all tense up visibly.

“They’re here,” Derek whispers. “How did things go with...” he trails off, waving his hand discretely toward Isaac.

Scott catches up to what he means a second later and his smile widens significantly, which Stiles decides to interpret as a good thing. “I have to tell you something,” Scott whispers so low Stiles has a hard time hearing, even when he leans closer. He frowns in concentration, trying to hear. “But not now,” Scott finishes. Stiles leans back, nodding and winking at him. He’s turning to his dad to ask him how he’s doing with all this when the werewolves all tense up visibly.

“They’re here,” Derek whispers. He nods at Boyd, who moves without a word. No one moves or speaks after that, they barely breath as the minutes go by slowly.

“Shit,” Erica curses in a hush after a while, and her tone sends chills down Stiles’ back. It can’t be anything but bad.

The blast breaks through the silence and Stiles turns toward where Boyd is shooting from behind a window. Stiles can hear the people outside shouting and running for cover.

“We know you are in there, Hale,” a voice calls. “Don’t do anything stupid and come out.”

Derek curses under his breath. After a moment, he stands, gun out, and everyone jumps after him. Boyd moves back quietly, appearing in front of them.

“How many?” Derek asks.
“Thirty, maybe forty,” Boyd says.

There’s a pause before Derek huffs in exasperation.

“Alright,” Derek says. He turns to look at Stiles. “You have to go.”

“What?” Stiles says roughly, unable to believe he just heard that.

“We’ll buy you three some time,” Derek explains. “And then we’ll join you.”

“What? No, we’re not leaving you guys here.” Stiles shakes his head, straightening his stance. Not this time, he thinks.

“Dammit, Stiles,” Derek curses, striding over until he’s in front of Stiles. He grabs Stiles’ face with both hands. “Hunters are not after humans, do you understand what I mean? The moment they realize they are dealing with a pack, things will get ugly. I need you to go before that happens.”

“But-” Stiles lets his eyes roam all over Derek’s face, sudden fear that this will be the last time he sees him. “I thought we weren’t separating again. I thought you understood I can’t let you to sacrif-”

“I’m not,” Derek cuts him off. He looks at Stiles straight in the eye when he speaks. “I have a pack to protect, and some of them are human, I have to prioritise their safety. That’s what Alphas do. And I-” Derek stops abruptly, gritting his teeth.

“What?” Stiles asks, voice almost failing him. He doesn’t care if everyone is just barely steps away from them. He circles Derek’s wrists with his hands, holding onto him, trying to reassure him with the gesture.

“I won’t be able to do this if I don’t know you’re safe somewhere,” Derek finally admits, eyes flicking everywhere but Stiles’. “Let me deal with this threat so we can leave. Together.”

Stiles takes a shaky breath. If that’s what Derek needs, he’s willing to do it for him. He knows what he should say and he does even though it kills him. “Alright. How will we regroup?”

“Don’t worry, just go. I’ll find you.” Derek leans closer for a moment and Stiles is sure he’s going to kiss him, his heart thundering in his chest as Derek presses their foreheads together. But then Derek is letting go of his face, hands easily disentangling from Stiles’, and he’s stepping back.

Stiles doesn’t have time to react before his dad is pulling at him. He ignores the pang in his side and nods, gathering courage to turn around, running alongside his dad and Lydia, away from his pack. As Stiles runs downhill, he can barely feel his body as his mind spins in his head. His pack. The thought is sudden and violent. He’s abandoning his pack. His.

Derek squeezes his eyes shut, feeling the distance between Stiles and him like an actual pang of pain, crushing his chest, twisting his insides.

“We have a lot to catch up on.” Erica smirks.

Derek snorts, turning to his betas. “We can exchange tales later.”
“Or maybe not.” Isaac smiles, nodding past Derek.

“Hey!” Someone yells behind him.

He recognized the voice instantly. Derek turns around, stunned. “What are you doing here? I told you to-”

“I’m not leaving you behind,” Stiles says resolutely. “I know it’d make you feel all warm and fuzzy if I stayed out of trouble, but that wouldn’t be very me, now would it?” Stiles grins, brushing a finger under his nose. “My place is here, for better or worse, with my pack.”

At the words, something inside Derek clenches in all the right ways. He feels a warm sensation spreading from his chest all over his body and finds himself moving, dropping the weapon he’s holding in the way and wrapping Stiles in his arms. He doesn’t hesitate, doesn’t even think about it. Derek kisses him with all he’s got. And as he does he has a fleeting thought; how stupid was he for not doing this before? Nothing has ever felt more right than kissing Stiles.

After a moment, he leans back, pressing their foreheads together as he smiles unconsciously.

“We do that now, huh?” Stiles teases, grinning back.

“Apparently,” he says before they are kissing again.

Someone clears their throat behind them, and Stiles starts laughing nervously, pulling away. Derek can see the shock in everyone’s face. His betas are looking at him like they don’t recognize him. Even Scott has an odd expression on his face as he looks at them. John may be the least surprised, and for whatever the reason Derek finds that hilarious. He chuckles, making Stiles laugh again. Which makes the betas crack in snickers.

“Are you all insane?” Lydia nearly screams then. “Stop laughing and let’s get the hell out of here!” She makes a gesture to indicate that’s final and then turns around, jogging down the ruins of the fallen wall and away from the building.

“Oh my god,” Stiles says, voice and laughter muffled against Derek’s shoulder.

“She’s right.” John grins, shaking his head as he follows her. Soon the betas and Scott are right next to him and before Stiles can move Derek grabs his hand. It’s a simple gesture, and probably to all effects unnecessary, but he’s been dying to do it since they found each other again in those woods. Stiles looks down at their joined hands and then up at Derek with an arched eyebrow.

“Let’s get out of here,” Derek says, head bent down to hide his smile at Stiles’ flushed face.

When they reach the bottom, the group begins testing out the abandoned cars.

“Isn’t this a waste of time?” Stiles asks, fingers still secured in Derek’s as he watches everyone scramble.

Derek shrugs as they approach them. He can tell this town was bombed some time ago, cars left in the middle of the street as people ran away. They might still work.

“Ha!” Someone cries triumphantly a second before the start of a car breaks the silence. “Everyone in!” Isaac yells as he steps outside a small car and starts gesturing everyone over.

“Derek! Stiles! Come on!” Erica yells before getting inside with everyone else.
“I’ll drive,” Derek says, jogging with Stiles.

Derek squeezes his hand before letting go to catch the keys Scott tosses him. In the back seat, Erica is sitting on top of Boyd, who is crammed between the window and John. Stiles’ father is helping Lydia climb inside while in the front, Isaac is already sitting, face red as Scott yanks the door open and takes a deep breath before moving inside, sitting on top of him. They stiffen with awkward tension, but Derek doesn’t miss the way Isaac slides his arms around Scott’s waist after a moment.

“We have half a tank,” Derek calls as he sits on the driver’s seat. “Let’s see how far we can get.”

Lydia is sitting between John and the open door. Derek can’t help the smile when Stiles falters, jerky movements as he tries to sit next to her, where it’s obvious there is no seat left.

“I- uh,” he falters. “Why don’t I- and you can... I mean-”

Lydia rolls her eyes, jumping out and huffing as Stiles scrambles inside. Derek shakes his head, smirking as he starts the car. Then Lydia moves back inside, sitting on top of Stiles, who makes a choked sound before closing the door.

They hear the gunshots a second before darting forward in a shower of gravel.

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Stiles supposes this would be like a dream come true back when he was a teenager and crushing hardcore on Lydia Martin. Right now, though, he can’t stop squirming, trying to find a position where his shot wound doesn’t bother him.

“Stop it,” Lydia hisses, elbowing him. Which, ouch.

“You stop it,” he snaps back.

“Kids,” Erica teases. “Be good.”

Lydia sends her a terrifying stare and Stiles is suddenly so scared of both, he stays still and takes the discomfort in silence.

“Keep going west,” Scott says then.

“Where are we going?” Derek asks, frown clear in his tone.

“To the meeting point with my mom,” Scott explains. “We’re late but I’m sure she waited for us.”

“Wait a minute,” Stiles’ dad says. “Your mom?”

“Yeah, she decided to get involved with the resistance when she saw what was happening in Chicago,” Scott explains, turning around in Isaac’s lap to look at him.

“I had no idea she-” John falters, frowning deep in thoughts.

“What is it, dad?” Stiles asks, hand reaching out to give him a squeeze.

“I just- I didn’t know your... friends, uh were involved, too,” John explains.
“We’re not,” Derek says stubbornly.

“Yes, you are,” Stiles snaps back without thinking. There is a pregnant silence in the car while Derek pulls down the rearview mirror and looks at Stiles, eyebrow arched.

“Uh,” Isaac hesitates, talking to Stiles’ dad. “What do you mean ‘too’?”

“Oh my god,” Stiles exclaims cheerfully. “That’s right, you guys don’t know yet. My dad is a double agent!” he beams as John rolls his eyes, huffing and covering his face. Erica rolls her eyes at Stiles, mouthing “smooth” before she smirks. And Stiles mouths back “what?” because he really has no idea.

“What does that mean, exactly?” Derek asks without moving his eyes off the road.

“It means we’re on the same team,” John says, voice steady and firm. “We both want the Argents out.”

Derek looks at John through the rearview mirror. They don’t speak for a long second, until Derek nods. “Okay,” he says as he turns his attention back to the road.

“That’s awesome, Mr. Stilinski,” Scott exclaims. “I’m glad you guys found each other.”

“Yeah, yeah...” John nods, still looking at Derek. “Me too.”

Stiles and Derek share a heavy look through the rearview mirror, knowing all that it took to make that happen.

The rendezvous point turns out to be a big plantation mansion. From the look of it, the place has been abandoned for years. Scott is out of the car before Derek has parked, closely followed by Isaac. They run inside as Scott calls for his mother. But no one seems to be there. A quick look reveals food in the kitchen, made beds upstairs and closets stocked with clothes, which calms Scott some. It’s obvious the resistance uses this place regularly, so sooner or later someone will show up. They decide to stay the night and figure out a game plan.

Once inside, the werewolves head to the kitchen, arguing with one another about what to cook. But all Stiles really wants right now is to take a shower and sleep. With Derek. But he’s feeling awkward, unsure now that they are not alone anymore. It’s just too weird, with his dad and the betas. And Lydia, which was something Stiles was not counting on. So he ends up going upstairs without telling Derek, who seems content with just observing his betas make a mess of the kitchen.

Stiles has no idea where his dad is, but he hopes no one will notice his absence if he’s quick. Stiles walks across the top floor, wood floor cracking under his feet as he inspects the rooms until he finds one with a bathroom. Inside the wardrobe there are practical clothes; jeans, thermal shirts, boots. Stiles says a little prayer for clean underwear and picks randomly all he needs before heading to the bathroom.

Trying not to wet his stitches is harder than he thought, so Stiles ends up taking a quick shower. He puts on the new clothes, humming in contentment at the feeling. Once he steps back into the room, though, Stiles startles and makes a surprised noise. Derek is on the doorway, arms crossed over his chest and shoulder against the frame.

“This your room?” Derek asks, head tilted down as he looks up at him.

“Good.” Derek nods before stepping off the frame and walking closer. He stops right in front of Stiles, but doesn’t reach out to him. “Can I stay here with you tonight, then?”

Stiles blinks in confusion. Does that mean...? What does that mean?

“Wait, what does that mean?” Stiles asks out loud, licking his lips nervously.

Derek huffs a laugh, shaking his head. “It means I want to sleep here, with you.”

“Oh.” Stiles breathes out. He has a sudden realization, that maybe Derek feels as awkward as he does. It’s almost a relief in a way, that maybe they are still on the same page, and just trying to find each other.

Stiles realizes he hasn’t given an answer when Derek frowns and steps back. “I can probably find some other room to-”

“No!” Stiles exclaims, moving closer. “Sorry, I was- my brain needed a second.” He shrugs apologetically. “You can stay! Dude, I want you to stay.” He realizes he’s nodding and stops abruptly, sucking his lips inside his mouth to control his facial expression from being ridiculous.

Derek doesn’t seem to mind. He’s looking at Stiles in a way that makes his knees weak. “Alright.” Derek nods, smirking. “You done with the shower?”

“Uh? Oh yeah, had to be careful with the stitches but yeah.” Stiles rubs the back of his head.

“Great.” Derek smirks, moving past him. “I’ll see you later, then.” Derek turns around when he reaches the bathroom’s door, hand on the frame as he looks back at Stiles, who only has time to nod once before Derek is closing the door behind him.

“Tease,” he breathes out, knowing Derek heard it.

Stiles suddenly feels more nervous than the first time he was with Derek. By all accounts, everything they’ve gone through should be enough to reassure Stiles, but it’s precisely their history that makes this so intense. He feels like this is the night. There is no one else to find, no pack missing, no father in danger. They can lay down and enjoy each other without the nagging feeling at the back of their mind.

Stiles barely feels his feet touching the steps as he goes downstairs and joins the betas in the kitchen.

A while later, when Derek steps out of his and Stiles’ room, he pauses. He feels like a teenager, giddy and excited. He’d honestly skip the meal and the needed talk with his betas to just spend the next twelve hours in that room with Stiles. But he knows he can’t... And on that note, there is someone he has to find.

Going downstairs, he finds Isaac helping in the kitchen. He’s doing what Erica says, clearly upset while trying to keep up with her orders. Derek can hear Stiles and his father talking to Scott in the other room, so he supposes this is as good a moment as any.

“Isaac,” he calls, making the beta stop chopping vegetables and look up at him. “Come here.” He tosses his head toward the door.
Derek doesn’t wait for an answer, he walks outside the kitchen and to the porch. The place is decrepit and in ruins but he can still sense the splendor and greatness of the colonial plantation. He sits on the single not-broken step of the porch and waits for Isaac, who sits next to him a moment later.

“How are you feeling?” Derek asks without moving, eyes on the orange and blue horizon.

“Derek, I wanted to apologize,” Isaac says urgently, sounding a bit upset. “I know what I did was wrong and put everyone in danger and I-

“I get it,” Derek interrupts him. When Isaac doesn’t speak again, Derek turns to look at him. Isaac’s eyes are wide open, jaw dropped in clear surprise. “I do,” Derek reassures him, snorting slightly.

“You... understand...?” Isaac trails off, still clearly confused.

“We both did stupid things for the people we love.” Derek shrugs. When he hears the small oh coming from Isaac, Derek huffs. “I almost let Kate Argent execute me to make sure Stiles and his father got away.”

“You what?” Isaac asks, voice raising.

“I should tell you that what you did was wrong,” Derek continues, ignoring his question. “That running off after Scott was reckless and stupid. I should even punish you. As your Alpha, I should make sure you understand what you did was wrong.” Isaac nods along with each word, showing he agrees. “But I won’t,” Derek finishes.

“Why?” Isaac asks cautiously.

“Because I know exactly why you did it.” Derek sighs, rubbing his face. “Next time, just trust in your pack. We’ll help you.”

“I know.” Isaac leans closer, grabbing his shoulder and forcing Derek to turn and look at him. “You may understand why I did what I did but it was still wrong and I regret it. I’m really sorry, I need you to know that.”

“I do,” Derek concedes, rubbing his back.

“Okay, okay,” Isaac murmurs, head cast down. Derek can hear the emotions choking him up in his voice and decides not to push it.

“So you and McCall...” he says instead, teasing.

“Yes, I don’t know.” Isaac shrugs. When he leans back, Derek can see the blush in his face.

“Should I talk to him?” Derek arches an eyebrow.

“No!” Isaac says quickly. “We just started- I mean, I’m still not sure what we are doing.” Derek nods. He knows too well what his beta means. They stay quiet after that, both sitting and looking at the sun disappearing slowly behind the mountains on the horizon.

“He’s so cute,” Isaac kind of whines after a while, taking Derek by surprise. “What is wrong with me, Derek? It’s never been like this. I’ve never felt like- like I want to, I don’t know, to...”

“What?” Derek asks, a bit intrigued by Isaac’s words.

Isaac drops his head into his hands. “Want to mate him. Really badly.”
Derek is so taken back by the words, he reacts by cracking a laugh. He’s suddenly laughing and Isaac lifts his head, looking at him like he were crazy, but he’s soon laughing with him.

They are still trying to catch their breath when Boyd’s voice carries outside, announcing that the dinner is ready.

Derek sits at the table with his whole pack, looking around to each of his betas, to Stiles, his father, Scott. Not even twelve hours ago he was sure his end had come, and here he is now. Surrounded by his family, with a warm meal on the plate in front of him, and the promise of a night with Stiles later. Derek feels at peace. He thought the feeling would disappear once his subconscious understood that death was no longer imminent. But the feeling hasn’t gone away yet. If anything, it has grown stronger with his pack finally back.

“Hey Lydia?” Scott asks then. “Is everything okay? You haven’t even touched your food.”

Lydia seems a bit surprised, as if not expecting someone to talk to her directly. She nods after a moment, though, and proceeds to move her food around with her fork in an attempt to make it seem like she is in fact eating.

“Lydia?” Derek asks. She looks up at him but doesn’t reply. “You seem to know everyone here but me.” She shrugs. “You wanna tell me why you’re here?”

“I’m here because I don’t have other choice,” she snaps then, surprising the whole table. “I’d rather be out there looking for my boyfriend.”


“He’s not a psycho,” she protests angrily.

“Alright.” Derek shows his palms, leaning back on his chair.

“I just want this war to end,” she continues, stabbing her food. “And I want both parts responsible for this dead, that’s why I’m still here. I want to join the resistance.”

“Why?” Derek leans forward, suddenly intrigued.

“Because then Jackson and I will be able to be together,” she explains with a bitter smile on her face. “After he was bitten, we decided to run from Beacon Hills. We knew it wouldn’t be safe for him there, we thought we’d find some other place. But this war has divided the country. We couldn’t understand just how much back then.”

“What happened?” Stiles asks, and Derek sees in his face he couldn’t resist the urge to ask.

“If we crossed to human territory,” she explains. “People hunted him. If we crossed to wolf territory, I had to be his slave to survive.” Lydia shrugs. “So we kept moving, never staying anywhere for more than a few days.”

“Didn’t people notice Jackson was...” Scott asks. Derek realizes she hasn’t told this story before.

“We knew Jackson was different,” Lydia grits through her teeth. “We just didn’t know how much. At first he wouldn’t even turn. We thought the bite had gone wrong and he was still human. But then the nightmares started and soon after that, he started to disappear for short periods of time. I had no idea back then- I mean- that he was... hurting people.” She pauses, gathering her wits. “He’d come back eventually, naked and covered in blood, and I didn’t have the heart to ask him. I didn’t really need to, it was obvious what was going on. That’s why we went to Chicago, hoping Peter Hale and
his pack would help him.” She shakes her head as if trying to remove a painful memory, then looks Derek straight in the eye. “You want to end this war? It’s simple: Peter Hale has to die.”

The tension at the table is almost palpable as Derek thinks this through in his head.

“Why?” Derek finally asks.

“He...” Lydia falters only a second, long enough to swallow back and gather courage. “He took me in as his slave. Challenged Jackson to win me back if he dared. Of course it was suicidal, everyone knew Jackson would die if he tried.”

“Why would my uncle want you? He has dozens of slaves.” Derek explains, not out of spite but honest curiosity.

“Experiments.” Lydia swallows, no hint of fear or weakness. She is fierce, wild red hair and pale features giving her an ethereal and dangerous aura. “He ran tests on me. Spent some time torturing me for fun.”

“Why you?” Derek insists, ignoring the way his insides turn at the idea of his uncle hurting this girl.

“Because I’m immune,” Lydia states, chin raised up and defiant.

Everyone in the table tenses up, not sure how to react. Derek sighs, leaning back, because if that’s true, it’s not really of any use for them. “Alright,” he decides to say, finishing the conversation and going back to his food.

"What, is that it?" Lydia snorts. "You don't want to know more about my condition? Maybe run some quick tests?"

"Not interested in your blood." Derek shrugs as he bites a piece of meat and chews, looking at her.

"Then what are you interested in?" she asks, sounding more cautious.

"Turns out we want the same thing," Derek explains, using his fork to point back and forth between Lydia and him. "For this war to end so we can be with the people we care about."

He looks at Stiles when he says it, unguarded and unashamed. Stiles holds his gaze and Derek watches the heat rise in his cheeks. They’re received with soft smiles and acceptance from his betas, and the feeling is exhilarating.

Lydia seems to study him for a moment before nodding. "Okay,” she finally says, mimicking him.

Derek is starting to see what the obvious thing to do is. He might not have wanted to join the resistance before, and he still doesn’t, but considering the things that he wants now, his new goals and motivations, Derek needs this closure, to end this war and be able to finally rest next to his pack, to Stiles.

The betas and Scott have been piled on top of a wrecked couch of the living room for an hour when Stiles decides it’s late enough to excuse himself upstairs. No one seems to pay him any attention as he moves slowly up the stairs, giving Derek enough time to realize where he’s going. Stiles can feel
several pair of eyes on him as he climbs the stairs.

Once in their room, he sits in the bed, jumping leg showing how nervous he really is.

“Hey man,” Scott calls after a while, making Stiles bolt in surprise. “You sleeping here?”

“What? Why?” Stiles jumps back on his feet. “I mean, uh aren’t you going to... you know, with Isaac?” Crap, he hadn’t thought of Scott wanting to share room like old times.

Scott blinks once slowly, giving him a quizzical look. “Alright, no need to pull a muscle to tell me you already have,” Scott makes quotations marks with his hands. “A roommate.”

“I am not! Pff, what? No.” Stiles shakes his head, snorting.

“Look, I-” Scott steps closer and lowers his voice even though they are alone. “I’m kinda freaking out. I don’t know what Isaac will want tonight; things are a bit weird between us.”

“Why? What did you do?” Stiles gestures with his hand for his friend to spit it out.

“Why do you think- Alright, yes,” Scott admits when Stiles rolls his eyes. “I kissed him,” he admits, making Stiles gape. “It was a spurt of the moment kind of situation. Happened once! But then, I don’t know, nothing else happened and we haven’t-”

“Talked?” Stiles asks when Scott doesn’t finish the sentence.

“Yeah.” Scott nods, eyes cast down as he seems to ponder something. “I’m still not sure how I feel, and I don’t want to lie to him.”

“You need to talk to him, dude.” Stiles clasps his shoulder, shaking him back and forth.

“You’re not saying that only because you want me out of here, right?” Scott teases.

“Of course not!” Stiles fakes a gasp. “Now get the hell out of here so I can-”

“No! Lalala!” Scott covers his ears and starts chanting as he runs out of the room. He almost collides with Stiles’ dad as the man knocks on the door’s frame before stepping inside.

“Hey son,” John says. “Already going to sleep?”

“I might be an old man, but my eyes still work, kiddo.” John ruffles his hair and Stiles ducks away.

“Okay then,” he says animatedly. “Does that mean we don’t need the talk?”

“I might be an old man, but my eyes still work, kiddo.” John ruffles his hair and Stiles ducks away.

“Okay then,” he says animatedly. “Does that mean we don’t need the talk?”

“Right n- But dad!” Stiles protests, because he’s expecting Derek to show up in any moment.
“Sit your ass down,” John orders, pointing at the foot of the bed where he’s sitting himself. “And tell me how serious this thing with Derek is before I decide how okay I am with my son spending the night with an alpha werewolf I barely know.”

“Technically, it wouldn’t be the first time so you shouldn’t worry.” Stiles winces the second it is out. Damn him and his motor-mouth.

John pinches the bridge of his nose, sighing deeply. “Stiles.”

“I don’t know, okay?” Stiles admits.

John raises his head at that, looking at Stiles in surprise. “How can you not know?”

“I know,” Stiles says. “I’m just not sure what he thinks. Things have changed now that it’s not just us anymore, you know?”

“Well, for what’s worth.” John sighs. “After what I saw, I don’t think anything could make him change his mind.”

Stiles’ eyebrows pop up as he takes that in. “I mean,” he says after pondering it for a moment. “I have no idea, it’s all suddenly awkward and you’d think that after what we went through, nothing could change that but I’m not sure. And the worst part is...” Stiles trails off, trying to come up with the right words to explain how he feels. “If he had died, I know I would have never-” he stops, unable to explain. He knows it might sound ridiculous, but that’s how he feels. Even now that he knows Derek is safe, that he won’t die, at least not like that, as a martyr, he still has this fear inside of him. It’s slowly eating at him, implying a lot of things Stiles isn’t sure they are ready to voice or deal with.


“No, you don’t understand.” Stiles shakes his head. “I’m crazy about him! Totally gone for, it’s pitiful, it’s pathetic, okay? I’m pathetic. And I don’t care. I’m beyond the point of caring. All I want is to be with him and, right now?” He points downstairs. “I’m jealous of that pile of werewolves because I want him all to myself, it’s insane. I miss him all the damn time. So stupid. Shit, the only explanation is that I’m in love with him...” Stiles trails off, realizing what he just said. “God, I just said that, didn’t I?”

John looks oddly at him a moment before looking past him. “And what about you?”

Stiles startles, turning around in an uncoordinated movement.

“I’d die for him,” Derek says simply. “He means... everything.”

Stiles gapes. Derek is looking at him like no one has ever looked at him before. Forgetting his father is still there, he moves, pouncing Derek, circling his neck as he crashes their lips together.

“Alright then!” John says stiffly before he leaves in a hurry.

Derek grunts, finally reacting. He grabs Stiles’ ass, lifting him up and stepping into the room before kicking the door shut behind them. He sits on the bed, Stiles straddling his thighs, knees pressed on the mattress.

“Wait, wait,” Stiles murmurs, leaning back. “Let me look at you.”

Derek nudges his jaw before stretching his neck back, patiently looking up at him through hooded
eyelids. Stiles can’t help but smile, fingertips brushing Derek’s cheeks. He sighs, trembling when Derek slides his hands under his shirt. “Take it off,” he breathes out, body stretched up to help Derek pull the fabric over his head. Stiles grabs Derek’s top and helps him next, their eyes never breaking contact for more than seconds.

Derek brushes his fingers over the patch in Stiles’ side as the human wraps his arms around Derek’s neck, holding his stare, willing him to ignore it, to stay there with him. He wants to say something silly, like how glad he’s that Derek didn’t die, but all Stiles can do is smile in amazement because this is really happening. Derek arches a questioning eyebrow, fingers stroking Stiles’ back down to his hips. He palms Stiles over the denim, smirking when he squeezes his eyes shut and curses softly.

“Shit,” Stiles breathes out, jerking against Derek’s hand. “I wasn’t prepared, fuck.”

“Shut up and kiss me,” Derek teases, voice low and playful.

Stiles obliges, melting against Derek when their lips meet again, this time slower and more softly. Derek cups his face as he explores Stiles’ mouth, sucking his lips, tongue lapping inside. Stiles has never been kissed like this before, with such purpose and precise control. He can feel Derek slightly trembling against him, eyes fluttering against his cheeks as he takes his time with each of his lips, sucking and nipping, before moving inside Stiles’ mouth. When Derek presses their foreheads together, Stiles is panting, already painfully hard inside his borrowed jeans. “Oh my god,” he nearly moans. “You are-”

“I love you,” Derek cuts in, voice clear and secure.

Stiles is stunned into stillness by those three words. He slides his arms from around Derek’s neck slowly, pressing his palms against his chest to anchor himself. His breath is as labored as before, but for completely different reasons. It’s the first time anyone’s ever said that to him, outside of his family. They stare at each other, and Stiles can see the calm in Derek’s eyes, in his stance. He just looks so secure, so warm and welcoming.

In that moment, Stiles realizes he might not have a house to call a home back in Beacon Hills, but he’s had a home all along in this man. Against all odds, Derek has become his safe haven, the person Stiles can’t live without. With a wide smile, Stiles moves away from Derek’s lap back to his feet. He pops open the button to his jeans, hands fumbling with his zipper. “Take your pants off,” he says as he jumps on one leg and then the other, dragging his boxers down with his jeans.

Derek seems to falter a moment, surprised, but then he leans back on the bed, lifting his hips and pulling his pants down. Once they are both naked, they seem to freeze a moment, Stiles’ eyes roaming all over Derek’s body. He’s never seen anything more breathtaking. Stiles suspects that he’ll never get used to Derek taking his clothes off.

Derek scoots back on the mattress, finding the pillows and settling down. He moves one hand behind his head, legs parted, inviting as he bends one knee up, his other hand on his chest. He looks magnificent, powerful in the way he rolls his shoulders, getting comfortable, muscles clenching and unclenching as he moves. Stiles swallows loudly at the sight of Derek’s cock, hard and flushed against his belly. Definitely never getting used to this.

“I’m going to risk sounding corny and say it anyway,” he says as he kneels his way back onto the bed. Derek leans forward and grabs him, pulling Stiles in for a kiss.

“What?” Derek asks when he doesn’t say anything else.

Stiles smirks against his lips. “You are so beautiful.”
Derek grunts and kisses him, hard. They tangle together, moving slowly, kissing lazily. They have made out before, they have taken their time, played around, but somehow this feels different. There’s something in the things they are saying with their bodies that makes this night different. Even the lazy mornings they spent in borrowed beds didn’t feel this way. Stiles buries his face in Derek’s neck, inhaling as he places a single kiss over his pulse, scenting him like Derek has done with him before. He rubs his face against Derek’s throat, trying to chase the memory of the metallic collar away.

Derek doesn’t hesitate in tilting his head back, giving him access. Stiles presses his teeth against his pulse, satisfied when Derek buckles up, arms tightening around him. And all Stiles wants in that moment is to make him feel good, to tell him with actions what he can’t say with words. He needs to reassure himself that Derek is there, that he’s fine, that they are together. Here. Right now. That there are no more collars. Not now, not ever again.

Stiles kisses down to his collarbone, rubbing his cheek back and forth, sliding to Derek's chest. He loves Derek's pecs. They are big and strong, pure fiber and muscle, not even a bit of softness to squeeze. He loves the feeling of muscles under his teeth as he runs them down Derek’s chest, planting an open mouth kiss on his stomach and following the line of Derek's abs, nipping and sucking unhurriedly, relishing in the small sighs escaping past Derek’s lips.

Stiles feels all the taut muscles under him, hears Derek’s intake of air, feels him shivering just slightly as Stiles keeps going down. He follows the happy trail from Derek’s navel to his pelvis, lapping and sucking, mischievously ignoring Derek’s cock, which seems to throb and jerk in protest.

Derek’s hands finally fly to Stiles’ shoulders, tugging him up. Stiles complies, resting on top of Derek, who opens his legs for him and circles his lower back, pulling him closer. When their faces meet, there’s a moment of uncertainty where they just stare at each other. Derek grins, tugging him closer and Stiles captures his bottom lip, biting it lightly, playfully, feeling Derek rumbling deep in his chest, his face breaking into an open laugh as they look at each other in wonder.

When the laughter dies and the smiles melt on their flushed faces, they kiss slowly, tongues tangling together lazily. They cling to each other, breathing each other's air, licking each other's mouths. There's this unhurried feeling, like there isn’t a goal, just needing to touch, to feel, to taste each other’s skin until they covered every naked inch and start again.

They start moving together, thrusting against each other. It’s slow and unhurried, and each time Derek thrusts against him, it burns in all the right places, driving Stiles mad with the slow way he arches his back and presses closer.

“I’m going to say it back,” Stiles blurts out. “I mean, I said it first, but I’m going to say it properly this time,” he clarifies in a soft whisper against Derek’s mouth, nipping it before he settles between his legs. Derek huffs a laugh, throwing his legs over Stiles’ parted knees, who drags his fingers up and down his thighs until he finds Derek’s hips, holding him down. “I just wanna do it at the right time,” Stiles says, licking his lips, noticing how Derek follows the movement with his eyes.

“Did I pick the wrong one?” Derek arches an eyebrow, nudging Stiles playfully with his legs.

“No! No, are you kidding me? That was perfect.” Stiles laughs nervously. “I just... wanna do something for you, like, blow your mind, and then say it.”

“Well.” Derek shrugs, arching his eyebrows pointedly. “You could start with blowing me.”

“Oh my god.” Stiles throws his head back and laughs, feeling his face flushing. “You decided to pick this moment to make a joke. Great, yeah, I totally deserved it.”
“Who’s joking?” Derek says, pulling his blank face. Stiles’ eyes flash with mischief. Leaning over his hips, he captures Derek’s cock in his mouth without warning. “Fuck!” Derek bucks up, legs tensing around Stiles before they drop wide open.

Stiles teases him a little, enough to make Derek growl and fist his hair. He licks from base to tip, planting open-mouthed kisses along Derek’s length. When he reaches the top, he engulfs Derek again, eyes on Derek’s face, watching as he squirms, eyes rolling back in his head. There is something incredibly hot about giving Derek head. Stiles likes to choke himself on the long, hard length, feeling the spit running down his chin, his own cock so hard it hurts. He’s rutting against the mattress when Derek sits up and leans over him, squeezing his ass.

“Shit, Stiles,” Derek moans when Stiles lowers himself on his cock until his nose is buried in Derek’s pubic hair.

Derek drops back down, arching his back up off the bed. And Stiles slows down, not wanting this to end too soon. He keeps his hand fisted around Derek’s cock, stroking him slowly with his thumb as he lowers down further, licking past Derek’s balls. He’s done this before and Derek seemed to like it, so Stiles doesn’t hesitate, doesn’t ask for permission, he just keeps licking down, parting Derek’s thighs slowly to get a better access, ready to read the signals and stop if Derek doesn’t want this. But Derek doesn’t protest, he doesn’t say a word. Instead, he opens his legs further apart and tilts his hips forward, giving Stiles the perfect angle.

When Stiles finds his entrance with his tongue, Derek shudders, fisting the sheets and letting out a low throaty moan. Stiles eats him out until Derek is squirming, and then he leans back and presses a finger slowly inside.

“Fuck, fuck yes,” Derek groans, thrusting back, encouraging Stiles to keep pushing inside.

“We don’t have lube,” Stiles speaks right against his thigh, hand working Derek open slowly.

“I don’t care.” Derek throws his head back. “Just, don’t stop.”

“Not stopping, just...” Stiles nips his thigh, moving up to Derek’s cock again as he presses a second finger inside. “Wish I could fuck you.” He takes Derek back in his mouth, feeling him throb and knowing Derek is close.

“Stiles,” Derek moans, hips stuttering before he stills, muscles going taut as he clenches around Stiles’ fingers, coming within seconds. Derek shudders, broken sounds escaping his lips as he rides the orgasm for what feels like minutes. Stiles doesn’t stops working him, pressing him down on the mattress as he fingers Derek through it.

“I love you so damn much,” Stiles whispers, leaning over and stealing a kiss before he kneels between Derek’s shaky legs.

Derek pins him with a stare, breath still labored as he calms down slowly. He hasn’t even gone soft after coming. Stiles drinks in his sight, relishing in how spent and bone-deep satisfied Derek looks. They smile at each other, content. Stiles licks his palm and spits on it before stroking himself, getting his cock wet. Derek is slick enough to try. He grabs Derek’s thighs, throwing them over his own legs, pulling Derek closer to align himself against his ass.

“Not sure this is gonna work, so don’t-” He nudges the entrance, testing carefully, reading Derek’s response. “Don’t get pissy.” He’s never done this before, the whole getting his thing inside other thing’s... thing. And he’s never done any type of anal play without lube. He takes a deep breath, using his weak human senses to smell the scents of sweat, dirt and Derek that are thick upon the air.
Derek feels exposed, wide open and bare. He’s let go, trusting Stiles, letting him take Derek wherever he wants. Letting the control slip away is liberating. Derek finds himself breaking apart, only being held by Stiles, who takes care of him, who makes him feel complete, filled.

“Fuck me already,” Derek says hoarsely.

“I’m on it,” Stiles breathes out, biting his bottom lip in concentration.

“I don’t really—nghh,” Derek speaks, voice breaking into a groan when Stiles pushes inside, welcoming the burning sensation.

“Shut up.” Stiles grins, leaning over to kiss him as he keeps pressing in.

When he bottoms out, Stiles holds his breath, hands fisted in the sheets on either side of Derek. He looks gorgeous like that, lips raw red and shiny from biting on them, cheeks flushed, eyes wide and blown with arousal. He smells fantastic, like mate, like family, like all the things Derek associates with safety and, more recently, home.

“I- I’m not gonna last,” Stiles stutters, breathing heavily as he stills. Derek can sense the discomfort in Stiles’ side, how his stitches tug him from the tension in his torso.

“Just move,” Derek groans, leaning up and squeezing Stiles’ ass, pulling him forward, helping him.

“That’s... not fair,” Stiles speaks as he starts moving. “I wanted to last.”

Derek snorts, his laughter cutting off with a gasp when Stiles changes the angle and he feels a white-hot shock running up his spine, curling his toes.

“You liked that, huh?” Stiles grins, leveraging himself on his arms, muscles popping, finding the angle again, working Derek’s spot over and over with each thrust. “Can you come again? I want to see you come again, Derek. Come on, do it for me.”

Derek curses, his guts tightening as the heat spreads all over his body. The burning feeling gets worse but also better. He’s never felt more full, more connected. “I wanted to come on you,” he groans. “Mark you as mine.”

“Shit, Derek. Shit, you can’t say that and—” Stiles curses, thrusts stuttering as he loses a bit of control, thrusting erratically. “Not pulling out, I wanna mark you, too.”

Derek shudders. He can feel Stiles coming a moment later and he tries to squeeze the base of his cock to prevent himself from following but it’s no use. He rubs himself against Stiles’ happy trail, coming as Stiles crashes on top of him, breathing heavily. They pant together, holding each other until Stiles rolls next him. He lifts his head to look at his stomach, smeared with Derek’s come, before dropping back down, laughing. “I guess that was the right moment to say it,” Stiles says a bit smugly.

Derek rolls onto his side, getting a hold of Stiles’ chin to lean him closer. They kiss again, moving to fit together in a comfortable position. “Leave it there,” Derek murmurs against Stiles’ lips. “I like how you smell like that.”

“You’re such a pervert.” Stiles snorts. “You’re lucky I’m apparently into that,” he comments as he runs a finger over his stomach and then licks it clean.
Derek groans, burying his face in Stiles’ neck. It’s really not fair the effect Stiles has on him. They stay like that for a while, Stiles’ fingers stroking idly on Derek’s scalp as Derek hums in appreciation, counting the moles he can see dotted across Stiles’ abdomen.

“How did we get here?” Stiles wonders aloud, huffing a laugh when Derek lifts his head enough to show him an arched eyebrow.

“I kidnapped you, remember?” he says with some sass.

“Right.” Stiles grins, pushing Derek against the pillows and splaying himself over his chest. “What I meant, smart ass, is how did we end up here, joining the resistance?”

“I don’t know.” Derek shrugs, hands stroking up and down Stiles’ arms. “I guess I just want to spend time with my boyfriend without getting us killed.”

Stiles’ eyes get stupidly wide. He drops his jaw, looking at Derek in utter shock. “Did you just- oh my god. Your boyf-”

Derek grabs the pillow behind him and throws it at Stiles’ face, laughing at his squeaking. “Let’s hit the shower, come on.” He grabs Stiles, careful with his side, and moves them off the bed to the adjoined bathroom.

And as they step together into the shower, limbs tangled, faces stretched by big smiles, Derek realizes this is it for him. What he’s been looking for. The piece missing all these years since his family died. He’s ending this war, he’s dealing with his past and he’s not doing any of it alone. Not anymore. And now- now all Derek wants is to stay with him, wherever Stiles wants to go. That’s it. It’s just that simple.

Finally, life seems almost easy for Derek Hale. And it feels great.
The Resistance

Derek hears the car approaching the mansion before Stiles awakes. He doesn’t want to move, though. Not yet. He’s spent the night holding Stiles against him, his face buried in Stiles’ hair. He had plans for this morning, things he wanted to do to Stiles before they had to go downstairs. But if his hearing is right, the resistance has arrived.

Before long, he can hear the betas moving around the first floor. He moves reluctantly away from Stiles, who makes a small noise of protest and buries his face in the pillow. Derek is still looking fondly at him when their bedroom door opens. Scott peeks inside, hand rubbing the back of his neck in an apologetic gesture.

“I know,” Derek murmurs, not wanting to wake Stiles.

“We’ll be downstairs.” Scott bounces a little in excitement as he closes the door behind him.

Derek can hear Scott’s fast heartbeat as he runs down the stairs and outside, never stopping until he has his mom in his arms. Derek finds himself smiling as he puts on his clothes and moves out of the bedroom. Stiles is still recovering from that gunshot, clear in how deeply asleep he still is. Derek decides to leave him there and go on his own. Downstairs, everyone is circling the car that just arrived, talking animatedly with Scott’s mother and... Derek falters and stops walking midway.

“Ah, Derek,” Dr. Deaton says in a friendly way. “I’m glad to see you made it out of the militia camp alive.”

Derek feels his whole body clench, ready to leap forward until a hand stops him. Startled, he looks to his right to find John grasping his shoulder. “He saved Stiles’ life,” John says, knowing it’ll be enough to make Derek desist. Funny thing is that it does, although Derek can’t say he’s happy about it.

“I’m not going to thank you for that,” Derek says, stubbornly. “It’s time to pick a side, Deaton. No more games.”

“I am here, aren’t I?” Deaton shows his palms in a surrendering gesture. “I was just waiting for you to pick up, Derek. My mission was never to interfere. I had to be in the right place at the right time and make sure you were able to keep going. It had to be you; it always had to be your choice.”

“You let those hunters torture me,” Derek speaks through gritted teeth. “They were going to kill me.”

“What could I have done to stop them?” Deaton asks with one of his enigmatic smiles. “I, however, did give you what you needed to fight; I saved Stiles’ life.”

“I don’t like this guy,” Boyd comments. And Deaton just smiles at them, seeming content with the conversation.

“Well, this has been fun,” Scott’s mother interferes. “But they are waiting for us. We need to go.”

“What’s the hurry?” Scott asks, frowning slightly.

“You were late,” his mother admonishes. “A lot has happened since we split up at that crossroad, Scott. We ran out of time waiting for you. We need to hurry or it’ll be too late.”

“Too late for what?” Isaac asks, casually stepping closer to Scott.
“To end this war, what else?” Deaton fills in, smiling.

“Stiles is still-” John gestures back at the house.

“He woke up.” Scott squeezes his mom’s shoulders with a big grin before running inside to meet his friend midway.

Derek can hear him updating Stiles as they come outside together. Stiles looks well-rested for the first time in a long time, and the sight is enough to loosen something inside Derek’s chest. He’s still favoring his uninjured side, but it’s nearly imperceptible.

Derek steps back as Melissa and John move closer, the four of them just hugging and celebrating that they’re back together. Derek feels like an intruder, yet cannot look away. He wants to be there in Stiles’ inner circle, but he also likes to see Stiles surrounded by people he loves.

Then John steps back, creating an opening and Stiles is smiling right at him. Derek’s breath catches in his throat as they lock stares, the ridiculous feeling that Stiles knows what he’s thinking tugging at the back of Derek’s mind.

“Well, kids.” Ms. McCall claps her hands. “Time to move.”

As John and Melissa move inside with the betas, Stiles lets everyone brush past him as he steps back until he’s next to Derek. “You let me sleep in,” he murmurs as he punches Derek’s shoulder lightly.

Derek moves without thinking, lifting his arm and circling Stiles’ shoulders. “Thought you needed it.”

“I woke up alone,” Stiles protests, pressing himself against Derek’s side, who looks at him in surprise. He wonders, not for the first time, if he’ll ever get used to Stiles and the open way he shows his affection, utterly without reservations.

Derek knows he’s looking at him completely awestruck, but fuck it, Stiles pulled and pushed until Derek cracked and surrendered. The mere thought is a miracle in itself. On impulse, Derek kisses the side of his temple, pulling him closer.

“We’re back on the road, huh?” Stiles sighs, leaning closer.

“Hopefully for the last time.” Derek kisses him again, rubbing his stubble back and forth against Stiles’ cheek, absently scent marking him without even thinking.

“Dude, your werewolfiness is showing,” Stiles jokes, face moving back and forth to rub against Derek’s anyway.

“Shut up.” Derek snorts, pulling away and guiding Stiles up the porch stairs.

As they go inside to help everyone get the things to the cars, Derek is already anticipating Stiles’ protests when he tells him to sit down and let the others work. When the group notices them, though, they stop what they are doing and turn to look at them.

“What?” Stiles stutters.

“What’s your decision?” Deaton asks, eyes pinned on Derek.

Derek takes a deep breath, eyes searching the room as he tries to come up with what to say. He isn’t even sure of what he thinks. He knows he’s going wherever Stiles goes, and that his betas will come
with him. The rest is uncertain.

“I may have information about your uncle that you should know before you make a decision,” John says then, startling everyone. “But maybe not here, we can-” he gestures to the other room.

“No,” Derek says, frowning. “Whatever you have to say, do it here.”

“All right.” John nods. “Your sister wasn’t killed by hunters.” He doesn’t say anything else for what Derek feels are ages. “Son, the Argents were still looking for her when she died.”

“What-” Derek tries to ask, voice breaking before he can even finish the first word.

“What I’m saying,” John says, gesturing with his arms in a way that reminds Derek of Stiles. It’s a weird thought, completely out of place, but he can’t help it. “Forensic work confirmed another werewolf was responsible.”

“What does that mean?” Isaac speaks when neither John or Derek do anything but stare at each other.

“Your uncle disappeared mysteriously from the hospital around that time,” John finally says, voice rough.

“I told you,” Lydia speaks up, surprising everyone. Her reaction is so strong, Derek pauses. He’s probably in shock. He’s probably not taking all this too well. He can’t be sure, though. He doesn’t think he’s feeling a single thing right now. But that’s not a normal thing to feel, is it? The lack of feelings. “We need to kill him,” Lydia keeps saying. “For all he’s done to me. To you. To all of us!”

There’s a pregnant silence in the room, everyone tensed and still. Derek is still processing the information in his mind, going slowly over John’s words. He can’t say he’s surprised Peter would-Somehow, Derek is unable to even think about it. He’s definitely in shock. Derek’s fingertips feel numb as he clenches his fists slowly, just to feel something, to prove to himself that he can still function.

“I think she’s right, Derek,” Erica says, nodding at Lydia before reaching forward and stroking Derek’s arm. “You know he’ll never let you go. We can’t keep watching our backs forever.”

He wants to answer, but everything is coming from afar right now. Derek can’t really feel his body, he’s not even sure if he’s thinking. It’s such a disconcerting feeling, that he isn’t even sure if he’s feeling at all. He has no idea how long he stays there, standing still, eyes fixed on Stiles’ father as his heartbeat is deafening in his ears. He hears someone calling his name but Derek can’t move, can’t tear his eyes away from John. What he said- what he just said.

“Derek, you okay?” Stiles asks, his touch like a jolt running up Derek’s arm, straight to his heart, and anchoring him in a way that makes Derek finally react.

Derek takes a shuddering breath, eyes blinking as he realizes he was unconsciously holding his breathe. He shakes his head, trying to clear his thoughts. “I-” he tries to speak, voice breaking. “We’re putting an end to this war. My pack and I will help. I will-” Derek falters just a second. “I’ll deal with my uncle, we’ll do whatever has to be done.”

Lydia sighs in relief, nodding resolutely. Derek can feel the mood in the room changing after that, like everyone just took their first breath since he entered the room.

“Good choice,” Ms. McCall says.
Stiles is looking at him anxiously, but Derek can’t do this now. If he takes a look at Stiles, he knows he’ll break. He knows he’ll bury himself in Stiles’ arms and say something stupid, something about his sister, and he can’t afford that. So, a moment later when everyone resumes their activity, Derek moves to Scott instead. He nods at him to follow up to the next room, ignoring Stiles’ stare like a brand in the back of his neck.

“What’s up?” Scott asks, once they are alone.

“I—” Derek falters. Fuck, Scott is like family to Derek, but sometimes that’s not enough. Sometimes that’s exactly the problem. Even though he always tried to help Scott, he knows they have history together not easily undone. He knows he messed up plenty of times. He’s an expert at that, after all.

“I need you,” Derek finally says, admitting what he’s been fighting to say for so long. The words are probably the most honest ones he’s ever said to Scott, too.

“What?” Scott tries to say but Derek is not finished.

“You don’t have to join my pack,” he continues. “I can see now that a traditional pack was never going to work. I always thought I should have a pack like my family, but—” Derek falters. “But they’re long gone and we’re different people. You can be independent. You can stay for Isaac, I don’t care. But I need you to fight alongside my pack. This is no longer against just hunters. We are going to go against our kind. My unc- Peter will complicate things and I need—”

“Derek.” Scott looks upset. “You don’t have to convince me.”

“What?” Derek furrows.

“We have something in common,” Scott says simply.

“Stiles,” Derek guesses.

“Well, yeah.” Scott snorts softly. “But we both want this war to end. It’s been a long time, I want to know what peace is like as a werewolf. And I know you want that more than anything.”

Derek nods, frowning in reluctant hope. “So you’ll join the pack and fight with us?”

“You really thought I was going to abandon you guys?” Scott chuckles, patting him.

“I thought that now that your mother was here...” Derek trails off. “I didn’t know what to think. I just wanted to make sure you’d join us in the battle.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” Scott holds his stare steadily. “We both know that I won’t be your beta, but I’ll be there with the pack.”

Derek nods, feeling a bit overwhelmed by the way Scott’s words affect him. “You’re right,” he admits. “You’re closer to being your own Alpha.” At Scott’s shocked reaction, Derek hurries to say. “It’s okay, I always knew you’d never join my pack. I still want you to stay.” Derek nods, dropping his eyes as he claps Scott’s shoulder. “I know you and Isaac... Well,” he grimaces, because no matter how much better he’s gotten at expressing what he feels, he’s still not that good. “No matter what, you’ll always be my brother.”

Scott is looking at him with impossible wide eyes. He nods slowly, swallowing loudly. Derek slides his hand up Scott’s shoulder until he gets a hold of the back of his neck, and pulls Scott against him very slowly, giving him the opportunity to move away if he wanted. But Scott doesn’t, he goes along with it, arms circling Derek’s shoulders as they finally hug.
“You too,” Scott whispers against Derek’s shoulder. And Derek closes his eyes, tightening his hold.

Maybe Derek lost all his siblings once, the memory of Laura a burning hole in his chest right now, but he found new ones along the way. He and Scott will never be pack by any normal standard, but they are family.

-

Stiles tries to ignore the stitches pulling at his side as he helps carry the bags back to the car. He knows there’s plenty of people to do this, but he needs to stay busy before he grows restless.

Derek closed off after hearing about his sister, something that shouldn’t really surprise Stiles, all things considered. He knows there’s no good way to take such news, anyway. But after what they’ve gone through, after last night- Stiles doesn’t want to feel disappointed, doesn’t want to feel jealous. He wants to be understanding, he wants to be whatever Derek needs.

But fuck, Derek not even looking at him did hurt.

He finishes packing, trying to distract himself while his… boyfriend and best friend have a private talk. It’s not like he wants to know what’s going on. Well, maybe he does. But he can respect their privacy, thank you very much. That’s why he’s carrying a bag with clothes and essentials to the car, instead of lurking outside their room. That, and because Boyd was there and gave him the stink eye. Whatever.

He’s stepping off the porch when he sees Dr. Deaton pulling a full gas can out of the resistance car trunk and moving to the car they stole from the abandoned town with it.

“Need help?” Stiles asks as he goes over and drops the bag inside.

“Thanks, but I’m almost done,” Deaton explains. “How is your side?”

“Oh, this?” Stiles pats himself lightly. “Holding up.”

“Let me take a look.” Deaton leaves the empty gas can on the ground and moves closer. As he inspects the stitches without touching, Stiles struggles with what to say.

“I guess I should thank you,” he finally admits. Deaton arches an eyebrow and looks up at him. “I mean for patching me up.” Stiles shrugs, like it’s not big deal that this person basically saved his life.

“Don’t take me wrong,” Deaton says as he rises. “I did it for Derek. But…” he trails off, enigmatic smile stretching his mouth.

“What?” Stiles insists when it seems like he’s not going to finish the sentence.

“I had my own reasons for wanting you alive.” Deaton crosses his arms and leans his back against the car. “Remember what we talked about, back in Chicago?”

“I usually remember all the creepy conversations I have with strangers,” Stiles says with sass. “So yeah, I think I remember your weird, cryptic words about sparks and igniting things.”

Deaton huffs a laugh. “You are exactly what Derek needed.”
“Is that a weird compliment?” Stiles arches an eyebrow.

“Probably.” Deaton smiles. “Did you learn anything more about what I was talking about that day?”

“Sorry, doc.” Stiles shrugs. “Was too busy getting shot and almost dying every other day to seek out gossip about sparks.”

“Now that this war is coming to an end,” Deaton says, pretty much ignoring Stiles’ smartass comment. “And you’re part of Derek’s pack.” He gives Stiles a knowing stare, making him falter and close his mouth before he can protest, because honestly? He and Derek have never discussed it. “Derek is going to need an Emissary, you know?”

“Right.” Stiles crosses his arms. “I remember my mom talking about them. I thought it was all myth, but I guess I’m staring one right in the face.” Deaton tilts his head in affirmation, still amused. “So what does that entitle, anyway?”

“I can teach you, if you want,” Deaton says. He’s about to explain further when the main door opens and a bunch of werewolves come down the stairs. “Maybe later,” Deaton murmurs, patting Stiles’ arms as he leaves.

Everyone loads the cars with bags and suitcases, talking animatedly. The last two to appear are Derek and Scott, who looks at Stiles and grins. Stiles frowns, not sure what that means. But then Derek is there, warm hand resting in the hollow of his neck.

“Everything okay?” He asks, and Stiles wonders if he can feel his distress.

“Yeah,” Stiles lies, huffing a bit.

“You’re that angry, huh?” Derek leans closer, playfully.

“Don’t give me that crap,” Stiles whispers, holding onto his biceps. Everyone around them is ignoring their conversation as they leave the cars open and go inside for the last batch of things.

“Not angry. Jealous then?” Derek arches an eyebrow, teasing him. And Stiles knows what he’s trying to do. Derek is trying to distract him but Stiles is not going to let that happen.

“You’re such a dick.” Stiles shakes his head, can’t help the grin. “I just- After what my dad said, I’d be a total mess if that was, you know. I just want to make sure-”

“I can’t,” Derek admits. “One day I’ll tell you about her, about- Just not today.”

“Okay,” Stiles whispers, hands rubbing Derek’s arms.

“If I start talking...” Derek falters and Stiles cups his face with his hands.

“Hey.” Stiles seeks his stare, making sure he’s looking into Derek’s eyes before speaking. “I said it’s okay. You don’t have to tell me right now. I just wanted to make sure you’re okay.”

“I will be,” Derek says resolutely and Stiles knows he’s thinking of revenge.

Revenge is a tricky thing, Stiles thinks. It catches you by surprise, dominates your thoughts in a way you can’t even see it’s happening. All you can do is go along with revenge and pray that it’ll be enough to make the ache in your chest go away. Or you can face the truth, accept your losses and the way they define you. It took Stiles a long time to realize this was even an option, even longer to be brave enough to accept it. But now the ache of the promise he made to Derek is stubbornly refusing
“You know,” Stiles says. “I wanted to tell you- well, that I’m sorry.”

Derek looks startled before frowning. “Why?”

“I broke my promise,” Stiles chokes slightly on the words. "I didn't kill her. I couldn't, I-"

“Hey,” Derek whispers, pressing their foreheads together, fingers stroking Stiles’ jaw. "I’m glad you didn’t. I don't want you to kill anyone.”

Stiles startles, breath catching in his throat. “You don’t have to protect me like that, I can take it.”

Derek shakes his head slightly. “That’s not it,” he says. “I know you can take it. I just don’t want you to.”

Stiles leans back to look at him, momentarily stunned into silence. He can hear everyone filling in the cars and getting inside. Someone is even pressing the car horn, calling them. So Stiles cracks a smile. “Oh my god,” he teases. “You’re a big softy.”

Derek rolls his eyes, pushing Stiles away. “Shut up.”

“Make me,” Stiles dares with a smirk, laughing loudly when Derek darts forward and steals a kiss. “Nice technique,” he observes as they walk up to the cars and get inside.

They end up in the stolen car with the three betas while the adults, Scott and Lydia ride the other car.

Stiles is in a good mood. He knows the worst part is still coming, but right here, right now, he’s surrounded by his people and everyone is safe and unharmed. He thinks back to when he lived in Beacon Hills. When Scott left. When Allison left. Stiles had his father, but even that wasn’t truly real. He’d built all these walls, all these lies between them. Stiles was alone.

Now, he has a pack. A family. These people? Stiles knows he’d die for them. And the most amazing thing is that they’d do exactly the same for him. Stiles has always been a reserved person when it comes to his inner circle, that’s how he ended up with only a best friend that felt more like a brother, and not much else. When Stiles doesn’t care about someone, he just doesn’t. And he doesn’t care easily. But somehow this journey made him open to all these strangers. He looks back at the three betas through the rear-view mirror and smiles.

“Once this is over,” Stiles announces. “We should all move back to Beacon Hills.”

“Sure,” Erica snorts.

“I mean it!” Stiles says enthusiastically. “Derek has seen my old neighborhood, there’s plenty of abandoned houses there. We could all move there, repopulate the area, fix the buildings…” Stiles trails off, suddenly remembering his mom and how it used to bother her to see their town like that. He wonders idly if some part of his subconscious always wanted to do this, to fix his neighborhood in some kind of memorial to his mother.

He must have shown something because Isaac is suddenly patting his shoulder. “I thought Beacon Hills was nice when we were there.”

“I’m not sharing a house,” Boyd suddenly says.

“Oh, I know!” Erica bounces. “We can live next door, it’d be perfect for pack meetings, but Boyd
and I wouldn’t have to deal with all of you.”

“Hey!” Isaac and Stiles say at once, looking at each other and cracking a grin.

“I liked your house,” Derek says, looking at Stiles for a moment before going back to staring out at the road. “Except for the bullet holes. And the trashed living room.”

“My dad will kill you when he sees the state of his house,” Stiles teases.

“We can fix it all together once we move back,” Erica offers.

Stiles smiles, feeling warm and fuzzy inside. “I’d like that.”

Derek allows himself to think of Beacon Hills, to think of going back to live there. Not because he’s on a mission, not because someone ordered him to, but because he wanted to. The thought is foreign and sits weird in the back of his mind. It’s been so long since Derek did something just because, that the mere idea makes him feel uneasy, like he doesn’t know what he’s supposed to do with that.

He’s been a soldier for so long, Derek doesn’t think he can be anything else. He realizes that once the war is over, he’ll be of no need, he’ll be no one. Derek re-made himself, struggling and changing until he fit in as a piece of this puzzle called war. He is good at what he does, but what can he do? Once the war is over, what else can Derek do? He has no talents, except for killing and maiming.

He’s spent years trying to push Beacon Hills out of his thoughts, but now the idea of going back doesn’t feel like a weight, like giving up. The idea of living in his hometown, with his pack, makes him smile unconsciously as they finally approach what Derek supposes is the main base of the resistance.

Only it doesn’t look like the main base. They are in the middle of nowhere, approaching a big military camp built into the side of a hill. There are military trucks, people everywhere. It’s clear that some just arrived, but others look like they have been camping out here for a while.

“This is not what I expected,” Erica mutters as Derek parks next to Ms. McCall.

“Let’s wait and see,” Derek says, turning around to look at them before they all get out.

Ms. McCall and Deaton take them inside, betas carrying the bags as the group enters the main tent. There are people everywhere, and everyone seems to want to meet him. Derek is stiff as strangers shake his hand and show their respect in a way he wasn’t expecting. Especially coming from the humans. Civilians and hunters alike approach him with kind words that throw Derek off. He suspects he manages to get through it all without snapping thanks to Stiles’ reassuring hand against his lower back. Even though Derek still wants to wipe the smirk off his face, the little shit.

“Why don’t you let your pack have some time to settle while we take you to the operations room?” Deaton asks, soft smile on his face as he gestures for everyone else to turn left and follow some random beta.

“I mean no disrespect when I say no fucking way, doc.” Stiles stands tall next to Derek, broad shoulders straight and tensed.
Deaton looks at Derek a second too long and Derek shrugs. “You heard him.”

“I think we should all go,” Ms. McCall interferes, stepping past them and giving Deaton a look before gesturing for them to follow her to a small room at the back.

At their insistence and after that unexpected welcome, Derek starts to have a fair idea of what’s going on once he gets inside the small room and meets a group of hunters and alphas, apparently in charge of the operation.

“You’re targeting my uncle first,” he says without preamble. Everyone goes visibly tense at his words, but no one speaks. “That’s why you wanted me here,” he continues saying. “You want a Hale to help you end Peter’s life. You know no one else, not even another alpha, would be able to.”

“You’re more important than you think,” Deaton concedes. “You think it’s only because of Peter, and that is important, but we’re looking beyond this battle, beyond this war. You’re the right alpha for this, Derek, the one who can help werewolves across the country to accept peace.”

Derek snorts.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” John says, as if he knew the mere thought was enough to make Derek sweat. “Just explain what’s going on here,” he points at the map in the table.

“You uncle,” one of the alphas says. “Will be here tonight,” he points at a place on the map. “We’ve reasons to believe the Argents will be there, too.”

“Wait.” Derek shakes his head. “You think my uncle is working with hunters?” He gives a cruel smirk. “Are you out of your mind? He’d never ally with the people that killed our family.”

“Actually,” Deaton says, looking more concerned than Derek has seen him before. “He’s been in contact with Gerard Argent for months, now. This is going to be the first time they meet in person.”

“This doesn’t make any sense.” Derek refuses to believe it.

“Unless,” Stiles says, probably without thinking if Derek knows him at all. The whole room turns to look at him and Stiles squirms. “I mean, maintaining a war for such a long time is hard. Especially if both parties don’t make concessions, if there’s no communication I mean, right?”

“That’s what we think,” Deaton explains. “It’s probably that they’re in contact to make deals for wanted territory, weapons, food supplies, decide about resources. That’s why some experts predicted this war would end years ago and yet it never happened.”

“Derek…” Erica trails off. When he turns to look at her, Derek knows what she’s thinking. He knows because it’s exactly the same conclusion he just reached. It’s inevitable, really. To think of all the missions Peter sent Derek on, keeping him far away from the Argents or any progress with his investigation. At first, Derek didn’t even notice, and then as his uncle’s plan became more obvious, the tension between them grew. Until Stiles showed up, becoming the breaking point.

“He said he wanted to avenge our family,” Derek says, eyes on the strategic map on the table. “That he had a plan, that we had to be smart. He kept me away from them, manipulated me because he wanted to end the war and secure the future of our race before avenging our family. How-” Derek stops abruptly.

There’s a weight in his chest that makes breathing suddenly hard. How didn’t he see all this? Derek shares blood with this man, he’s known him since he was born. Peter used to be the cool uncle, when did things go wrong? That’s a stupid question, Derek knows exactly when. And it’s his fault.
*Everything* is his fault. Peter going crazy after years of enduring third degree burns and killing Laura is Derek’s fault. He should’ve never let her travel alone, he should’ve predicted the effect that such an agonizing and long term illness would have on their uncle. He should’ve done *something*.

“You couldn’t have known,” Stiles says, like he just read his mind again. He’s moved and is standing right behind him. They are not touching but Derek can feel the heat of his body and that’s comforting enough.

“He’s my family,” Derek breathes out. “I should’ve known. I should’ve noticed.”

“You didn’t even know about Laura,” Stiles insists. “You’re not in his head, Derek. There was no way you could’ve known his plans.”

“And what are those?” Derek grits out, hands clenching in a tight fist as he feels suddenly angry. “Ally with the hunters that burned our family alive? For what? To drag this war on? Why would he want that, anyway? It makes no sense.”

“Derek is right,” Isaac says. “We don’t know these people.” He points at the others in the room. “The humans are probably hunters and the other werewolves are not pack.”

“You can trust me,” Ms. McCall says. “I’ve been involved with these people for a long time and I know they are telling the truth. Deaton has been a spy for months now, compiling evidence of this contact between Peter and Gerard.”

“That’s how we knew about this meeting,” Deaton adds. “I found out during my stay in the militia camp. Unfortunately, I had to leave before I could gather all the information when you two showed up. Couldn’t risk any of you telling Kate about me.”

“He came here,” one of the alphas says pointedly. “To inform of the situation so we could start planning our attack.”

“Have you ever played RPGs?” Stiles asks unexpectedly. At their blank stares, he clarifies. “Role-playing games. Y’know…” Stiles trails off. “Oh my god, alright. Anyway, my point is, yeah it makes no sense to us. We are not mentally unstable, or whatever. But Peter would be Chaotic Evil.”

Stiles starts enumerating with his fingers. “No respect for rules, no respect for other people’s lives, basically no respect for anything but his own selfish and cruel desires. Ring a bell?”

Derek frowns. That actually makes some sense. He still has no idea what Stiles is talking about, as usual. But he supposes all bets are off with someone like his uncle.

“What’s the plan, anyway?” Scott asks, looking at the resistance.

“We’re attacking tonight,” a woman explains calmly. “We know some sort of exchange is happening, but we are not sure of what. It could be done in minutes, so we need to be fast. Also, werewolves.” She shrugs, like that explains everything.

“No surprise element, gotcha.” Scott moves around the table, taking a better look at the map. “Where?”

“Here,” another man says, pointing to a river that crosses the mountains, one part in particular surrounded by forest in both banks of the river. “It’s pretty far away from here. We’d have to leave after noon to ambush them by dusk.”

“We’re doing this with or without you,” Deaton affirms. “It’s time to make a decision.”
Derek knows they are waiting for him to say something. His betas won’t decide without hearing him first. He suspects Stiles is going to go if his father decides to, and there’s nothing he can do to stop him. And also, the idea of someone else dealing with his uncle sits wrong with Derek. It’s his fault, his responsibility.

“I think this is a mistake,” he announces. “But if someone is catching Peter, that’s me.”

“So we’re going?” Erica asks tentatively.

Derek nods. “But we’re doing it my way. We’ll go into that forest in teams of two, hunters and werewolves, intervals of five minutes each. We need to know the direction the wind is coming from and only approach them in that direction. Anyone going after them from another point will be scented and noticed even before setting one foot in that forest. They are werewolves, but we can buy some time if we’re smart.”

Deaton is smiling at him as Derek speaks. He grabs the pieces on the map and offers them to him. “Tell us.”

“I only work with my pack, and that includes everyone I arrived here with.” He grabs a piece and places it in the middle of the hot spot. “We’ll go first and deal with Peter. I want the best group you have to track the Argents. And I want to meet them.”

“Not to be disrespectful, son.” Stiles’ father interferes. “But I’ll be the one after Gerard Argent and his people.”

Derek can’t say he’s surprised. And to be fair, if he’s allowing humans to take care of the hunters responsible for his family’s massacre, Derek can’t think of anyone better than the man whose wife was killed by the Argents. Derek is not sure how or when, but he considers John as much as pack as his son, and that means he trusts the man.

“Works for me.” Derek nods. “You can pick your team, direct them as you want. Just keep in mind we’ll go in first and clear the path. After that, he’s all yours.”

“Um, just to be clear,” Stiles stutters slightly. “I’m not leaving my dad alone, I’m going with him.”

“I won’t be alone, Stiles.” John points at the map. “I’ll be with a group of hunters that want the Argents taken out as much as we do.”

“Even then.” Stiles shrugs. “I just found you, I’m not going to let you out of my sight that easily.”

Derek notices John glaring sideways at him, like he wasn’t sure how Derek would react. So he nods, ignoring the lump in his throat. “Stiles should do whatever he thinks is best.”

“Alright, son.” John clasps Stiles’ shoulder and they smile at each other. “We’ll do this together.”

Derek ignores the way his body reacts to the idea of not being with Stiles during the fight and makes the conscious decision to trust him, no matter what. He’s seen Stiles fighting hunters before, he’s seen how quick and strong he can be. So he’s going to choose to believe. Because that’s all he can do.

After that, they spend hours planning the attack before everyone is too tired and hungry to continue and Derek is satisfied enough to let them go. Everyone knows their position and what to do in case of any unexpected event. He wishes he had more time to train everyone, but he supposes this is the best they will be with such short notice.
As they’re guided to the canteen, Derek can’t help but think of his uncle. There’s still a small part of him that hopes his uncle would have a reasonable explanation for all this. Derek knows it’s insane, but this is his last living relative and it shouldn’t have to end this way. Not again. Because it seems like everyone around him gets hurt and he can’t stand the idea. Not with Stiles next to him. Not when Derek is fighting to start over, to believe he deserves this chance at something good.

Stiles is going to trip and fall if he doesn’t stop stealing glares at Derek every few steps. He can’t help being concerned, though. He wants to know how Derek is doing but asking him in a place full of strange werewolves is probably a bad idea. Being an alpha and talking about emotions outside the killing and maiming specter is probably considered a weakness.

So Stiles doesn’t say anything, he just falls back in stride with him and bumps their shoulders together until Derek grunts in acknowledgement and grabs his hand, intertwining their fingers. “You okay with the arrangement for tonight?” he asks tentatively, looking down at their joined hands and smiling.

Derek’s hold tightens for a moment before he nods. “Yeah, you should be with your father.”

Stiles doesn’t know how to say the words, so he just bumps their shoulders again, placing himself in front of Derek and stopping them as everyone else keeps walking. “Just don’t do anything stupid,” he asks tentatively, looking down at their joined hands and smiling.

Derek’s hold tightens for a moment before he nods. “Yeah, you should be with your father.”

Stiles doesn’t know how to say the words, so he just bumps their shoulders again, placing himself in front of Derek and stopping them as everyone else keeps walking. “Just don’t do anything stupid,” he blurs. That’s not what he wanted to say. What he wanted to say probably was too close to the truth and reflected his fears and insecurities. So of course Stiles opted for something more superficial at the last second. That’s his specialty, after all.

“When have I ever done something stupid?” Derek arches an eyebrow. “Don’t answer that,” he deadpans when Stiles’ face breaks into a big smile. And Stiles snorts, loving his dry wit.

“You’re lucky I’m feeling generous today,” he teases, eyebrows wiggling as he gets a hold of his shirt and pulls Derek forward so they can resume walking. They are still smirking at each other when they approach the group, which is standing in front of some big double doors.

“Before getting inside,” Ms. McCall is saying, pointing behind her to the closed double doors. “There is someone you need to meet in there.”

She gives Scott a weird, insecure look and then pushes open the doors to the canteen. Inside, a girl is sitting on a long table. Stiles feels a pang of recognition almost immediately. She’s armed with a crossbow, looking calm and lethal, with her long wavy hair and that determination Stiles knows so well in her eyes.

“Allison,” Scott breathes out.

At his words, Isaac growls openly, tensing up. And Erica and Boyd are quick, moving in front of him. Lydia makes a choked sound and runs to the girl, who gets up and embraces her. Scott doesn’t seem to move, though, not even to breathe. Stiles sees it all from afar, unsure of what to do. He remembers the last time he saw Allison, so many years ago. How he refused to see her when she came by before leaving town. And even now, Stiles feels the shame of what he did.

“You okay?” Derek asks, looking at him with concern. Stiles supposes he picked up on his sudden frantic heartbeat.
“I- yeah, gimme a sec.” Letting go of Derek’s hand, Stiles moves forward.

He goes to Scott, who is still unmoving. Stiles pats his back, but when that gets no reaction, he keeps walking. Ignoring the drama going on with Isaac and the betas, he steps next to Allison and Lydia, who are still hugging each other.

“Stiles,” Allison breathes out, letting Lydia go to embrace Stiles instead. Stiles tenses up for a moment but then he circles her back.

“What are you doing here?” He asks more softly than he intended to.

Allison pulls back to look at him and smiles, her adorable dimples showing up the same as Stiles remembers them. “My dad and I are with the resistance.”

“What?” Scott says, still standing several feet away.

“Scott,” Allison speaks, voice suddenly very small. “It’s good to see you.”

Isaac replies with a loud growl, long and menacing. And Scott ignores her to turn around and stare at him instead. He moves closer to Isaac and holds his neck in a strong pull. He doesn’t speak, though, just rubs his palm up and down Isaac’s throat, over his pulse point. And Stiles suspects it’s a weird scenting thing, or some sort of werewolf stuff he doesn’t want to know. Because Isaac holds Scott’s stern stare for what feels like an eternity before he steps back from Boyd’s and Erica’s hold and leaves the room.

No one but breathes too loud after that. Derek, still standing closer to the door, lets Isaac leave without a word, but Stiles notices he’s pinning Allison with a scolding stare now.

“Why is she here?” Scott asks, turning around to look at his mother with a betrayed expression on his face.

“Scott, you should listen to her,” Ms. McCall says, patting his son softly on the shoulder. “It’s been years since you last saw each other, things have changed.”

Scott stares at his mom for a second too long before turning to Allison. He nods after a pregnant moment and Allison relaxes visibly. “Why this?”

“Like I said-” Allison tries to say.

“No.” Scott shakes his head. “Why did you want to see us? Why now?”

Scott is a nice person by nature. He’s good. It’s really hard to piss him off for real or to draw a strong reaction from him. But then again, Allison freaking Argent just magically appeared out of the blue after years of total silence, so it probably makes sense. Stiles suspects things with Isaac are still tentative enough for this encounter to make Scott doubt what he is doing. Allison used to be the love of his life, and no matter what he’s starting with Isaac, this situation must be a big mind fuck for his friend.

“I didn’t see why not,” Allison says, chin tilted up. “You left Beacon Hills without a word years ago, don’t act like it was me who walked away.”

At her words something seems to get loosen inside Scott because he slumps a little, sighing. “You’re right, I guess I just... I wasn’t expecting you here...” Scott trails off, clearly uncomfortable.

“That’s okay,” Allison says. It’s actually cute how awkward things are getting between them, Stiles
“Where’s your father?” Stiles’ dad asks.

“Oh, he’s fine! Yeah, he just went out with the surveillance group a few hours ago,” she explains. “He’ll be back in time for tonight.”

“But what are you doing here exactly?” Lydia interferes, still next to Allison. “What got you here?”

“Well… My mother died a few months after we left Beacon Hills,” Allison explains, voice strong and sure. “An alpha bit her and Gerard had her killed. I think that was—” She pauses, taking a big breath. “The breaking point for my dad, I guess? For the both of us. We moved away, had to hide from my aunt a few times, even. Then my dad heard about the resistance and we decided to join.”

Finding out that Allison also lost her mother is like a wave of cold water drowning Stiles. Gerard killed both their mothers, that’s a realization that rocks Stiles off his center. Stumbling a little, Stiles steps closer and touches Allison lightly on her arm. “I’m sorry about your mom.” He hears himself from afar, ears muffled by the sound of his own deafening heartbeat.

Stiles searches for his dad, staring at him. John’s only reply is to nod. The gesture is a promise, a silence vow to end with the life of the person who killed Claudia Stilinski. Stiles knows in that moment that it’s not his place to seek revenge, that it was always his father’s. Stiles nods back, silently agreeing.

“I didn’t know—” Scott says, trailing off. “I’m sorry to hear about your mom.” They stare at each other for a long moment until Scott rubs the back of his neck and averts his eyes. “I have to go,” he finally says, backing up and leaving the room. He’s probably going after Isaac, if Stiles knows his best friend a little.

It’s been a long time since Stiles saw it, but he can still tell when Allison is hurt just by looking at her face. She’s gotten better at masking her emotions over the years, but Stiles still can read the way she frowns, probably wondering what’s going on with Isaac, notice how she clenches her jaw, trying to remain calm when something upsets her. And in that moment he wishes they were still close so he could go and comfort her.

“We should all get some rest anyway,” Ms. McCall says then, helping break the tension. Everyone seems to be grateful for that, following her when she raises up.

“Where are you staying?” Allison asks Lydia, who just shrugs. “With me, then!” She forces a smile and holds Lydia’s hand, who tucks her hair behind her ear and follows her friend outside the cafeteria.

“Let’s find someplace to crash,” Erica says, smirking at Boyd as they hold hands and walk out after everyone.

Stiles starts to follow when Derek circles his waist and presses his back against his chest. “Let’s find somewhere we can be alone,” he murmurs against Stiles’ ear.

“Oh?” Stiles arches an eyebrow, teasing smile stretching across his face as he turns around to look at him. Derek rolls his eyes, but he grabs Stiles’ hand anyway, his grip warm and dry, secure, like a physical representation of the strong link between them. They are last in the line following Ms. McCall outside, walking through unknown places and corridors until they reach what looks like the barracks.

“We’ll find you a better place once we come back,” Ms. McCall explains. “For now, you have a few
hours to rest. I suggest you use them. I’ll see you all later.”

Stiles’ dad clasps his shoulder before following Scott’s mom inside and no one needs to be told twice. Stiles would like to go find Scott and Isaac, make sure they are okay, but he’s tired. He’s also petrified with terror. In a few hours they will be ambushing a bunch of werewolves and hunters, those responsible for Stiles’ and Derek’s respective losses. Stiles isn’t sure they are ready for it, but all he can do is drag Derek inside and find a bunk in a dark area to lay down.

Derek wraps himself around him in a way that makes Stiles’ stomach flip. He turns around instead of pressing back against Derek’s chest. Hands fisted in the fabric of Derek’s shirt, Stiles buries his face in the crook of his neck and Derek moves instinctively. He tangles their legs together, grabbing Stiles’ thigh and moving it over his hips, hand palming his ass and staying there.

“Are you okay?” he whispers against Derek’s neck once they’re settled.

“I should be the one asking you that,” Derek murmurs, lips brushing Stiles’ ear.

“I’m fine.” Stiles shrugs in the tight space between Derek’s arms.

“We should sleep,” Derek suggests, hand still on Stiles’ ass.

“Mmhm,” Stiles agrees. He arches his back, though, sticking his ass further up, inviting Derek to keep stroking. Derek seems to try to hold back for a moment before he makes a sound in the back of his throat and cups Stiles’ face, tilting it up to capture his lips. The kiss is fierce, desperate, with too much tongue and just perfect. Stiles can barely keep up, opening for him, taking everything Derek is giving.

“This could be the last time we do this,” he moans against Derek’s mouth.

“Don’t.” Derek sounds desperate, fingers digging into Stiles’ jaw.

“All I’m saying is that if it’s the last time I get you like this, I wanna see you,” Stiles explains, sucking on Derek’s bottom lip.

“Stiles, I’m not getting naked in communal barracks,” Derek deadpans as he moves lower to nip and suck on Stiles’ throat.

“Ah-fuck! Okay, uh. What about a peek then?” Stiles asks as his hands grab Derek’s shirt, lifting it between them and tucking the material over Derek’s pecs to work on his zipper. Derek makes no move to stop him, which Stiles is less than surprised about.

“Daaaaamn,” Stiles breathes out. “You’re so fucking beautiful, how are you even real, look at you.” Derek moans as Stiles wraps his hand around him. He nips Derek’s chin, down the line of his neck, relishing in the feeling of Derek’s stubble scratching his lips. “I can’t get enough of you.” Stiles accompanies his words with controlled strokes, making Derek shudder.

“Stiles,” Derek breathes out, undone. He attacks Stiles’ mouth with ferocity, fucking into him with his tongue until Stiles is panting. Then he leans back, confusing Stiles for a moment until he can see Derek licking his palm, spitting in his fingers before he slices it inside the back of Stiles’ pants, pushing his fingers between his ass cheeks. Stiles bucks up at the first pressure of a finger against his entrance. He can’t help letting a moan out before he bites Derek’s shoulder to stop himself from being loud.

Derek fingers him methodically, using just one finger because they don’t have lube. But it’s enough, Stiles feels wide open, completely full as the pressure reaches all the way to his spine, spreading heat
and a certain heaviness Stiles knows in his gut.

He doesn’t even need Derek to touch his cock, Stiles ruts against his thigh, both of them thrusting against each other in a frenzy. Derek fingers him in deep, strong strokes of his pad against Stiles’ walls, making him shudder and bite harder. When Stiles comes in his pants, Derek whines, nostrils flaring as he buries his face in the crook of Stiles’ neck, scenting him. He doesn’t pull his finger out, though. Actually tries to push it deeper, making Stiles spasm with aftershocks.

When Stiles gathers his bearings again, he uses his other hand to stroke Derek’s pecs. He plays with his nipples until they are hard and perky, his strokes becoming faster, his thumb brushing over the head of Derek’s cock, smearing the pre-come there. Derek arches against the touch, voice breaking in a moan. So Stiles does it again. He drinks in the sight of Derek’s body trembling, his muscles clenching as Stiles gets him off tortuously slow, relishing in the small jerks and sounds coming from him.

“I wish I was buried inside of you,” Derek groans, finger moving inside of Stiles as he finally comes, letting out a muffled cry against Stiles’ collarbone, trembling as his arms tighten around Stiles.

The whole thing lasts just minutes. But the bliss that usually follows doesn’t come this time. Derek pulls him closer with a desperation uncommon to their previous afterglows. He almost snarls before capturing Stiles’ lips again, kissing him hard enough to bruise. Derek cups his face, running his tongue down Stiles’ chin to his neck, where he sucks a few hickey, nipping and sucking until Stiles is panting again. When Derek is just licking and nuzzling the line of his throat with his nose, Stiles pulls at his hair and brings him back to his lips, demanding more.

Fingers still clenched in Derek’s hair, Stiles snuggles closer, rubbing his face against Derek’s cheeks, scent marking each other like he knows Derek likes, loving the scrape of his beard against Stiles’ skin, hoping everyone will be able to tell what they did. Hoping that if something happens, the imprint of Derek in his body will last forever, ignoring the logical part of his brain, ignoring everything except the dulling memory of Derek’s fingers in him, the burning sensation of his stubble against Stiles’ lips and how much it calms him.

After a while, Derek sighs and guides him against his neck. He tightens his hold to the limit, right until it’d start being too hard for Stiles to breathe. And Stiles doesn’t say anything. He clings onto him just as hard, fingers buried in Derek’s shirt, pulling him closer even when there’s literally no space left between them. Legs tangled, arms secured around each other, they try to catch their breath, try to calm their frantic hearts, not from the exercise, but from something completely different.

After a while, Stiles realizes they are not going to say anything. This could be the last time they are together, but neither of them can voice what they are feeling. The words die on Stiles’ lips, twisting his insides and choking him, but even then he can’t say it. He’s too afraid. Stiles wants to say goodbye just in case. But he can’t.

He also doesn’t want to say those words just because tomorrow they might be dead. Those words mean more than a farewell. The memory of Derek and him exchanging them the night before is comforting in a way that Stiles is afraid of tainting. Go figure, he never knew he was a romantic until meeting Derek but it’s clear now because Stiles wants that to be the last time he says I love you if he doesn’t make it out alive tonight.

So he snuggles closer, head under Derek’s chin. He sighs, feeling secure in Derek’s arms, and smiling when Derek does the same.

When Stiles wakes up, it’s time to go and too late to say it.
Derek doesn’t do goodbyes. After losing everyone he ever cared about, he decided it was not worth it. That no matter if you have time for farewells or if your loved ones are snatched away from you in the blink of an eye, the feeling is always the same. He’d always need more time. He can’t face Stiles and tell him to be safe, to keep on living if Derek is gone, to find someone else, to try to be happy. He’s just not ready to say goodbye. Not now, not ever.

So he stays quiet, frantic heart pouncing inside his ribcage as he holds Stiles as close to him as possible. Derek tunes everything out except for Stiles, the way his tense lines slowly melt against him, the way his breathing goes back to normal as he falls asleep. Derek cherishes those moments, fingers running through Stiles’ sweaty hair, drinking in his scent, in what makes him Stiles. He memorizes all of the little things, holding on to them like a lifeline.

And for a moment, Derek is able to forget about Peter, about Kate or Gerard, about his pack risking their lives, about all the other werewolves and humans who will trust his judgement and place themselves in danger, finding fleeting peace in this moment.

When people start to stir and get ready, Derek kisses Stiles’ temple, running his lips down his nose, unable to stop himself from marking Stiles again. He kisses his cheek, his jaw, the curve of his chin before capturing Stiles’ lips, sighing at the contact. Stiles wakes slowly, moaning softly as he snuggles closer and Derek can’t help but tighten his hold. He knows he should let Stiles go, move away, shake him awake, but he can’t. These are the last moments they’ll have until… after, whenever that is. And Derek realizes he’s a weak man when it comes to Stiles. He’s greedy and selfish, he wants more, he will always want more.

“G’morin’,” Stiles murmurs, stretching between his arms and Derek can’t help but snort, closing his eyes and ordering his traitor heart to calm down.

“It’s past noon,” he says, finally moving away from the heat of Stiles’ body and sitting up.

“Details.” Stiles dismisses with a hand. When he sits down and grimaces at the uncomfortable feeling between his legs, Derek understands.

“C’mere.” He gestures with his head, yanking the sheets off the bunk to clean himself and Stiles as best as he can.

He knows any werewolf will know what they did, probably the humans as well. But when they meet with the rest, Derek realizes they are not the only ones smelling of sex and desperation. He picks up on the mood of the camp for the first time and is overwhelmed with the sensation of so many people knowing this could very well be it, that tomorrow morning many of them might be gone. No one comments on it, and that only makes the imminent danger more real.

He’s soon too busy giving orders to the people coming with them to think of anything else. It’s more men than he’s used to commanding, but they seem highly motivated. Derek leaves Stiles with his pack, going with Deaton to meet everyone personally. He shakes hands and gives instructions, hoping each person will be the last one he’s going to be responsible for, forcing himself to not think of all the ways this could go terribly wrong.

When he finally sits in the truck that will take them to the rendezvous point, Derek closes his eyes
and sighs, blind hand searching until he finds Stiles’ fingers meeting his midway. No one speaks during the long drive. The tension could be cut with a knife and all Derek can do is try to calm down, to relax against the uncomfortable seat, project these emotions to his betas and all the other werewolves, trying to reach them without words.

When they park, everyone hurries out to get ready before they have to walk into the forest, and Derek approaches his betas. Without a word, the three of them lean in closer, arms circling each other as they breath in their mixed scents, getting strength from the proximity.

“Don’t let Stiles out of your sight,” Derek orders, voice steady but low. He doesn’t want Stiles to hear.

“But-” Erica tries to protest but Derek cuts her with a shake of his head.

“Scott is going with you then,” Isaac says. “You can’t go in alone.”

“You can try to convince him.” Derek shrugs, breaking the circle.

He’s about to walk away when Boyd clasps his shoulder. “Be careful out there.”

Derek can’t even turn around, can’t look at him. He just nods curtly and resumes walking, feeling the loss of Boyd’s touch like a scorching pattern under his shirt.

“Alright, everyone ready?” He asks, voice loud enough for everyone to hear. Derek observes the groups slowly forming in the clearing. He knows the name of each of the leaders, a lot of the hunters, most of the werewolves. “You know what to do!” He clasps his hands, joining his own group.

His and John’s groups are coming in first, followed shortly by the next two groups and so on. Derek senses Stiles approaching him and he turns around.

"I know what you're going to say,” Stiles speaks before he can even open his mouth. “But I won't stay behind while you--"

"Stiles," Derek interrupts. "If anything, I was gonna say to be careful."

Stiles looks surprised. "You're not going to ask me to stay behind?"

"Would you?" Derek arches an eyebrow.

"You know the answer." Stiles smirks.

"Then be careful." Derek cups his face and kisses his forehead before moving away.

Stiles is looking at him with something close to awe. "When did you turn into a reasonable person?"

"I just accepted the fact that there's no way to keep you away from danger.”

He doesn’t allow himself to think. Instead, he lets his instinct out, feels himself getting ready to run with the rest of the werewolves, his bones singing with anticipation.

"Heh." Stiles rubs under his nose, scrunching up his face as he chuckles.

“It’s not a compliment,” Derek deadpans, knowing Stiles will get a kick out of it.

“I'll be the one deciding that.” Stiles smirks, clearly amused.
This is easy, this banter, this bickering. It’s actually perfect to get his blood pumping in his veins, ready to break into action at the signal.

Derek doesn’t need to check his synchronized watch, he knows the moment they should move. His vision is clear, his senses enlighten, he’s as ready as he’ll ever be.

Without a word, Derek makes a gesture with his hand and the two groups steal into the woods.
The idea is simple; sneak in as close as possible before the werewolves can sense them and then attack. The priority is to capture Gerard, Kate and Peter, but never, under any circumstance, let them escape. The designated groups for each target have precise instructions about that. Derek is taking his pack to stop Peter, and meanwhile John, Chris and a group of hunters will deal with the Argents. It’s better that way, Derek has decided. After all these years driven by the desire to avenge his family and kill those people, Derek would still rather stop his uncle before he hurts more innocents. Let the hunters deal with their rogue ones.

The idea is simple; the reality not so much. Derek will never be sure who or how but someone fucks up. They are still approaching the designated area when the howls break the night. Peter’s werewolves are warned of their presence far too soon and things speed up from there. Derek howls back, a warning to those werewolves, a call to his own. Within seconds, the rest of the groups should be in the forest, ready to back them up. They run through pine trees, the scent of resin and sap so thick in the air it makes tracking scents difficult. Soon, the groups get scattered and lost, and Derek centers on his pack, concentrating on each of their heartbeats and focusing long enough to pinpoint their location.

“Don’t fall back!” he shouts, calling his people.

“Are you sure this is still the right direction?” Stiles asks from close behind, breathing heavily. He has his gun out, safety off.

Derek grunts in affirmation, he’s too locked down, centered on the scent he just tracked to speak. His three betas are going to be taking care of Stiles no matter what, so he knows he can do this, he can lock his senses on the faint smell of Peter and tune everything else out.

That’s why he doesn’t smell the hunters before the first explosive arrow flies next to them, hitting a tree and momentarily blinding them. Derek gets shot on his left shoulder a moment later, knocking him backwards and down onto the dirt. Someone is screaming his name. Stiles, he thinks in confusion as his body wrings in pain.

“Get down!” Scott yells, crawling over dead leaves until he’s next to Derek, who is still on his back, eyes shut as white spots dance in front of him. “They knew we were coming,” Scott nearly growls. “Derek, someone told them!”

“No time for that now,” Derek grits out, shaking his head as his vision comes back slowly. “This is a distraction, we almost got him.”

“A distraction? You were shot!” Scott insists.

Derek doesn’t have time to explain he had already sensed Peter because the betas start dragging Stiles and the rest of the humans under cover behind a clump of trees. He can hear Stiles fighting with them, wanting to approach him, and Derek says a little prayer for werewolf strength since that’s the only thing his betas have over Stiles in a situation like this.

Derek snaps his head back at the sound of ruffled bushes in time to see a group of heavily armed hunters entering the small clearing. He knows the moment Stiles spots Kate Argent among them because his heartbeat skyrocket as he goes suddenly quiet. Derek can also pick up Allison’s heartbeat. She seems genuinely scared and Derek doesn’t fail to notice when she brings her bow out and loads an arrow, pointing at her aunt.
He expects a remark, a sardonic smile from Kate, but she doesn’t seem that amused anymore. And Derek gets some satisfaction from knowing they messed up her plans, that she’s bothered by all this. Crouching down, Derek flashes red eyes and stares at the group of hunters. No one is touching his pack.

“Why are you still alive?” Kate laments, sounding exasperated.

She raises her gun, aiming directly at his chest, and Derek holds his ground, ignoring when Stiles shouts behind the cover. Derek is flexing his legs slowly, ready to dash forward, when a shriek pierces the night. It sounds closer than it really is, but what makes everyone still is the terrible growling noises coming from the same spot. And suddenly Derek understands. Of course Peter is approaching them, he wants Kate. He wants his revenge as much as Derek used to.

He’s about to tell everyone to retreat when all hell breaks loose.

There are suddenly werewolves in the clearing and Derek realizes quickly they are feral ones, not resistance, when one of them goes after Scott. The second Derek takes to break the arrow still deep on his shoulder is enough for Kate to disappear. She steps back behind the line of hunters and flees, leaving her men behind to slow them down.

His betas and the humans are already fighting both hunters and werewolves, and Derek roars, frustrated at his body for not keeping up. A moment later, Stiles is with him on the ground, calling his name, breathing labored and heartbeat frantic. He presses his palm against Derek’s wound, fingers at both sides of the arrow still poking out of his flesh.

“I’m okay,” Derek manages to say, his own hand over Stiles’.

“You were shot, I can’t believe that bitch got you shot!” Stiles is speaking frantically, clearly outraged. “We have to find her, Derek. She can’t keep getting away with this.”

Derek knows the rest of the group have created a small protective circle around them, so he hurries to get up, bringing Stiles back to his feet with him. He clasps Stiles’ shoulder and nods at him resolutely, not trusting his voice at the moment. There’s no way Stiles knows, but he’s projecting his anger and rage in an almost palpable way, his heady and strong scent nearly dizzying.

Derek wants to tell him to be safe, he wishes he could stay with Stiles, take him away from the danger. But he trusts Stiles, he believes in his strength and capacity. So Derek swallows down the words and gives him a small smile before joining the rest of the group and fighting alongside them, followed by a resolved Stiles.

Everyone is right behind him, until Allison’s walkie-talkie screeches and the distorted voice of her father announces they spotted Gerard west of their position. She shouts the position and soon John is right next to her, grabbing the walkie-talkie and telling Chris they are on their way.

Derek doesn’t stop to look back, he can’t do it, can’t see Stiles turning away and leaving. But he hears Scott’s deafening heartbeat, hears him whispering to Allison to be careful before she darts in the other direction, hears everyone else following her.

“Shit, I can’t,” Stiles suddenly says.

At that, Derek turns in time to see him stopping.

“What’s wrong?” John asks, grabbing his son’s arm.

“I- I’m sorry, dad. I’ll catch you later.” Stiles nods reassuringly before he hugs his father. “Please be
careful and catch that fucker.” John seems to hesitate a moment until he looks across the forest at Derek and makes a decision. Nodding, he hugs his son again and leaves with the rest of the hunters.

Instantly, his three betas are next to Stiles as they agreed. Derek’s about to speak, to ask Stiles what changed his mind, when he senses Peter again a moment before spotting him, a blur of fast limbs as he chases after something or someone. Derek acts on instinct, turning around and going after him. At first he can hear the betas and Stiles behind, but after a while, he and Peter are too fast for them. His pack is so far back, Derek can’t even pick on their heartbeats, but that’s okay. His target is in front of him, not behind. And his heartbeat is clear and loud.

When he finally manages to cut the distance between them, Derek calls out to Peter, not expecting him to stop. But it works. The blur stills, revealing his uncle as he turns around, cunning eyes finding Derek almost immediately. Something in his stance changes. Peter shifts on his legs, facing Derek completely and Derek circles him slowly, placing himself between his uncle and whatever he was chasing a moment ago. He knows Peter is allowing it, that he could easily attack or dodge him. Which only means Derek is falling into Peter’s plan, whatever that might be. Sweat breaks out on the back of Derek’s neck as Peter regards him with a dangerous glint in his alpha eyes.

“Derek.” Peter looks deranged, menacing smile showing his fangs. “I’m so glad you came. I knew you’d put the pieces together. I never wanted to do this without you, you know.”

“Do what?” Derek asks tentatively.

“Our revenge,” Peter explains, frowning slightly in confusion.

“Peter, do you have any idea what’s going on here?” Derek asks, a bit horrified at the the way his uncle is acting. “The resistance is here, it’s over!”

“It’s not over until they pay.” Something cold crosses over Peter’s face as he shifts into his alpha form. Stalking forward, he swipes at Derek. Thick, sharp claws dig into his side and knock him down before Peter is gone.

Derek loses vision for a moment, hand clutching at his side, feeling the warmth of his blood in contrast with the chill of the night air. He could have stopped him, could have at least tried to. But seeing Peter so far gone is a shock. After finding out he’s the responsible for what happened to Laura, Derek was looking forward a confrontation, to ask for an explanation, to demand it. But Peter is out of his mind with rage. It’s so vastly different from the last time Derek saw him, back in Chicago. Even that night, with the ambush, the bombs going off, the building collapsing, Peter never lost his cool, not really.

Crouching down, Derek takes a deep breath. If he had any reservations about the plan of the resistance, this encounter was enough to help him make up his mind. Determined to find his uncle before he can hurt someone else, Derek finds the strength to stand up.

“Derek.” Erica is suddenly next to him, hands pressing against his side, drawn by the scent of flesh blood.

“What are you doing here? Where’s Stiles?” Derek asks roughly.

“Boyd is with him,” Erica says before he can even finish the question. “They were right behind me. Don’t wait, Derek. Go after him.” Erica gives him a reassuring nod, hands squeezing a bit over his still gaping wound and Derek grunts, acknowledging her as he takes a first step. “Wait, are you okay to go?” Erica asks.
Derek turns around, blind hand palming her arm until he finds her wrist and squeezes once before letting go and moving forward. He has to be okay, there isn’t another option. Eyes still unfocused as Derek heals painfully slow from the alpha’s claws, he rushes through the forest, his other senses heightened.

There’s a cacophony of sounds all around him. People, hunters, screaming, calling each other and giving their position. Until another sound silences them. Derek presses his side, pausing, as he hears Peter hunting them one by one. There are growls, sounds of jaws snapping, of people grunting, howls. The forest is almost silent when his uncle has finished, except for one single heartbeat left that is almost enough to make Derek falter.

He squeezes his eyes shut, willing the familiar heartbeat to go away, to disappear into the night and back to the past. But apparently, she won’t concede him even this.

Peter stumbles in between two trees unannounced. He looks wild, red eyes the only light in the night. His fangs are visible through his parted lips, blood dripping down. Peter is covered in blood everywhere. He’s holding someone against his chest, hand like a brutal vice around her neck.

Kate Argent looks back at Derek with terrified eyes and something goes cold in the pit of his stomach. Derek doesn’t want to lay eyes on her. Revenge is not worth it if it means having to look at her contorted face. Derek refuses to acknowledge her as anything but a psychopathic, mass murderer. He doesn’t want to see the tightness around her eyes, the fearful set of her mouth, the panic in her stare. She doesn’t have the right to look like a victim, not now, not after the militia camp, not after she killed his family.

“No,” Derek grits out.

“Nephew,” Peter says, voice sounding distorted and animalistic. “I want you to see this.”

“I don’t.” Derek shakes his head.

“Please,” Kate pleads weakly, eyes fixed on Derek.

“Do you have any idea how long I’ve waited for this moment?” Peter growls. “I had to fight my way up here. I waited years. I was so patient, Derek. I did it for us, for our pack.”

“So this…” Derek trails off, dumbfounded. “This was your plan all along?”

“Yes,” Peter snarls. “But your dear resistance had to show up and ruin everything!” He accompanies his words with brusque movements of his arm around Kate, who cries out. “It’s the second time you ruin my plans, dear nephew.”

“There’s still time,” Derek tries to reason. “We can still-”

“No,” Peter presses Kate against his chest, claws digging in the flesh of her neck. “There’s only time for this,” he says, looking down at her.

Derek feels sick, his stomach twisting and turning as Peter runs his other clawed hand slowly up Kate’s arms, marking her, making her bleed, cupping her stained face and leaving bloody crescent moon marks in her cheek with his claws.

“Apologize,” Peter snarls, voice shaking. “Say that you're sorry for decimating my family, for leaving me burnt and broken.” When Kate stays quiet, Peter digs his claws deeper into her neck, making her whimper. “Say it.”
Peter is shaking, his whole body trembling as he holds Kate by her neck, claws against her aorta. And Derek’s lungs are on fire. He can almost smell the ashes and the smoke of that night, he can see the picture of Kate holding that electric baton right before hitting him in the face. Derek remembers the body bags containing his little cousins being carried out of the ruins of what was left of his house.

Kate opens her mouth then, dried lips trembling as she tries to speak.

“Sorry,” she manages to croak out.

Peter tilts his head back, eyes shutting as he smiles satisfied, relishing in the moment. Slowly, he looks at Derek across the clearing, and as their eyes lock, Peter moves his clawed hand in a blur, tearing Kate’s throat apart and letting her body drop.

Kate barely makes a sound. Her eyes widen as she falls face first on the dirt, where she stays. Both men stare at her for what feels like an eternity. Derek isn’t even sure of what he’s feeling. Mostly relief that this person won’t be able to hurt him or anyone he loves ever again. There’s some catharsis in all this, Derek can feel it in the way his shoulders sag. But there’s also devastation and hollowness in the way his insides burn.

“I don’t know about you, Derek.” Peter smiles, all off and wrong. “But that apology didn’t sound very sincere.”

Derek is unable to answer. He staggers a step back, hands on his thighs as he leans forward and concentrates on breathing.

*It’s over.*

The person whose existence darkened the last years in Derek’s life is gone. There’s no one else to chase, to hunt, no one to wish death upon. For a long time, Derek anticipated this moment but also dreaded it, because what was he supposed to do when there was no longer a monster to hunt?

Derek stands up, resoluted. He needs to find his pack. That’s where his priorities lie, has been for a long time now, he realizes. But the moment he turns around to leave, he understands his mistake. Peter is still there, and he’s definitely not done.

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Stiles’ throat and lungs are burning. He ignores the pain, tries to keep breathing as he pushes his legs to the limit, running along Boyd and Erica until everything hurts.

Isaac had left them a while ago. Stiles can’t blame him, though. Scott went with the hunters and Isaac tried, he really did, but although Stiles is no expert in werewolfery, he’s pretty sure Scott is closer to Isaac’s alpha than Derek is at this point.

When they finally reach the point where Derek and Peter stopped, Stiles is ready to double over and hurl his insides. Only the sight of the two alphas fighting stops him from doing so. They seem to be evenly matched, but Peter is still landing more hits just because Derek is leaving some inexcusable openings. Stiles knows how good Derek is at one-on-one and this is utter bullshit.

“What the fuck is he doing?” Stiles grits through clenched teeth. He’s about to approach them, god knows what for, when Boyd and Erica beat him to it, jumping into the brawl.
Watching two alphas fight is impressive, but watching a group of werewolves is actually something Stiles wasn’t ready for. The four of them move so fast, everything is a blur in front of his human eyes. He can’t be sure who, but someone bites Peter in the back of his neck, making him throw his head back and howl. And there’s something in that piercing sound that gives him chills.

Stiles looks around, creepy feeling in the back of his neck, and that’s when he notices the body on the ground. Startled, his heart-rate picks up at the realization that Kate Argent is laying motionless on the forest ground, throat split wide open. Stiles opens his mouth, not sure if to speak or just to _breathe_. He’s wanted to kill this person and now she’s dead, the realization spreading like ice through his veins. She’s looking up at him with lifeless eyes, and Stiles can feel her cold, stiff fingers closing around his neck like a vice. Unable to breathe, Stiles stumbles a little, hands closing around his own neck. For a moment he’s sure he’ll find her hand still there. He’s starting to hyperventilate when a noise alerts him.

Stiles turns around in time to notice the werewolf running toward him. That’s when he realizes what Peter did. He was _calling_ his people. Even with his human vision, Stiles can see the shadows moving in the night through the trees, approaching them. He sees Erica and Boyd in his peripheral vision, leaving the fight in order to contain the other werewolves.

Without thinking, Stiles aims at the one running towards him and pulls the trigger, wolfbane-laced bullet burying itself in the were’s gut. He hits the floor, twisting and turning in agony and Stiles can’t stop staring, half horrified and half fascinated at what he did. More howls and roars pull his attention away, though. Stiles knows he needs to save ammunition. He has a Molotov cocktail Lydia gave to each of the humans, but he’s not even sure using it is a good idea, considering what little experience Stiles has with explosives.

Ironically, it’s a hunter that knocks Stiles over. He’s still looking into his backpack, deciding what to do with the Molotov, when he goes down from a blow to the side of his head. He ends up face first on the ground, choking on dirt and leaves. When he manages to turn around, gun ready and aiming to shoot at whoever is on top of him, Stiles realizes the hunter didn’t even stay to finish him off. Stiles has a moment to feel offended before he notices the number of fights breaking around him.

Still on the ground, Stiles looks frantically around him, searching for Derek. He finally spots him still fighting with Peter a few feet away. Derek is bleeding from several places, but mostly from his side. But at least Peter isn’t looking too great either.

Determined to leave this place as soon as possible with Derek, and realizing they are too evenly matched for this battle to end anytime soon, Stiles grabs the Molotov cocktail and rises to his feet, approaching them. He’s not sure how to do it, though. After all, he has an impressive track record of clumsiness on his back and doesn’t want to hit Derek by mistake.

He’s still pondering when he sees the arrows flying straight for Peter's alpha form. He looks back in time to see Allison re-arming her crossbow before firing again. And that's all encouragement he needs. Making the most of the current distance between Derek and Peter, Stiles hurls the Molotov cocktail and suddenly the alpha goes up in flames.

Stiles makes a little fist bump until he sees Derek's face. He's looking at his uncle in terror, completely petrified. The alpha moves toward Derek, still roaring and waving his arms, and Stiles’ stomach drops at the thought that Peter might try to take Derek with him.

Derek looks with horror at the flames approaching him but he doesn’t seem capable of moving. So Stiles looks behind and gestures for Allison to shoot again. She aims and flies her arrows in seconds, stopping Peter right in front of Derek. He staggers and falls backwards after an endless heartbeat. The flames are almost extinguished and beneath them, there’s just a charred, blackened body.
"Peter," Derek chokes, dropping to his knees in front of him.

Peter flutters his eyes open then, looking up at his nephew. “You’re here,” he says like it was the first time he’d seen Derek. “I searched for you everywhere after you left me.” Peter chokes before he can keep talking. “All I wanted was revenge,” he rasps out.

"I know." Derek nods. “And you got it.”

"I did." Peter grins. Or at least he tries to.

Derek tilts his head down, hand moving to Peter's neck, hesitating once there.

"Do it." Peter flashes red alpha eyes and bares his fangs as Derek swings his arm back, brings his claws out and rips Peter's throat out in a blur.

Stiles looks down at his empty hands, realizing he just helped kill Derek’s last remaining relative. He feels sick, maybe for the wrong reasons. He doesn't care a person died, he wanted Peter gone, but he feels guilty for Derek, because he had to endure more pain again.

Derek moves back to his feet and turns around, looking at Stiles. And Stiles understands for the first time how sometimes consequences are more than what we can handle. Stiles knows regret, and this isn't exactly it. He regrets Derek's family died, he regrets his only relative was insane, but he doesn't regret the loss of Peter Hale.

He goes to Derek anyway and offers him comfort however he can in a moment like this, still on the battlefield. Derek clutches the sleeves of Stiles’ torn shirt in a desperate way and something in Stiles’ throat catches. Derek is trying to look strong, he lifts his head high, clenches his jaw, looks away, but his hand doesn’t let go of Stiles. And Stiles just stays there for him. He doesn’t speak, doesn’t tell Derek all the reasons why that had to be done, doesn’t remind Derek of all the horrible things his uncle had done.

Stiles gives Derek this moment, gives him the dignity, the composure he’s trying to maintain. Stiles pretends like he doesn’t know Derek well enough to notice the internal turmoil tearing him apart. And Derek nods, stiffly and curtly, like he knew. He swallows audibly around the lump in his throat and presses his lips into a thin line before releasing Stiles’ sleeve and moving away.

-When Peter stops breathing, Derek knows. He can sense the moment his body starts to decompose, like a cosmic joke, a reminder that he did that, and Derek has to take a step away. He refuses to see the changes in his uncle’s body. He knows how it feels to lose a family member, someone who shares his blood. The first time it happened, Derek thought he was going to die from the pain. But the feeling doesn’t come now. All he can feel is numb, empty.

He’s stepping back, moving away from the corpse, when Stiles holds him, strong arm closing around his waist. And Derek lets him guide them through the cold night. He know Stiles is trying to get them out of the war zone, but Derek is too tired to explain that the whole forest is the damn war zone at this point. He’s just grateful everyone seems to be too busy killing each other to notice them.
"We have to get out of here," Stiles is saying. "We need to find my dad, Derek. I don’t know who he’s with. I think Allison stayed back with Kate, but she’s gone now, I can’t see her anywhere. I’m not sure where Erica and Boyd are, but the last time I saw them, they were close. I hope Scott stayed with my dad. I know it’s unlikely, but werewolf help would do him some good, considering all the crazy stuff I’ve seen tonight." Stiles pauses, turning around to look at him. “Hey, are you okay?”

That’s when it happens. Derek feels it all the way to the narrow of his bones. Losing a pack member is like losing a limb. He feels the physical pain, like a brand on his heart that moves all the way to his legs and arms, fingers and toes tingling as his chest contracts in pain. He’s falling, falling, falling until his face hits something. He registers Stiles’ shoulder, his scent, the vibration of his body as he speaks. But Derek is calling Erica’s name instead, moving before he really registers it.

He can feel Stiles right behind and somehow that gives Derek the strength to keep moving. The forest is full of foreign smells, dangerous noises. He glimpses a few werewolves in his path but they all move back, leaving him alone. His side isn’t hurting anymore, it feels numb. In fact, all of him feels numb as Derek finally finds Boyd. It takes him only a fraction of a second to notice the lifeless body of Erica in Boyd’s arms, face buried in the crook of her neck as he murmurs things to his mate no one else should hear.

Derek collapses onto his knees in front of him, hands shaking as he reaches out to touch Erica’s hair, pet her head, rub a lock of blonde hair between his fingers. Derek can barely wrap his mind around the thought that she's not sleeping, she's not paralyzed, she's just gone. He can tell the difference, can feel the lack of consciousness in the way her body sags against Boyd’s, and Derek knows the memory will haunt him forever.

Derek braces himself, hands on the ground as he swallows back the nausea. He notices the blood around Erica and he lifts his hands, looking at his stained palms, unable to control the tremors running down his back.

"Derek," Boyd croaks weakly.

That's when he noticed the wounds on Boyd's sides, his blood mixing with Erica's.

"We need to get you out of here," Derek says roughly, hand seeking Boyd, but the boy pushes him weakly away.

"No, Derek," he murmurs, leaning over Erica’s body and pressing his face on Derek's shoulder. "I want you to know that it was worth it. Being in your pack, being a werewolf. It was all worth it."

Derek knows what it feels like to lose members of his pack. He lost his whole family and felt the loss of each of them. He felt it when Laura was gone, miles away. But nothing could prepare him for this. Derek feels the life leaving Boyd's body like a knife through his heart; slow, cold and painful. He tries to draw them to him, tries to embrace Erica and Boyd and press them to his chest, face buried between their necks as he roars. He tries to keep them in a safe place, to protect them. But it's too late. It’s always too late.

He can feel Stiles' warm, anchoring presence next to him, but Derek refuses to let go just yet. He drowns in grief and guilt, knowing no one else will ever understand what it feels like to get everyone around them hurt. To be a curse to the people they care the most for.

"I'm here," Stiles says then, hand rubbing up and down Derek's back. Not for the first time, it's like he can read Derek's mind, his words in complete sync with Derek's thoughts. But it doesn’t matter, because Derek doesn’t deserve it. He’s known for a while Stiles is the reason he comes back, what centers him. He knows it’d be easy to let Stiles bring him back from the dark, familiar place Derek is
starting to slip into. But Derek refuses, closing off.

Isaac arrives and it’s his broken howl that tears what’s left of Derek apart, breaking through what was left of his façade. Isaac bends over his pack members, hands clutching clothes desperately as he cries for them.

"Isaac, breathe," he murmurs, leaning closer and pressing his forehead against Isaac’s side. "You need to calm down. I know you’ve never felt anything like this before but you need to concentrate on my heartbeat. Listen to me, let me anchor you through this."

Isaac finally lifts his head, dirty face struck by tears. He looks lost and scared as he meets Derek’s eyes. But his eyes are glassy and unfocused until they snap up, looking over Derek’s head. He senses Scott before hearing his approach. Derek is still looking at Isaac, and he doesn’t miss the way the beta’s shoulders crumble as he takes his first dragged out breath. Understanding, Derek leans back and a moment later Scott is there. Without a word, they cling to each other, Isaac letting out a whine against Scott’s chest.

"That’s it." Scott murmurs, grabbing Isaac’s blood stained hand and pressing it against his chest. "You’re doing good, just listen to my heart beat. Like this, see? Breathe with me."

And Derek feels like an intruder, like a pretender. He never deserved a pack, he should’ve never turned those kids. He was lonely, and he thought he needed the power to accomplish his revenge. He was selfish and didn’t think things through. He’s paying for his mistakes; this is his fault. He should’ve never leave his betas alone. They shouldn’t have been here to begin with, but Derek wanted to believe they were strong. He needed them to be prepared. Derek trusted them with his life and it was them who paid with it.

Repulsed with himself, Derek stands up, moving away from Scott and Isaac still holding each other next to the bodies. Derek is sure he’s going to be sick. His mouth flows with saliva, and his stomach seems to be right behind his paladar. But nothing happens. The same way the pressure comes, it goes. Leaving Derek alone and numb.

“Derek?” Stiles is suddenly there. Or maybe he never left. “Derek, please say something.” Stiles shakes his shoulders, but Derek can’t deal with anything else right now.

He sits down, stumbling a little as he drops down, body locked and clenched. Crossing his legs, Derek supports his elbows on his knees and just... ceases. Muscles tense, Derek shivers. He’s never felt as cold as he does right now. But he can’t move, can’t do anything about it. Because if he moves, Derek will shatter into a million little pieces.

It’s a new circle of hell, the new punishment for what he’s done. He’s not somewhere far away, oblivious to what’s happening. He knows everything that’s happening around him, he can feel Stiles’ hurt and despair, but Derek is unable to react to it. He’s just empty.

Stiles doesn’t know what to do. Erica and Boyd are dead, and he doesn’t- he can’t even begin to understand what happened. They were fine the last time he saw them. Stiles remembers Erica even winked at him after smashing her foot in some dude’s face. It’d been disgusting, he had made a face at her. And she was gone now. Stiles tries to remember the last time he saw Boyd, but he can’t. And
somehow that’s worse, it feels like a bigger betrayal.

Needing Derek, Stiles kneels in front of him. And the closeness is what finally allows him to see how tense Derek is. The muscles in his neck look painfully locked down and Stiles realizes there’s something seriously wrong with him.

“Derek, please,” Stiles whispers with a shaky voice. “Tell me what’s going on. I can’t- I can’t help if you don’t talk to me.”

There’s no reaction whatsoever coming from Derek, though. And it only makes Stiles’ chest tighten even further. He feels like there’s a weight there, preventing him from taking full gasps. Stiles can’t get all the air he needs, he can’t-

“Stiles,” Scott calls, snapping him out of it. His best friend is still holding Isaac so he can’t move, but just his voice is enough to remind Stiles that he’s not alone, not really. “I’m here, buddy,” Scott says. Stiles can’t look at him, though. His eyes are trained on Derek. He doesn’t want to miss when he finally moves. “Talk to me,” Scott insists.

“I-” Stiles tries. “I don’t know what happened to him.”

“Stiles, you can’t really understand but losing a pack member? It’s like losing a part of yourself. Derek had to go through it three times tonight, you need to give him some time.”

“Okay, yeah.” Stiles’ head is spinning with questions. The truth is that he’s never seen anyone acting like this. No matter what Scott says, this is definitely too big for him and Stiles can’t help being terrified of making things worse.

“I don’t- What the fuck am I supposed to do?” Stiles asks, voice frantic. He shakes Derek, but nothing happens. Making a frustrating noise, he stands up and paces around, kicking the ground.

When he moves, Derek averts his eyes. At the realization that he did so to avoid looking at Boyd and Erica, something in Stiles’ chest just hurts. He didn’t miss the first time Derek moved, but now he regrets catching that. Overwhelmed, Stiles goes to Scott and Isaac, kneeling next to them.

“Dude, we have to do something,” he tells Scott, because Scott always knows what to do. He’d been Stiles’ strength for years when they were kids. He can be that for him again.

Scott reaches behind and pulls out Allison’s walkie-talkie. “Try this,” he offers, still holding Isaac against him, who doesn’t seem willing to let Scott go just yet.

Stiles stands up, hands lifting the object closer to his face so he can see it when he makes a desperate noise. “Oh my god! It looks like someone sat on it!”

“Just try it!” Scott insists. “It has to work. It will, okay?”

Stiles makes an indignant noise, but he tries it anyway. “There’s still a signal!” he cries out. “Hello?” he speaks into it. “Resistance hotline? Is someone in there? For the love of god, say yes, say yes, say yes,” he murmurs. He waits a moment, but there’s nothing. “Fuck, I think it’s really broken.”

“Keep trying,” Scott speaks right against Isaac’s hair.

“Alright, yeah, I can do that. I’ll keep trying. That’s our plan, to keep trying. Keep trying before a bunch of rogue werewolves find us. Or maybe some of the evil hunters. Yeah, great plan. I love this plan!” Stiles sounds nearly out of it the more he keeps talking, but there is really no one to stop him.
“Hey, this is me trying,” he speaks into the receiver. “If you are there, whoever you are, it’d be awesome if you said something.” He keeps talking into it for a long time, so long he even sits down again. Eyes pinned on Derek, Stiles speaks the same words, over and over, knowing no one will ever hear them.

“Please, please someone answer,” he murmurs into the half smashed walkie-talkie. “Please, anyone.” He’s starting to hyperventilate at the thought of them never getting out of this forest, when someone finally answers.

“Kid?” A distorted voice breaks the silence of the night. “Son, is that you?”

“Dad!” he shouts into the receiver, eyes burning. “Are you okay? Who are you with?”

“Stiles,” his dad sighs in relief. “It’s so good to hear your voice. I’m with Chris and Allison. Scott left not too long ago, I’m not sure where he went. Is everyone okay there?”

“Dad, daddy, listen.” Stiles can’t answer the question, clutching the receiver until his knuckles are white. “Are you okay? Are you hurt? Please- I’”

“I’m fine, Stiles.” John sounds worried now. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah- yes.” Stiles lets out an humorless huff. “But- dad, Scott is here. He’s with Isaac. They are okay. But something happened. I don’t know how- They were supposed to protect me but they are gone now and I’”

“Who?” John asks frantically.

“Boyd.” Stiles pauses. “E-erica.” His voice wavers as Stiles finally breaks into quiet sobs, his laboring breath making it hard to speak.

Stiles imagines this is what hell on earth is like. His friends either dead or close to it while all responsibility falls on him. He needs to do something, but he doesn’t know what. His body feels like it’s buzzing, his skin tight around his bones, barely able to contain him. Stiles knows those symptoms. He’s been there before. But he’s not going to have a panic attack now. He has to be the strong one, the one standing when everyone else is down.

“Where’s Derek?” his dad asks through the walkie-talkie, his voice secure and firm, helping Stiles to breathe.

“He’s here.” Stiles actually points at him. “He’s injured but he’s fine. Well… Something’s up with him but I don’t think it’s physical.”

“Are you in danger?” his dad insists then.

“No, I think we’re safe here.” Stiles looks around, making sure his statement is actually true. “I have Scott anyway, we’ll be fine.”

“Alright kiddo, just be careful.” There’s a pause in the reception and Stiles thinks his dad is gone. “Stiles,” John suddenly says, static breaking the silence. “We did it. We stopped Gerard.”

“Tell me,” Stiles sighs, closing his eyes and leaning his head forward. He’s suddenly so tired.

“Ask Scott,” his dad says instead, which makes Stiles open his eyes and arch an eyebrow at his best friend, who shrugs slightly around Isaac.
“I will, don’t think I won’t,” he says, still looking at Scott like a promise.

“Alright, they’re telling me the area should be secured.” There’s a pause when the signal breaks. “Go back to where we left the trunks, but be careful anyway.”

“Sure, dad. You too, okay?” Stiles brings the walkie-talkie close to his face, his lips brushing the plastic as he says the next words. “I love you.”

“Love you too, kiddo.”

When the connection cuts out, the silence is almost deafening. No one says anything. Not Isaac, who still clings to a stoic Scott, or Derek, whose face is hidden in shadows as he curls in on himself.

“What now?” Scott finally asks, and Stiles knows he’s the one who will make the final decision, the responsible one if anything horrible happens to them. Staying seems secure for now, but for how long? But what if they find danger on the way to the secure area? Understanding there’s no way to know what’s the right decision to make, Stiles rises.

“You heard my dad,” he says.

Scott helps Isaac back to his feet and they start moving slowly in the direction of the trunks. But Derek doesn’t move. He doesn’t even react to Stiles’ words. Stiles can understand, though. The moment they leave this place, the moment they leave those corpses behind, it will become real. It will become absolute. There won’t be another chance to see Boyd and Erica.

Stiles kneels next to Derek, circling his shoulders slowly with his arm. “You can do this,” he murmurs right next to Derek’s ear. “Come on, Derek. I know how strong you are. You can do it. Let’s just concentrate on getting up. And then we can talk about walking. No pressure.” He doesn’t try to pull Derek up, though. His hold is only for comfort and support, not to force him. “I know it’s shitty, okay? I don’t want to leave them here, either. But they’ll be fine, Derek. Nothing can hurt them anymore.”

When nothing that he’s saying seems to work, Stiles tightens his hold, pressing his forehead to Derek’s temple. “Please, I need you to do this for me.” It takes him a moment but Derek stirs slowly and finally gets back on his feet, face still expressionless.

Stiles twines his fingers with Derek’s and turns them away from Boyd and Erica. He rubs his thumb over Derek’s hand and then takes the first step, hoping -praying- Derek will follow. Luckily, he does. Stiles guides them slowly out of there, step after step, alert at every little noise, afraid danger will find them. But soon, Stiles realizes the only ones left are the dead. The forest is silent around them. He suspects the time it took him to convince Derek to leave, Scott already reached the parking area with Isaac.

“Stiles!” his dad yells, approaching them once they’re in sight.

Stiles takes a shuddering breath, feeling a weight being lifted off his shoulders. Afraid of letting Derek go, he waits for his dad and hugs him single-armed. “It’s so good to see you,” he says, voice muffled against John’s shoulder.

When they pull back, John seems to realize the state Derek is in and he looks suddenly worried. “You should take him back to the camp, let a doctor take a look.”

“That was the plan,” Stiles says softly. “I just hated the idea of leaving without making extra sure you were okay.”
“I am.” His dad nods. “Will you be okay on your own? I need to stay here a while longer.”

“Sure.” Stiles tries to smile. “I’ll wait for you at the camp.”

They hug one last time, exchanging I love you’s before John leaves. Stiles turns to look at Derek, hoping against all hope that he will say something. But he doesn’t. A while later, when they start to see resistance people around, Stiles finds Scott and Isaac near the trunks, probably waiting for them. Without letting go of Derek, Stiles hugs his friend, taking a deep breath because it suddenly sinks in that Scott is alive. That’s another fear checked off the list.

Isaac doesn’t acknowledge them, and neither does Derek. He grows a bit stiffer but doesn’t say a word during the long drive back to the camp. The truck is full of severely injured people, and Scott spends the trip leaching the pain away from humans and werewolves alike. Meanwhile Stiles sits in between Derek and Isaac and tries really hard not to think.

Once they arrive, the camp is bursting with activity, the people who stayed behind apparently have gotten everything ready for all the wounded coming back from the battle. Derek is still healing, so Stiles takes them to the infirmary and sits him in a dark room, away from the frantic crowd, thinking he might like that better. Scott promises to come back later and takes Isaac somewhere else; Stiles isn’t sure where.

Derek sits on the mat and stays there, eyes lost, posture off-kilter. Stiles tries to talk to him, tries to tell him to lay down and get some rest, but Derek ignores him. He acts like no one is talking. Stiles is still speaking softly next to him, when Lydia shows up. As she approaches them, she’s asking a million questions that Stiles can’t follow because his brain feels like goo.

“Is it done?” Stiles realizes she’s asking after what he’s sure is her third repeat.

“Y-yeah, yes.” Stiles nods, clearing his throat. Derek is still sitting there, unmoving, ignoring them.

“He’s dead? You killed Peter?” Lydia insists.

Stiles’ gaze slides over to Derek, searching for some reaction, but there is nothing. Sighing, he scrubs his face and nods. Lydia makes a relieved sound and when Stiles finally looks at her, she’s smiling.

“We need a medic,” Stiles changes the topic, nodding at Derek and the arrow tip still buried on his shoulder.

“He got shot?” Lydia asks, already stepping closer and pulling the torn cloth away from the wound. Tisking her lips, she leaves and returns shortly after, pulling a cart with her. Lydia drags the cart over to the mat and puts on some gloves. Realizing what she’s about to do, Stiles jumps on his feet.

“Woah, wait!” he gestures with his hands. “What are you doing?”

“Taking that arrow head out of his shoulder so he can heal before there’s an infection,” Lydia explains calmly, coating Derek’s angry red skin with disinfectant before she grabs the scalpel. “Don’t panic, I know what I’m doing. And all the other doctors are too busy with the dying humans.”

Stiles doesn’t even have time to answer before she’s cutting the flesh around the arrow head in meticulous, careful movements, just enough to be able to pull it out. Through it all, Derek doesn’t even flinch once. He still looks absent, and that scares Stiles more than the blood and the big, metallic piece of crap Lydia pulls out of his shoulder.

“I’d usually have to stitch it up, but it’s already healing. See?” She points at the wound as Derek’s skin starts regenerating slowly. “I’d say it’s best to leave it uncovered and just wait for his body to do
“Alright, yeah.” Stiles licks his lips nervous, at a bit of a loss for what to do.

“Are you hurt anywhere?” Lydia asks him and Stiles hurries to shake his head. There’s nothing serious, anyway and it’s not the first time Stiles has some scratches and bruises. He can live with that.

“Alright.” Lydia pulls off the gloves and throws them in a trash can on the bottom shelf of the cart. She looks at Derek and then at Stiles, nodding like she’s come to a conclusion. “I’m going now,” she says without moving. “I’ll try to bring you clothes and blankets lat-” but she can’t finish the line because Stiles is pulling her in for a hug.

“Thank you,” he whispers against her hair. “Please tell my dad we’re here, if you see him.” And she nods, only a bit stiffly.

Once she’s gone, Stiles turns to Derek more determined than he was before.

“Alright.” Hands on his hips, Stiles stares down at him. “I don’t care what’s going on in that little head of yours right now, but you’ve been gutted and shot, and let’s not forget all the emotional scarring shit added to that. So we’re going to sleep. Sleeping is good, Derek. And I’m tired.” Stiles steps closer. “I don’t care if you don’t want to hear this, I know you’re still in there somewhere and I’m going to pull you out with teeth and claws if i have to. So let’s start with laying down on that mat and closing our eyes.”

Derek doesn’t react, which is not surprising. Stiles doesn’t care, he grabs Derek’s shoulders, pressing him down and, surprisingly, Derek lets him. Stiles tugs him softly and Derek complies in silence, laying down on the mat, eyes unfocused and open.

“None of that creepy staring at nothing crap, Derek.” Stiles lays next to him, spooning him from behind. “You’re closing your eyes.” When Derek doesn’t, Stiles insists. “Come on, Derek. Do it for me. I won’t close mine until you close yours.”

That seems to work, which means he’s still in there listening to what Stiles is saying. Good. Derek closes his eyes but doesn’t move. After a moment, Stiles realizes he’s shaking like he’s cold. So Stiles wraps himself around him like a protective blanket, covering him with limbs and kisses. He is tired but he knows sleep won’t come easy. He stays awake, holding Derek against his chest, face buried in his dirty hair. Stiles listens to his heart, his breathing, alert for any change. But there isn’t. Finally, hours after they left the battlefield, Derek sleeps and Stiles takes his first real gulp of air.

Derek wakes up, only a couple hours later, calling Stiles’ name in a choked out whisper. Stiles is right there, still wrapped around him.

“I’m right here,” he murmurs, tongue thick with sleep. “We’re fine, everything is gonna be okay.” Stiles prays for him not to hear the doubt in his voice and Derek seems to calm down regardless. He lays back against Stiles, snuggling closer.

“Isaac?” Derek asks after a long silence, voice rough and low.

“He’s alive, but I- I don’t know where he is.” Stiles decides to be honest. “Don’t ask me to go find out though, because I won’t leave you alone.”

Derek doesn’t insist.

Allison shows up a bit after that and Stiles is surprised to find out Derek is so deeply asleep he doesn’t notice her presence. “Hey,” he whispers, getting up from the mat and meeting her a few feet
“How is he?” Allison asks, nodding back at the unmoving form of Derek.

“I don’t really know,” Stiles says, ignoring the way his voice breaks. “I’m giving him time for now.”

Allison nods, like she understands. “My dad is helping get all my grandfather’s allies on file, the ones who survived. They’re taking them somewhere until they decide what to do.”

Stiles doesn’t know what to say, so he doesn’t.

“I brought you food!” Allison says after an awkward moment of silence. She offers Stiles a cup of hot soup and a spoon and Stiles swears he could cry right now.

“Did you bring more?” he asks, wanting to keep it for Derek if she didn’t. Allison smiles her lovely dimple smile and passes him a bag full of containers and food. “Oh my god, you’re awesome. Thanks.” He drinks the soup straight from the container.

“I went to see Scott and Isaac before,” she says while he’s finishing the soup, which is a bit unexpected but Stiles supposes she needed to let it out.

“How are they?” Stiles decides to ask.

Allison shrugs. “Scott won’t talk to me that much but it seems like Isaac is better. He woke up asking for food and a shower.” They both snort weakly, humorless.

“If you see them again,” Stiles says. “Please tell Isaac that Derek asked for him.”

“I was going to see Lydia before leaving, but I can do that,” she explains. “I just wanted to say goodbye.”

“You’re leaving?” Stiles can’t help the surprise in his voice.

“I want to help deal with what my family did in this war,” Allison explains, shrugging. “It wouldn’t feel right if I didn’t. But I want to come back. I mean, to Beacon Hills.”

“You will?” Stiles asks dumbfounded.

“That’s the idea.” Allison smiles weakly before hugging him. “I’ll see you soon.” Stiles waves her goodbye instead of saying what they’re both thinking; it’s doubtful they’ll see each other again any time soon.

Stiles leaves the bag next to the mat and goes back to being Derek’s personal blanket, wrapping himself around him. He doesn’t know for how long they sleep, but when he wakes up, Derek is already awake, eyes open and staring at nothing.

“What did I say about the creepy staring?” Stiles murmurs as a weak attempt at humor. He stretches and sits down. “Are you hungry?” Derek doesn’t reply. “Fine. I’m starving, you know? But we’ll eat whenever you want.”

Stiles sits there, waiting for Derek to do something. But he doesn’t. And the longer he waits, the more sure Stiles is that something is irreparably wrong with him. Something that he can’t fix by just being there for him. Something that Stiles isn’t good enough to fix.

Stiles is starting to feel short of breath when Derek sits suddenly up on the mat, head tilted down toward the bag with the containers. Stiles takes a deep breath, shaking slightly as he reaches over and
grabs it. Without noticing what he picked, he passes Derek an open container with food inside, and Derek complies and eats in silence. Stiles can't be sure, but he suspects Derek noticed his heart rocketing into what was most probably the beginning of a panic attack, and that's why he agreed to eat.

Stiles doesn't want to think of what's going to happen, doesn't want to think of how all this has scarred Derek in a way he can't even begin to understand. All he can do is live in the present, be there for Derek and take care of him the best way possible. All he can do is make sure Derek eats, sleeps and is safe. They'll work on everything else later.

After eating, Stiles makes Derek lay down again. He cuddles Derek, drawing him to his chest, arms around him, laying his face against Stiles’ neck, the way he knows Derek likes it. But Derek doesn’t react. He doesn’t push away, but doesn’t move either. He just stays there, allowing Stiles do whatever he wants with him. And that troubles Stiles more than if Derek had pushed him away.

His dad and Deaton visit them the next morning, just a day after the battle although it feels more like a year. Derek doesn’t get up or acknowledge them, but Stiles considers it pay back to Deaton for all the bull he’s pulled on him over the years.

“How are you doing, son?” John asks as they hug, and Stiles shrugs.

“Any change?” Deaton asks, nodding at Derek. Stiles can only shrug again, voice suddenly lost. “He just needs time, Stiles. Stay with him, be his anchor.”

“I don’t know what to do,” Stiles whispers. “You say be his anchor like I’ve any idea what that means.”

“You’re his emissary, Stiles.” Deaton pats his shoulder. “You can’t understand what that means, but you’re giving him strength just by being next to him. This is something he needs to sort out on his own, you can’t help him find shortcuts. But your presence helps.”

“Well, that’s just bullshit, doc. I’m not going to just sit around and wait for him to magically start talking again.”

“Not magically.” Deaton shakes his head. “The mind, same as the body, requires a healing process and time. It works different for each of us. Derek is still there, fighting.”

“I know that!” Stiles says, louder than he intended. “Derek is a fighter, he won’t give up.”

“Son,” John says, pulling him closer. “Let’s talk. Deaton will stay with Derek.”

Stiles straight out refuses to leave Derek, but then his dad insists and Stiles is too tired, too weak, to resist him.

“They are burning the corpses,” his dad explains, once they are out. “But I asked around and they won’t touch your friends.” John makes a pause, probably to give Stiles time to assimilate the information. “Do you understand what I’m saying? We can bury them but we need to be quick, son.”

“Alright.” Stiles feels numb as he speaks, nodding at his dad like he really understood what’s happening. “How long?”

“A few days, tops.”

“Okay, I can work with that time frame.” This is good, this is something Stiles can actually do. Dig a
grave, or two. Use his hands to create a few crosses, maybe. Feel like he can still do something useful.

“Son, I won’t be here,” John says softly. “The new council is forming, they offered me a position. We need a group of men and werewolves out there, visiting towns, spreading the news. I’m taking over, bringing as many military forces as possible.”

“You’re leaving?” Stiles asks incredulously, heart suddenly kicking inside his chest.

“I won’t disappear, I promise.” John circles his back. “Someone needs to demolish the borders, right? You know your mom would’ve loved to be there to see it. I wanna do this for her.”

Stiles can’t speak, the lump in his throat choking him. “Y-yeah, she would.”

“You need to stay here and take care of Derek,” his dad explains. “I know that’s where you want to be, and that’s fine. It’s about time you live your life, son.”

Stiles nods, trying to swallow through his choked up throat. “I don’t want to keep Derek here longer than needed.”

“That’s fine.” John nods. “Just tell Deaton, he’ll get the message to me somehow. He always does.”

Saying goodbye to his dad is actually harder than Stiles anticipated. They cling to each other for a long moment and when John finally steps back and turns to leave, Stiles can’t watch it happen. He goes back inside, shoulders slightly shaking as he tries to hold back the tears.

When Stiles sees Deaton sitting next to the mat where Derek is laying, eyes lost in the ceiling, he stops in his tracks, growing tense.

“I’ll leave you two alone,” Deaton says, standing up and approaching him. “I’ll be around in case you need anything. But I have the feeling you’ll be fine.”

When Stiles is sure he’s gone, he lays down next to Derek and throws an arm over his chest, face pressed against his shoulder. Stiles closes his eyes, letting the sensation of Derek next to him sink in.

“We’ve been through so much to find my dad and now he’s gone again.” Stiles snorts bitterly. “We’re such fucking idiots.”

Derek doesn’t answer, unsurprisingly.

“Derek?” Stiles asks softly, eyes looking up, searching the other man’s face for a reaction. “Derek, please. Did you hear what I just said? My dad left.” Stiles hates the way his voice sounds, small and broken. “Everything is falling apart and I can’t do anything. I can’t do what you guys do. I just-” Stiles stops talking, unable to voice his insecurities and fears.

An hour later, Derek sits up before Stiles realizes they have company. He doesn't speak, doesn't try to reach out. And Isaac doesn't, either. They stare at each other and Stiles, still laying on the mat next to Derek, grows exponentially more worried with each passing second.

"I'm sorry," are Derek's first real words since they arrived. Isaac makes a broken noise, like a whimper. And he's suddenly on his knees in front of Derek, embracing him. Stiles is still on his side, facing them and when he notices the tremor running down Derek's back, he can't help kneeling down on the mat and embracing him from behind, arms circling around Isaac, too.

"It wasn't your fault," Isaac murmurs.
The walls seem to come crashing down at those words. Derek cries, openly. Desperately. He clings to Isaac at first, until he turns around and buries his face in Stiles’ stomach. And Stiles is right there, relief flooding his veins, because Derek is reacting, he’s doing something. He doesn’t even notice when Isaac leaves. He holds Derek until he stops crying, Stiles’ dirty shirt wet against his flushed face. And then they lay down and Derek wraps himself around Stiles, actively holding onto him. And that’s probably the best feeling Stiles has experienced in what feels like a lifetime.

Nothing is magically fixed after that, but the next time Derek wakes up, he asks to use the bathroom. It takes Stiles a while to find it, but the trip helps him to understand the calibre of what happened that night. The camp is packed with wounded and injured. Stiles also sees the piles of dead outside, ready to be moved away, probably to incinerate to contain infections.

Before the battle, Stiles never had the feeling that this was it, that what they were about to do was such a monstrous, determining event. But now he realizes that was exactly what it was. What went down in those woods will be written into history books for future generations to read. And the idea seems ridiculous. It doesn’t make him feel any better, it doesn’t make him feel like his friends died for a cause. Stiles feels like shouting from the top of his lungs what a shitty thing they did. What a shitty thing war was, what a shitty thing they had to do to stop it.

When he’s back in their little corner, cuddling Derek, Stiles can’t stand the silence any longer.

“I know you’re still in there,” he whispers next to Derek’s ear. “You’re probably fighting your way out of this, whatever that is. I don’t know how PTSD works with werewolves, but if someone can overcome something like this, my money is on you. You stubborn son of a bitch, I know you can do this. So stop beating around the bushes and just snap out of it.” He shakes Derek a bit, unable to stop himself.

Stiles can’t stop thinking of Deaton’s words. Being an Emissary sounded more like being a diplomat for your pack, or that’s what he had imagined. All that talk about sparks still makes no sense to him, anyway. Stiles doesn’t care what Deaton says, he can’t accept his mere presence is supposed to be enough. He’s restless, in need to do more. He cares too much about Derek to just sit and wait. The sudden realization makes him bolt upright, sitting on the mat next to Derek.

“You know what? Fuck this,” Stiles says, resolutely. “We are not like other packs, we don't need to follow the same rules. I may not understand what you're going through but I know what it's like to lose someone you love. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do, but I don’t care. I’ll come up with something. I’ll help you, even if that means bringing you back kicking and screaming, you hear me asshole?”

Stiles is hungry and cold. He’s worried he went too far, that he didn’t go far enough. The feeling of helplessness doesn’t go away, it stays there pressing him down and making him feel very small. But he doesn’t let go of Derek, no matter what. Stiles presses his forehead against Derek’s side and wraps himself around him, resolved to stay there no matter how long it takes Derek to win this fight.

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Derek doesn’t know how long he’s been like this. Time stopped working in those woods. He’s in a state of mindlessness, yet he still feels trapped. He’s in a state of soullessness, yet he can still feel pain. His body has become an infinite prison. He’s motionless, humanless. Gone.
Only he’s not.

Derek starts to regain consciousness in stages. He remembers Isaac, his scent, his warmth. Derek remembers cathartic words, but can’t remember what they were. He remembers feeling a cold, wet cloth against his feverish cheeks. Can’t be sure but he thinks it was Stiles’ shirt from the smell. As he comes back slowly to his body, Derek notices the wound still on his side, almost healed but still tender. It pulls and burns whenever he moves, and Derek holds onto that sensation. He uses it to remain there, until the moment he feels Stiles’ hot breath against his neck and his whole body warms up.

Tense, clenched muscles go slowly soft. Derek can feel his lungs again, working evenly. His eyes feel dry, so Derek blinks. His unfocused sight clear after a while and he can see the ceiling over him. His hands, a moment ago cold and shivering, palm around, feeling the rough material of the mat.

Derek is looking for Stiles, he knows Stiles promised to stay with him. But he’s alone. Heart beating inside his sore chest, Derek looks around. His body still feels like rubber, disconnected and off. He doesn’t really move, just tilts his head back and forth slowly, scanning the room.

"You can't stay here, we need the room,” someone suddenly says, startling him. Derek doesn’t recognize the voice, doesn't even realize it comes from someone talking to Stiles at first.

"What do you mean you need the room? We need the room!” Stiles protests. He sounds close by, but Derek can’t find him.

"Neither your nor his conditions are critical,” the person explains. “I suggest you find bunks in the main barrack we facilitated for the wounded if you still-”

“Listen here, okay?” Stiles sounds pissed. “This man is the reason why we are all still here. So I suggest you take your suggestion and shove it where the sun doesn’t shine before I do it for you.”

Agitated by Stiles’ tone, Derek struggles until he manages to sit up and finally sees them. Stiles is talking to a woman right outside the room he’s in. With wobbling legs, Derek stands up and approaches them.

“Please, understand I’m not the one deciding here,” the woman is saying. And before Stiles can snap back, Derek has reached them.

"We’ll go,” he rasps out.

Stiles whiplashes so fast he nearly trips over his own feet. “Derek!” he nearly shouts. “You’re-you’re-” Derek grabs his shoulder, seeking contact. Stiles moves quickly, hands running up Derek’s arms to his shoulders. His fingers feel like pure electricity when Stiles cups his face, awaking Derek, making him take a big gulp of air.

“Oh my god,” Stiles babbles. He doesn’t seem able to stop. “You’re standing! You’re talking! Derek, Derek, you’re here.” Stiles says his name like a prayer, like a miracle. It leaves his lips in a rushed whisper, and Derek holds onto him, opening up, finally allowing Stiles in and pushing the darkness aside.

“If that’s settled,” the woman says softly. “I’ll take you to the barracks.”

“Back off!” Stiles snaps, turning around to look at her a moment before he goes back to Derek, burying his face in Derek’s neck to murmur nonsensically against his skin.

Derek looks at the woman over Stiles’ shoulder and nods. “We’re going,” he whispers, throat hurting
from disuse.

“But Derek,” Stiles protests softly. “After all you did for them, they can’t just—”

“I want to go,” Derek interjects, interlocking their fingers together and leaning his forehead to Stiles’. Derek closes his eyes, drinking in the warmth and closeness. Stiles huffs, discontent. He leans back to look at Derek in the eye for a long moment before he gives in, nodding as his shoulders drop.

“Follow me,” the woman indicates as she starts walking toward the barracks.

Derek can feel Stiles’ eyes pinned on him, the way he twists his fingers just slightly under Derek’s grasp. He’s still feeling unsure in his footing, a bit disconnected in a way that makes him feel like the only thing anchoring him to the ground is Stiles’ touch.

Once in the barracks, Derek winces. The smell of death and decay is unbearable, and the depressive mood is suffocating. But Stiles is still there, releasing his hand to place a warm palm against the lower part of Derek’s back, guiding him in. And somehow that makes everything better.

“There aren’t two bunks left together,” the woman explains, pointing at the full room. “One of you could stay here,” she points at a bunk a few rows back. “And the other could stay there,” the woman points at the end of the room.

“No fucking way!” Stiles protests automatically. “Are you out of your mind? Didn’t you hear anything I said?” He gives an annoyed sigh. “Whatever, we’ll use one bunk.”

As Stiles guides Derek to the one closest, Derek hears the woman saying something about rude assholes and he can’t help but smile. The sensation feels weird on his face, like learning to walk again. Derek thinks he’s broken, and he’s afraid for a moment that Stiles won’t want him anymore once he realizes. But then Stiles is smiling at him, patting the ratty mat with an inviting gesture and Derek feels reassured.

They lay down together and even though the mat is small, Stiles manages not to touch him. They are on their sides, facing each other. Stiles is looking at him so intensely, Derek isn’t sure what to do.

“You…” Stiles trails off. “I mean.” He licks his lips nervously. “How are you feeling?”

Derek shrugs, because he isn’t sure yet.

“Do you remember… everything?” Stiles asks tentatively.

Derek nods.

“Can you- God, Derek. Please, use your words.” Stiles huffs.

“I remember,” Derek finally says, smiling softly at Stiles’ palpable exasperation.

“I know you were never the most talkative guy.” Stiles says. “But I really missed your voice, so if you could, you know, use it, that’d be awesome.”

“I can do that.” Derek reaches forward, fingers sliding over Stiles’ arm, up to his neck. “I want to do this, too.”

Stiles takes a shaky breath, lips trembling as he smiles. He closes his eyes when Derek’s hand wraps around the back of his neck, seeking his pulse and warmth. Derek leans forward, pressing their foreheads carefully together.
“I’m here,” he whispers.

Stiles makes a choked out sound, like he was trying to hold back a cry, and falls forward, wrapping himself around him in a way that makes Derek’s stomach clench.

“I’m afraid this isn’t real,” Stiles finally admits, voice frantic and small. “That I’ll fall asleep and when I wake up, you’ll–” he stops abruptly.

Derek runs his fingers through Stiles’ hair, trying to soothe him. “I’m here,” he tries to say clearly and firm. “I’m not going anywhere.”

When Stiles finally falls asleep, Derek realizes he must’ve been exhausted and wonders how long he’s been in that catatonic state. He wonders if Stiles slept at all during that time. Derek should be tired, but he can’t sleep. He spends hours cuddling Stiles and petting him, reassuring himself that this is all real and using Stiles’ presence as a constant pull to bring him back, like a light at the end of the tunnel.

When Stiles wakes up, Derek knows something is wrong almost immediately. “What?” he whispers, trying not to disturb everyone sleeping around them.

“Boyd and Erica,” Stiles murmurs. There’s a pregnant second, where Derek’s heart stops beating, before Stiles bolts up and look him in the eye. “I’m sorry! I didn’t think, I–”

“It’s fine.” It’s not, but Derek wants to believe it will be, eventually. He can’t even say their names, not even think them for that matter. But he supposes that’s grief and there’s nothing wrong with that.

“I just remembered,” Stiles says. “Today is the last day we can bury them. Or they’ll be burned.”

Derek feels short of breath but he decides it’s okay. He can deal with the pain, he can accept it. Derek wants to embrace the loss, the emptiness inside of him where his two betas used to be. He believes that’s the only way to honor their memory, to somehow keep them alive. He is still not sure he deserves that, but they sure do.

“Let’s do it.” Derek sits up slowly and Stiles hurries to follow.

“Let me–” Stiles stutters. “I-I’ll be back.”

He leaves in a hurry, Derek suspects to make the necessary arrangements. He’s restless while waiting, knees jerking and fists bumping against them. Derek is itching to do something all of a sudden. When Stiles shows up again, he jumps off the bunk, hurrying to meet up with him midway.

“Come with me,” Stiles whispers in a rushed way, guiding Derek out and into a dark corridor. They walk farther and farther away from where everyone seems to be living, until they reach what Derek knows has to be the morgue. He can smell the decay long before they arrive.

Stiles takes him to a small, dark room where, on top of two gurneys there are two bodies covered by sheets. Derek knows Stiles is talking, he’s probably still holding onto his wrist. But Derek can’t feel it, he can’t hear anything. Taking a shaky step closer, Derek feels something break inside his chest, like a cord that was tensed up, ready to snap. He steps in between the two gurneys and extends both hands, fingers ghosting over the bodies barely brushing against the sheets.

Derek closes his eyes, head tilted down. He is unable to say what he’s feeling but he can still think the words. He hopes it’s enough for Boyd and Erica, that the whispered words in his head talking of regret and guilt reach them somehow.
At the presence of Isaac, Derek turns around to acknowledge him. This is his pack, after all. They nod at each other and move without exchanging a word. Derek moves toward Erica, arms sliding under her cold body and lifting her against his chest. He doesn’t pull the sheet off, unable to face her just yet.

Scott is there with Isaac, helping him carry Boyd and the three of them carry the bodies outside, Stiles following just behind them.

The midday light blinds Derek, squinting for a moment until his eyes get used to the brightness. He doesn’t wait for the others, hurrying forward as the itch gets worse. When he sees the beta waiting for them, he snatches the shovel out of his hand awkwardly and keeps walking, away from everything.

He walks blinded by the sunlight and unshed tears, feeling sick to his stomach every time he breathes and the smell of decay fills his nostrils. Derek walks until his calves are on fire. He doesn’t even look around when he lays Erica down carefully atop the grass and dead leaves strewn about the ground. Without thinking about it, he turns around and starts digging a hole right there. He doesn’t even care where they are, or if they’ll end up using it. He just needs to do something, to busy himself with physical labor. The burn in his stiff muscles is a welcoming balm to his scarred mind, something Derek had no idea he was seeking but that he realizes now he needs.

It’s only when he’s deep to his hips, that Derek realizes the spot is actually nice. They are in the top of a low hill, a few small trees growing to one side. Wiping the sweat off his forehead, Derek observes the two trees and decides this is as good a place as any. He refuses to think further than that, tuning everything else out before he goes back to work.

After a while, he realizes Isaac is next to him, digging in silence. It takes them a long time, even with their strength. The ground is unforgiving and dry, the sound of the shovels hitting the soil terrifying. It’s like digging into his own heart. And maybe that’s exactly what he’s doing. Derek doesn’t know, but they manage to get the graves ready just as the sun is starting to set on the horizon.

They carry both bodies together, laying them down with the utmost care. Derek kneels next to Erica first, pulling the sheet away to pet her hair and cheeks. He leans forward and kisses her forehead, ignoring the small droplets of tears falling to her face. Holding her hand, Derek says his goodbye as well as he can. He remembers his family had a ritual for when a pack member died, but when they lost everyone, he and Laura did nothing, and since then he’s refused to bring back the tradition. There are things better left in the past.

When he kneels next to Boyd, his shoulders are shaking and Derek is barely holding onto control. It’s only when Stiles steps closer and places a careful hand in his shoulder, that Derek manages to take the first big gulp of air. He presses his forehead to Boyd’s for a long time, murmuring promises and regrets.

And then all that is left is covering the graves. Digging was torture, but this is the real goodbye. Every bit of dirt that falls onto their bodies is like an arrow flying straight to Derek’s heart. When the work is done, the sun has all but set while everything inside of Derek is unsettled and torn.

After that, the four of them find a place together in the barracks. Days go by and they settle into a routine. Scott starts helping his mother in the infirmary. Derek likes to sit down and observe him, see how kind he is with the dying, how he takes the pain away until it’s nearly too much for him. He can’t explain it, but looking at Scott makes Derek feel less defective, like there’s still good left in this world. Like there’s still good left in him.
One afternoon, Derek is looking at Scott working when an alpha approaches him. “Mr. Hale, would you please accompany me to the operations room?”

“What for?” Derek asks calmly.

“Sir…” the man stutters. “The council is forming, everyone is waiting for you to claim your position.”

Derek considers that for a moment. He knows Deaton wanted him to join in the next phase, he knows the council needs a good representative for the werewolves, someone willing to make sacrifices for their race. Deaton believes that werewolf is him, but Derek knows best.

"I'm done," he proclaims. "Don't count on me."

“But Alpha Hale.” The man even bows a little. “We need a representative.”

“You want a leader? Take him.” Derek points at Scott, a few bunks away helping leach someone’s pain away. “You saw him in the operations room, and I saw him on the battlefield. That’s your man, not me.”

The alpha stumbles a little, clearly torn between insisting or doing what he’s being told. In the end, he leaves. Probably to inform the council so they can make a decision. Derek doesn’t care what they do. But no matter what, he knows Scott is the right choice.

Derek raises, leaving the infirmary. Without hesitation and knowing what he wants for the first time in a long time, Derek walks up to Stiles and embraces him from behind, chest pressed against his back.

"Take me home,” he asks, burying his face on Stiles’ shoulder.

And so Stiles does.

They borrow a car and fill it with supplies under Stiles’ insistence. Isaac and Scott come to say goodbye, and Derek knows instantly that Isaac is worried, maybe even scared. He grasps his shoulder, ignoring when Isaac flinches a little, and pulls him closer into an embrace.

“It’s okay,” he murmurs. “I understand.”

They will always be pack, but not like other werewolves understand it. By letting Isaac go, Derek knows he’ll never truly lose him. And that’s enough for him. In a way, he lost his pack in those woods. The thought sits heavy in his gut, but Derek will have to accept it and live the rest of his life with that loss. They have a second chance to start over and Derek wants to try this time, for real.

Stiles drives them away from the resistance camp, and Derek watches Isaac and Scott as they become dots in the rear-view mirror before completely disappearing.

As they move through fallen borders and in and out of small towns and bigger cities, they notice the changes. Some insignificant ones, some more important. But each one, no matter how small, gives them hope. Derek knows Stiles misses his dad and Scott, but he also catches glimpses of optimism in him when they talk about the future. And Derek decides that’ll have to do for now.

“Where to?” Stiles asks as they finally drive in Beacon Hills.

“I’ve been thinking about it,” Derek says. “I’d like to stay at your place. Fix it up again, maybe make it ours.”
Derek is actually itching to work with his hands again. There is so much pent up energy inside of him, he feels caged. He believes keeping himself busy will help his healing process, help his thoughts to settle, his mind to center.

“What about the abandoned train?” Stiles jokes. “Not good enough for you?”

When Derek snorts, Stiles breaks into laughter and Derek realizes it’s been a long time since he last heard Stiles laugh like that. He decides then, as Stiles parks in his old driveway, that he’ll do his best to hear it as often as possible for the rest of his life.

Derek wants to believe there is a second chance for everyone. Or a third. He wants to believe, no matter what he went through, that he can still live with his scars. That, even after everything he lost, he’ll still be able to find himself under all the regrets and pain. He does believe he’s still capable of good, that he can still offer something good and that’s why he keeps fighting. That’s why he’ll always keep fighting.

As they approach the front door, Derek has a feeling of déjà vu. He remembers when he brought Stiles back home for the first time, how lost and hurt Stiles was. As Stiles fumbles with the knob, Derek realizes he hasn't had a home since his family’s burned to the ground so many years ago. He's never called any place where he's been living a home in all these years. And as he passes the threshold, Derek realizes he didn’t because he never wanted one.

Until now.

They walk through the different rooms, eyes lingering on bullet holes and trashed furniture. Derek follows Stiles to the back porch, where they lean against the railing to look at the sun setting behind the woods in silence.

“What now?” Derek asks softly, eyes lingering on the horizon.

“Now?” Stiles asks, smile spreading slowly across his face as he holds Derek’s hand. “Now we start over.”
Derek puts the book down on the bedside table when he hears Stiles getting out of the shower. Laying back on their bed, he feels the soft sheets under his naked skin and looks up at the green pastel ceiling. Stiles insisted on that color, said green represented hope and new beginnings.

Derek smiles faintly, thinking how lucky he is. The first months adjusting to this new life were pretty hard on Stiles, but he never faltered. Derek used to think it was only a matter of time before he’d give up on them. But it never happened. No matter what, Stiles was always there, even if sometimes he ran out of patience.

They’ve always been so good at fighting anyway, but those months they exceeded at it. He can still hear Stiles' desperate shouts whenever he tried to discuss something. But Derek was always better with his body than his words anyway. So they'd fight and Derek would end up shoving Stiles against a wall or any other hard surface, pressing their bodies together. Just a desperate attempt at stopping them from going too far, from letting something shift between them. Derek would kiss him desperately, knowing Stiles was already half hard in his pants.

The first months all they did was fight and fuck. Stiles literally fucked Derek’s anger and resentment out of his body. He’d ride him until Derek was nearly keening, until his eyes were damp and his cheeks wet. He’d give Derek exactly what he needed in a way that Derek could accept.

They fought desperately, fucked even more fiercely. But there were times, nights when Derek would wrap himself around Stiles and somehow Stiles would know. He’d just press Derek down and make love to him, so tender and loving Derek would come apart under him. Holding onto Stiles for dear life, feeling the waves crashing down his battered body and holding onto it, holding onto his anchor.

They were terrible at dealing with their problems. Neither of them knew how to express what they felt, but their bodies never stopped understanding each other and speaking their own language. It took Derek months to feel like himself again. It took even longer for Stiles to stop worrying about him. They are both good at pretending, though, and that’s what they did for a long time, until one day there was no need to pretend anymore. They are the most imperfect in their perfection, they understand each other in ways other people can’t. They fight and fuck and, to the outside world it probably makes no sense, but it does to them.

After moving back to Beacon Hills, the town council offered Stiles a position. And Derek had to fight him with tooth and claw until Stiles agreed to accept the job. He didn’t want to leave Derek alone so much, so Derek made good on his suggestion and starting fixing Stiles’ house.

And once he starts, Derek gives himself to the task with a mindless determination, only realizing how cathartic it is after he’s been at it for several weeks. Stiles never tells him what to do with his family house, the only time he does is to ask Derek to take the wardrobe in the entrance out. And maybe it’s not the most practical thing to do, but Derek understands his reasons so he does.

Once the living room is fixed and all the bullet holes are covered, Derek decides to start on the house next door. And then the next one. That's what he's been doing for almost a year now. He fixes the houses in Stiles’ old neighborhood as if he knew who was moving in. He knows the houses will be empty for a long while still, until people finally start to move out of the refugee camps and into the cities again.
But Derek doesn't care. He doesn't paint the walls, lifts floors, pull up plumbing and fix ceilings because people need him to. He does it for himself. Physical labor keeps him busy and centered, and so that's what he does. He was always good with his hands, so he just changes the activity. Now his calloused hands are busy fixing the town he was born in.

Derek can hear Stiles toweling himself dry before he moves to the sink to brush his teeth. He remembers the day they talked about Claudia, how she hated the state their neighborhoods were in, how she wanted to find a way to fix it. Derek had been thinking about her a lot by then, that's why he decides to adopt her idea, finding it fitting to work on her legacy this way.

Not even five months after the final battle, Derek receives an official, sealed letter from the new government, requesting his services in werewolf matters, but Derek declines. After losing Erica and Boyd, something fundamental changes in his core. Derek can’t stand the thought of involving himself any longer with anything related to the war. He wants to live a simple life, to heal his wounds, the ones buried down under years of denial and the new ones. Derek wants to start over. He’s content with his small life back in Beacon Hills, with his small project to rebuild the town and the small group of people that make him happy.

Maybe it’s selfish, maybe it’s not the right thing to do. Maybe he should think of all the lives he could be helping. But Derek can’t make himself care. He knows there will always be someone to replace him. After all, he isn’t that important in the vast scheme of things.

No, he’s not that important to the world, but no matter what, Derek can always count on getting back home to Stiles. Every night, without exception, he buries his face in the crook of Stiles’ neck, finding their mingled scents there. The mere touch is like reaching home, making sense to what they do, no matter how hard it is.

They spend the first months alone, until one day Scott and Isaac show up unannounced on their door. Derek was just putting the finishing touches on the house next door, so they move in and paint the walls. He doesn’t have to ask, Scott goes to him willingly to explain what happened after they left the resistance camp. He’s still working for them, which means he still has to travel occasionally but he’s been assigned to Beacon Hills. He seems happy, and Derek is glad they took his advice and contacted Scott for the position.

He holds back the conversation with Isaac for a long time, until they are both in a good place, until Derek believes they can talk without shattering their fragile bond. Derek lost all his betas that night in the woods, he’s known from the start. But still, it’s good when he finally talks about it with Isaac. It’s ironic, but talking about not being pack anymore actually helps them to grow closer. And maybe Derek is wrong, maybe after all these months living next door, after all the dinners together and the movie nights and just being there for each other in general, maybe they are pack after all. Just not a conventional one, but still exactly what they all need.

After months of mail correspondence, Stiles’ father calls one afternoon to celebrate that phone lines are back up. Stiles cries on the phone for ten minutes straight when John announces he’s coming back to Beacon Hills. He says he thought about it and Claudia would want him to spend the rest of his life, however long it is, next to their son. John talks about the new government, how they are well settled now, how they don’t need him anymore. He talks about all the borders being demolished and promises Stiles to be back home for his birthday.

Almost eight months after that, Lydia moves back to town, too. No one really knows where she’s been all this time, but Derek suspects she never gave up searching for Jackson. They don’t see her that much, but it’s still not a surprise when she becomes mayor of Beacon Hills shortly after her arrival. She brings a lot of good changes and speeds up some of the processes, too. She’s good at her
job, efficient and determined. But Derek suspects she’s lonely. He knows Stiles tries to bring her to their family dinners, but she always refuses. After being a loner for a long time, Derek suspects he can understand her better than anyone else and maybe that makes him the closest person Lydia has now, but Derek doesn’t think much of it.

The peace is a bit disturbed when Chris and Allison Argent come back almost a year after the war. Derek can hear Scott and Isaac fighting next door a couple of times, but he stays out of it. Even when Stiles inevitably gets involved because of his best friend, he stays out of it, too. No matter what, Derek is pretty sure he’ll never be able to get involved with the Argents again. He finally found peace in this world and is in no hurry to test it.

Everything goes back to normal a few weeks after Allison arrives, though. Derek doesn’t know the details, doesn’t care, but Stiles says Scott and Allison bumped into each other at the grocery store and she invited him to coffee, which ended up in them finally talking. All Derek cares about is that Isaac seems to be happy, so whatever is happening between Scott and Allison is something he approves of.

Derek is still staring at the green ceiling, lost in his thoughts, when Stiles comes out of the bathroom. He walks over to the bed, dropping the towel and laying next to him, snuggling closer when Derek lifts his arm in an inviting gesture.

“Come here,” Derek murmurs, lips brushing his temple. Stiles sighs, burrowing his face in the crook between Derek’s shoulder and his neck while Derek slides his arm under him to pull Stiles half on top of him.

“Someone getting his cuddle on?” Stiles teases, licking Derek’s neck slowly up to his jaw.

Derek snorts, lips parting when Stiles bites his chin. He groans, pressing Stiles closer, who slides his arms under Derek’s armpits to circle his chest. He rubs his face back and forth against his chest hair and Derek can’t help the purr that escapes him. They snuggle together, finding a comfortable enough position.

"I've been thinking," Derek says after a while, trying to sound nonchalant. He pauses, though, suddenly unsure of how to follow up.

“Proud of you babe,” Stiles teases, trailing kisses along Derek’s pecs.

“Funny,” Derek deadpans, running his fingers through Stiles’ hair anyway. "Well, I was talking to the architect that helped rebuild that old house at the end of the street and he said it'd be possible to rebuild the Hale house.”

“Oh?” Stiles breathes out, growing still on top of him.

“Make it bigger, too,” Derek adds after a pause.

"Bigger? What for?" Stiles ask, and Derek can hear the frown in his voice.

"I remembered what your dad said, about all the orphaned kids," Derek says carefully. "The place is too big for the two of us anyway, but I think my family would’ve liked to see our house still in use.”

Stiles raises his head, wide eyes staring at Derek. "Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"I mean, these kids need a place to stay and I need something to do." Derek shrugs.

Stiles hesitates for a moment, thinking. Derek can hear his frantic heartbeat, almost deafening in the
silence of the moment.

"Hale Pack Foster Home," Stiles finally says, smirking.

Derek blinks in surprise a moment before he smiles, feeling a warming in his chest only Stiles can give him. "I like the sound of that."

"I bet Isaac would want to help," Stiles offers, flopping back down on Derek's chest, kissing him before snuggling closer.

"Scott too, maybe," Derek says softly, eyes closed, arms around Stiles. "If his job allows him the time."

"You know you're gonna have Allison involved, then." Stiles smirks against his skin. "Those three are a package deal these days."

"That's good," Derek murmurs. "I'm gonna need the help."

"I'm always available to give you a hand," Stiles teases, face rubbing its way up to Derek's neck. Stiles nuzzles the line of his throat with his nose, sliding between Derek's legs and pressing closer. Derek arches his body, welcoming the heat and the pressure. The weight of Stiles' body anchors him in a way that always makes Derek rumble in his chest with satisfaction.

"I could use an extra something right now," Derek murmurs, eyes still closed, although he can't help the smirk.

"You don't say," Stiles nips his throat as he palms Derek's half erection. He sucks a big hickey on Derek's collarbone, leaning back to look at it slowly disappearing. And Derek can't help but snort at his satisfied expression. Stiles looks almost smug as he lowers to his chest, dotting his skin with hickies that disappear as he keeps moving down.

"Where are you going?" Derek asks huskily, pupils blow up and breath catching in his throat as Stiles licks his way down Derek's happy trail, ignoring his now fully interested cock in favor of licking a line up the V of Derek's hips.

"To help you with this." Stiles pushes Derek's legs apart and he moves willingly, widening the gap himself. "Fuck, you're so beautiful." Stiles runs his fingers over the inside of Derek's thighs. "I'm never going to get used to it."

"Shut up." Derek rolls his eyes, looking up at the pastel green ceiling. He doesn't take compliments very well, no matter how many times Stiles voices them.

"Make me." Stiles flashes a cheeky grin, head poised right on top of Derek's fully erected cock. Derek arches an eyebrow, silently accepting the challenge. Holding the base of his cock, he tilts it forward until the tip kisses Stiles' mouth, rubbing it slowly back and forth over his flushed lips.

"Open up." Derek palms Stiles' throat, holding him in place and waiting until Stiles has his mouth wide open before sliding inside. "Yeah, just like that. Nice and slow." Stiles moans around his cock, closing his eyes with a blissed out expression on his face. "You are beautiful. God, especially like this."

Stiles sucks eagerly as his only reply, leaning forward until his nose is brushing Derek's pubes, deep throating him with abandon. His lips cover Derek's fingers still around the base of his cock, and Derek starts to jerk off at the feeling of slickness in his palm. His other hand is still around Stiles’
throat, feeling his muscles work around him, and the feeling is enough to make his toes curl.

“I’m not gonna last, fuck-.” Derek curses, squeezing his eyes closed.

He hasn’t taken his next breath before Stiles is pulling back, cleaning his mouth and chin with the back of his hand. “That won’t do,” he smirks. “I want you inside of me for that.”

Derek throws his head back, hand tightening around the base of his throbbing cock to prevent himself from coming. When he manages to look again, Stiles is on his knees, straddling Derek’s thighs as he uncaps the lube and pours some in his fingers. Having access to lube is one of the signs that they are officially out of wartime, or so that’s what Stiles always says.

“Let me see,” Derek speaks roughly, grabbing Stiles and forcing him to lean forward until he’s splashed on top of Derek, his face buried on the pillow above Derek’s head. Lifting his head over Stiles’ back, Derek parts his ass cheeks to see what Stiles’ long fingers are doing to himself.

“Another finger?” he asks breathlessly, the sign of Stiles working himself open enough to rebuild the pressure at the base of his cock again.

“Yeah, I can- fuck, I can do that.” Stiles nods against the pillow as he adds a second finger, body clenching on top of Derek as his knuckles breach inside and Derek buckles up, unable to hold back.

“I need to be inside of you,” he murmurs against Stiles’ exposed neck, forgetting himself for a moment and giving him a big hickey. Derek sucks the delicate skin where his pulse is, lapping over the mark a few times, nudging it with his nose. Stiles whines, thrusting against Derek’s stomach already slick with his pre-come. But he doesn’t stop, in fact he gets another finger inside, groaning at the pressure but shoving back against his hand anyway.

“Fuck, Stiles. Please, just let me-” Derek nearly pleads.

It seems to do the trick, though, because Stiles is suddenly back on his knees, hands on Derek’s chest as Derek aligns himself, ready for him. He watches as Stiles sits very slowly on his cock, and the view of flesh disappearing is enough to make Derek’s throat click. But Stiles doesn’t sit all the way down. The tease barely gets the tip in before he stops, playfully smile on his face as he looks expectantly down at Derek.

Derek arches an eyebrow, hands closing around Stiles’ waist. He thrusts up as he pushes him down, but Stiles manages to struggle away, turning it into a moot effort. He’s openly laughing by now, so Derek growls playfully and grabs him, flipping them over hard and fast. They bounce on the bed, Stiles laughing in delight, a husky sound that makes Derek shiver with anticipation. Pressing him down against the mattress, Derek leans on his elbow and lays next to him, capturing his lips in a fierce kiss.

Stiles laughs against his mouth, sounding happy and alive, sounding exactly like what Derek needs. Still smiling, Stiles steals a kiss before he twists around beneath Derek, pressing his back to Derek’s chest, head turned back to look at him with a challenging smirk.

“Lift your leg.” Derek nudges the line of skin behind his ear, hand already on the back of Stiles’ knee. He guides himself back inside Stiles, slowly thrusting all the way in this time, shuddering when he feels Stiles tightening around him. Derek slides his arm behind Stiles’ leg, pulling it up against his chest, opening him up just because he can, exposing Stiles in the privacy of their bedroom where only Derek can see him.

Sliding the other arm under Stiles’ chest, Derek holds him firmly against him. He circles Stiles’ neck
with his hand, not really applying real pressure, just securing him. And Stiles moans shamelessly, nearly keening as Derek starts pounding him.

“Fuck- fuck me, yeah,” Stiles stutters, completely out of breath.

Derek growls, lips parting to close around Stiles’ shoulder. He doesn’t bite down, not yet. Just holds him there. Derek has Stiles exactly where he wants him, and he knows Stiles is exactly where he wants to be, too.

“Bite me,” Stiles pleads after a while, voice breaking in a moan when Derek tilts his hips and thrusts sharply into him.

He obeys, teeth pressing against Stiles’ shoulder to the point of almost breaking skin, until Stiles is whimpering and squirming against him, shoving frantically back against his cock. Derek lets go of his shoulder and leans forward to find Stiles’ lips instead. The angle is a bit weird, but Stiles bends his head and they manage to lock their mouths, tongues tangling together in a messy kiss. Derek loves the intimacy, the way his mouth seems to be made to fit in with Stiles’. He can’t get enough of Stiles’ mouth, the bow of his top lip, the fullness of his bottom one. He loves to suck and nip them until Stiles is panting, lips flushed red and swollen. The closeness of it all and what it means never fails to take Derek’s breath away.

Moving his hand from behind Stiles’ knee, Derek strokes the inside of his exposed thigh, smirking when Stiles’ muscles jerk and start trembling. He fists Stiles’ cock, stroking him in rhythm with his thrusts. They are no longer properly kissing, too far gone to be able to coordinate themselves, but Derek licks Stiles’ mouth anyway, sucking on his lips.

“Come on, Derek,” Stiles pants. “Come for me, fucking fill me up.”

He clenches around Derek and it’s too much. Derek is coming before he can even reply, feeling his orgasm being milked out of him in the way Stiles keeps moving against him, fucking himself on Derek’s cock even when Derek has stopped coming. He doesn’t go soft, not yet. Derek tightens his hold around Stiles’ neck, just the way he knows Stiles likes it, and starts fucking him restlessly, determined to get him off. He knows when Stiles is about to come because he clenches around him almost painfully and his cock pulses in Derek’s hand.

“That’s it,” Derek praises. “I love you so much, give it to me.”

And Stiles does. He comes in Derek’s hand, dripping down his fingers. It lasts for what feels like a really long time, with Derek hitting his prostate through it all until Stiles is spasming and whimpering. When Derek suspects it’s starting to be too much, he stops. Leaning back to be able to look down at Stiles’ ass, he brings his wet hand down between them, fingers ready and pressing inside the moment he slides out of Stiles.

Derek buries his forehead between Stiles’ shoulder blades, eyes cast down to look at his fingers getting their come mixed up together, their scents working into one and marking Stiles.

“Mine,” he murmurs against Stiles’ back.

“You’re such a weirdo.” Stiles snorts softly, but he sticks his ass back, giving Derek better access.

Derek plays with their come, fingers pushing everything inside of Stiles dutifully until he’s properly satisfied. Then he circles Stiles’ waist and snuggles closer.

“I love you.” Stiles pats his head, speaking against the arm he’s using as pillow. Derek makes a small noise, already too far gone to reply. With his nose filled with their mixed scents, Derek drifts off with
a smile in his face.

Derek lives now with his ghosts. He is not afraid to remember anymore. He likes to tell Stiles stories about his siblings, of how his parents met. And sometimes he asks Stiles about his mom and Stiles tells him all these childhood memories Derek can pin in his own timeline, making him feel connected to Stiles in a way that’s probably how fate must feel.

Derek is happy, he’s where he wants to be. He’s doing what he wants to do. And not because someone else told him to, and not because he thinks he must. But because he wants to.

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Stiles knows something is up almost from the start. It’s clear in the way Derek’s eyes drift away for a moment before meeting him again, in the way he seems to think before speaking. But Stiles doesn’t press the matter. He figures that whatever secret Derek is keeping from him must be for a good reason. He’s learned, after months of living together, that it’s always better to leave Derek alone. Pressuring things out of him never seems to work, except to get angry sex. Which Stiles is not against, but maybe now isn’t the best moment for that.

It’s the first time he stands inside the new Hale house, now known as Hale Pack Foster Home. Derek spent six months working on it until it was finished. Glass of champagne in his hand, Stiles ignores the conversation going around him and observes the group of new small residents of the house running around. It seems everyone from Beacon Hills is here, not wanting to miss the big opening. But no matter how big the crowd is, Stiles’ eyes go inevitably back to Derek- who is looking like he’s gonna be sick.

Leaving the empty glass on his way, Stiles approaches him.

“Hey, buddy.” He circles Derek’s waist, patting his side. “How are we holding up?”

“Fine.” Derek nods. “It seems everyone liked the food.”

“I told you Lydia is an amazing cook.” Stiles smiles, both of them looking out at the spacious room. The big glass windows open to the spring garden, where more people are mingling together, drinking and eating ridiculous canapés. The picture is so colloquial, it seems almost impossible to believe that less than a year ago, these people were living in a warzone.

He and Scott have spent half of the day making fun of Derek for being a good host, offering food and beverages to everyone. It helped them to feel normal, like they were acting the way people used to before the war. Because going back to what life was like before the war has been harder than any of them anticipated. So he and Scott made jokes, and Allison and Isaac offered help with the catering, slapping the back of their heads before following Derek back to the kitchen area. Which had only fueled their jokes until his dad had showed up with Mrs. McCall, asking what was so funny and making Stiles and Scott realize the jokes weren’t funny, they just wanted an excuse to laugh.

“I think it’s time,” Derek says, kissing his temple before stepping away and walking outside.

Stiles follows, knowing he means the speech. Stiles has been helping Derek with that for weeks so he knows he’ll do well. He stays close by, in the group with their family and friends, ready to hold his hand the moment he’s finished anyway.
Derek stands in front of a covered plaque in the main entrance. It’s funny, but this is the first time Stiles noticed that. Intrigued, he steps closer. He listens as Derek says his speech, just a few simple words thanking everyone for being there. He talks about his large family, and how he’s paying respect to their memory. He talks about the little kids already living here, asks everyone to consider the idea of fostering or even adopting. And then something happens. Derek hesitates before uncovering the plaque. He looks at Stiles, and something inside Stiles’ chest clenches.

“What-” he starts to ask, confused.

But it seems Derek decides to go for it at the same time, because he turns around and uncovers the plaque, which reads:

IN MEMORY OF CLAUDIA STILINSKI, WHO SAW OUR SIMILARITIES WHEN WE COULD ONLY SEE OUR DIFFERENCES.

Stiles holds his breath for what feels like a long time, until his lungs burn and he has to take a big gulp of air. Wiping his eyes hastily, Stiles sniffs once before he moves forward. He doesn’t register anyone except for Derek and when they finally meet, Stiles circles his neck and gives him a big, open mouthed kiss.

Words are not exchanged, they are not needed. Derek just nods, smiling at him and Stiles holds his hand, stepping back together to let everyone take a look at the plaque.

They don’t seem able to take their eyes off each other. Stiles understands now why Derek had been acting so weird lately. He had wanted to surprise Stiles. He’s such a hopeless romantic, it’s no wonder Stiles has it easy when it comes to pulling his leg from time to time. But not this time. This time he holds Derek’s gaze and mouths a thank you.

Those two words hold a lot of meaning. Stiles is not referring just to this moment. He thanks Derek for stumbling in his apathetic life, turning everything upside down in order to fix it, make it be how it was supposed to be. He thanks Derek for every sacrifice, for saving Stiles from himself, from his past. For giving him a future.

Stiles never thought he'd find his place in this world when he was once dragged behind enemy lines. He smiles, feeling like he can almost see their future in that moment, how good it’s going to be. Knowing that no matter what, they will always be the lucky ones for finding each other against all odds.

Chapter End Notes

So, this is it. I finished Enemy Lines, by far my longest and most ambitious story to date, hopefully to your satisfaction!

Just a clarification: I started to write this story 16 months ago, before season 3A aired. That’s why you won’t find any of the new characters from that season here. I could’ve added them in later chapters, but it never felt right.

Also, I tried to tag this monster fic appropriately without giving too much away, but if you believe it needs any other tags, please let me know!

For whoever is interested, and because I couldn't help myself, my headcanon is that
Derek ran the Hale Pack Foster Home for the rest of his life and that he and Stiles ended up adopting probably a few kids, werewolves and humans. Also Allison, Scott and Isaac ended up moving in together and had biological kids, becoming the most stable and sweet polyamory trio ever. Derek probably made some plaques with Boyd's and Erica's names on it, hung them in the hall of the foster home, too. As for Lydia, I think she never stopped searching for Jackson, but she had a full life where she didn't need any man to feel complete. I also like to think that she and Derek/Stiles became close over the years and she ended up being the godmother of their kids. Sheriff and Melissa, unsurprisingly, found love again in each other. And as for Deaton, I’d like to leave that as a mystery for everyone to decide. Same as to what exactly happened to Gerard.

Of course, you can take whatever you like from this and disregard the rest. In fact, I'd love to hear your headcanons from this verse, so please don't shy away from messaging me on tumblr or leave a comment here to discuss this or anything else!

I'm not going to pretend like I'm not tearing up a little as I type this last goodbye to Enemy Lines. I just hope you enjoyed the journey as much as I did. And to see you again soon.

Thank you so much for reading!

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