"Sometimes when you really love something you have to set it free", Derek knows this. But an omega is not a butterfly, and Stiles might never come back.

"You are my melody and I am the refrain, always turning, turning, returning to you."

This story will not make sense without reading Runaway Mate, so please read that first!
The Friendship Bridge

Chapter Notes

Please read the first part of this Story- Runaway Mate, or, well nothing will make any sense. at all.

- 

Ritornello

*a recurrent musical section that alternates with different episodes of contrasting material. The repetition can be exact or varied to a greater or lesser extent.*

The Friendship Bridge:

Derek

Stiles looked so small standing before Derek and so sad. His eyes dropped, his voice flat. Derek looked at his omega, whom he had hoped to love and cherish, and felt the sadness, the darkness emanating from Stiles.

The thoughts that had been bothering him throughout his time on the Friendship bridge came to a head.

Boyd’s voice came back to him, “*Even if you catch Stiles, he won’t be back because he loves you, he'll be there because you forced him to be there. And I don’t know about this, but do you really want to live for your entire life with an omega who hates you with every breath he takes?*”

Derek knew the answer to that.

Stiles was still standing in front of him, tired, and bedraggled, with bags under his eyes that seemed to be carved on.

He could feel it, deep within his bones, if he took Stiles now, Stiles would never forgive him, never love him. Stiles wasn’t the kind of omega who would live and let live or not hold grudges.

He turned Stiles to him.

“I don’t want to do this?”

Stiles turned angry eyes to him, “What’s this?”

Derek growled, “I don’t want to have you like this?”

“Well, then how do you want me alpha? On my knees and begging for it?” Stiles snapped.

“You took my life, my job, my identity, my reputation, everything that ever meant anything to me and ripped it away from me. Now, I’m just Stiles the omega- the liar. The nothing. You’re taking me back to a horrible country where I have no rights to property, children or even myself and you don’t
“Wait-Stiles” Derek began

“I think I deserve to be a just a little bit angry when everything I am is about to be erased!”

“Stiles, you never let me get a word in edgewise. To think of it, that’s how it usually is. I’m the big strong brute and you’re the omega who runs away from me. When you saw me, you just ran, you never gave me a chance to talk with you, to prove to you that I could be anything other than some evil monster you had in your head” Derek began

“Because that’s what you were!” Stiles exploded, “pinning me to the wall, sniffing at my neck, is that what you do with all the omegas you choose to date?”

“I’ve made a lot of mistakes,” Derek began

“Big mistakes,” Stiles butted in, ”by outing me to the newspapers, I lost my identity, all my achievements were called into question. You called the OCS to chase me from country to country, all for an omega who didn’t want to be found. You induced an early heat, you commanded me with your alpha voice when I have wanted nothing, nothing to do with you. You ruined my life” Stiles sobbed.

Derek wrapped his small mate in his arms, “I’m sorry. I didn’t know. All my life I’ve been taught that alphas are here, betas in the middle and omegas on the bottom. When I met you, you didn’t confirm to any of these things and I had no idea what to do, what to think or how to be. And yes, I have been selfish. Not breaking the bond early was selfish of me. Pursuing you when you didn’t want me was selfish because I couldn’t stop thinking of you as an omega instead of a person”

Stiles’s eyes widened and his breath caught, no, Derek did not just say that.

“I know you don’t believe me, but I do love you Stiles. From reading about your life, I’ve been in your apartment, talking to you mind to mind. You’re quick, funny, resilient, an omega I’d be proud to have at my side. But I don’t want to force you to be there if you don’t want to be,” Derek continued.

Derek took a deep breath. Took a gamble, prayed he wouldn’t regret it.

“I don’t want to be the pursuer and with you as my captive. I don’t want to play this game anymore. Stiles, I’ve been thinking about it a lot. Reading about omegas of old. And I want you to be free.”

What did I just hear? Thought Stiles.

“But,” Stiles began skeptically, “won’t you die if we do this. We’ll both die.”

Derek swallowed, “I know that the technology in Paraguay is much better than it is in the USA. And I’ve heard they can keep omegas of broken bonds alive. But I probably wouldn’t make it.I’m putting my life in your hands.”

Stiles tried to make sense of the situation, “You’d be willing to do that? For me?”

Derek smiled a sad smile, “What, let you leave? I’d do more for someone I love, Stiles. And I think I would have done it for you earlier. I know I can be really dense sometimes, but, just, talk to me, Stiles”

Stiles felt something take growth in his heart.
Derek placed a small phone in Stiles hands. “Don’t forget to call me, Stiles”

Derek waved the OCS men, to let Stiles through.

Stiles took a few steps away, half expecting this to be a mistake, a joke, for Derek to pounce on him. But Derek gave him his space.

Stiles ran back to Derek and pulled the alpha to him, standing on tiptoe to kiss him full on the mouth. They wrestled, lips crashing against lips, teeth to teeth, breaths hot against each other, reveling in the smell and the taste of their mates.

Stiles had to stop kissing Derek for a second, and he pulled off his favorite blue hoodie, the hoodie with whom he had seen everything together.

He pulled Derek’s ear down, so he could whisper in side Derek’s ear, “I’ll come back to you, my alpha. I will.”

Then he kissed Derek on the cheek and ran off into Paraguay.

Derek watched Stiles leave, holding the scent of his omega close to his chest. “Come on, men. Let’s go home,” he said to the OCS agents, whose faces were frozen in disbelief.
The red wedding dress

Chapter Summary

We see the aftermath of Derek’s decision

Chapter Notes

mostly angst

“I HATE YOU!”

The glass paperweight goes flying by Derek’s head, and after that comes the antique rotary phone.

Derek ducked both with a bit of good timing, which was lucky, or else he might have been in serious trouble. He was reaching the terminal stage of bond sickness and his werewolf healing was suffering.

Laura had appeared at Derek’s door in a brown Balmain pleated Leather mini dress, dark red lipstick placed to highlight the severity of her face.

Derek had hoped for a kind smile, a chance to explain himself.

But there would be no explanations for Laura Hale.

“How could you? After everything I have done for you? Just let him go? Do you know what this means?”

Derek held both hands up, as if he was trying to soothe a wild animal, “Yes, I do, Laura, I—”

“Obviously not. You will die, Derek. A long gruesome death”

“Maybe, but Stiles could come back for me—”

“Come back for you?
Come back for you?”

Laura laughed cruelly.

“I never knew my brother was this stupidly naïve. Why would Stiles ever come back for you? He has everything he wants. Freedom. He’s in Paraguay with doctors that can help omegas survive a bond breaking. You think he’ll come to the USA and risk capture, death, misery, just for you? Why? Because he promised you? Because he l-o-ved you?” Laura twisted the word “love” in her mouth.

“You’re a fool” She pronounced.

Derek pushed away the doubts in his heart, the throat tightening fear as he grew weaker and weaker.
“My mate wouldn’t lie to me.”

At those words, Laura kicked over one of Derek’s dining room chairs, “Yes, because Stiles has never lied about anything else in his life,” she retorted sarcastically.

“That’s enough, Laura” Derek began, a little angry about someone insulting his mate.

“Enough?” Laura said quietly, with an almost deadly tone, “Enough?”

“Derek”, Laura began, “do you know what it was like to have to hold on to your sixteen year old brother while you run out of your burning house? To be 23, coming home, excited for Thanksgiving and see your world bgo up in flames? I have protected you every day of my life, with every inch of me and you’re going to go commit suicide because of some omega?” Laura swallowed.

In the small beat of silence that followed, Derek could not help but think of **Kate**.

Even though his sister had always insisted that it was not his fault, that he would never have known, Derek wondered if deep inside her she blamed him for destroying their family. For trusting so easily.

Derek was jolted back to the present by his sister’s sad voice.

“What about me Derek? What about me?” She whispered, as tears rolled down her cheeks.

“I lost everyone else to the fire, Peter to insanity and greed and you, to what? Love?” Laura asked, as if expecting a response.

Laura dropped down onto Derek’s satin white sofa, “I can’t do this anymore?” She sobbed.

“Why are you doing this to me?

Derek had faced a lot of anger, and condemnation after he returned from South America without an omega in tow, but Laura’s heartfelt plea hurt the most.

His mind flashed back to 2 weeks ago.

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**2 weeks ago**

As soon as he had ordered the OCS to return to their cars and the normal border agents (corrupt Brazilian officials whom he had bribed), returned to the border, Derek felt the barely restrained anger from the OCS men under him.

“What?” Derek growled.

One older OCS agent named Zack, took it upon himself to say what the men were feeling, “You dragged us out here. We worked like dogs, barely eating and sleeping for days, just so you could let some stupid omega go free? What was even the point of all this if you never intended to capture the little T-hole worm?”

T-hole was a typical insult of an omega, referring to it as nothing but a creature with three holes to keep an alpha’s knot warm.

Derek growled, and facing the man, he exerted his alpha influence, while wrapping his fingers around the man’s neck. The man turned a delightful shade of blue as he struggled to breathe.
“If you ever insult my omega like that again—I’ll make sure you never have the breath to insult me or anyone ever again” Derek snarled.

“And that’s not a threat, but a promise” Derek continued.

Boyd’s wise brown eyes watched Derek calmly.

And once Derek had said his piece, Boyd defused the situation.

“So that’s quite enough, men,” Boyd continued.

But even after that confrontation, Derek could hear the whispers behind his back, the quiet complaints that he was a knothead or a fool. A man who didn’t know how to handle his omega, who had been hood winked.

He realized that when he was pushing Boyd’s team to the breakpoint, yelling at the men over a slow tire change, his team may not have liked him, but they respected him, empathized with him. After all, he was just an alpha trying to get his omega back.

However, letting Stiles and his companions go. Trusting his omega to come back to him was such a paradigm shift that none of the men could comprehend it.

Why would you let your omega soul mate go? Because you loved him? You wanted him to be happy?

That was practically suicidal.

And his conversation with Agent Smith when he landed in Argentina?

Even the thought of it led to a grimace.

Well, that had not been pleasant.

And sometimes at night, Derek wondered to himself whether he made the right decision. Whether he wasn’t as stupid as everyone thought he was.

But then he remembered Stile’s smile. The kiss. The “I’ll come back for you alpha” and he knew Stiles had never looked at him like that before, like there was maybe even a shadow of shock? Affection? In his eyes. A warmth through the bond that Derek prayed he had not imagined. And he knew he would do it again, to see Stiles light up like fireworks on the fourth of July.

To be honest, Derek had chosen this, chosen not to break the bond with Stiles when he could. He wanted to give Stiles the same option. The same choice.

Except he was wagering with his life.

The only thing that made it better sometimes was the way Boyd watched Derek with a newfound respect, like Derek had done something right, something noble.

Even though Derek didn’t feel very noble at all, he just felt alone. And scared.
Derek wasn’t having the best week. On his return to the USA, tabloids were filled with his story.

Pictures of his tired face graced The Enquirer and the Watchman.

“Hale Alpha returns!” the magazines blared.

At the airplane kiosk, Derek made the supreme mistake of picking up a copy of “The Watchman” and opening to the page that promised the inside scoop on Derek Hale

“Once the most eligible alpha bachelor in the Tri-State Area, the Hale alpha returned to the US, a broken man. Rebuffed by the one omega whom he loved, he returned home to die of bond sickness, and a broken heart”.

“Of course” Derek thought, “omegas can come and go, but tabloids never change.”

After successfully hailing a cab while wearing nondescript sweatpants, Derek arrived to find his house overrun with reporters.

He growled to himself at having his privacy disturbed and pulled his hat down over his face.

Cameras flashed, bright lights in his eyes.

One pudgy man with brown hair began the ordeal, “Derek, is it true that your omega outwitted you and escaped to Paraguay before you could catch him?”

“No comment” Derek muttered.

Another, female voice, “Derek, some reports said that you allowed your omega to leave because he said he did not love you. Can you confirm or deny this fairytale?”

“No comment”

And yet another, “Derek, considering that you will certainly die of a broken bond, while your omega has fled to Paraguay—what is your opinion on Larry Epsom’s argument that the USA has a moral duty to go to war with Paraguay to protect alphas such as yourself?”

“No comment,” Derek growled, “and get off my lawn. Go home!” he roared.

And of course on the 9:00 p.m. news that night, “An irascible Hale chases away reporters from his residence, preferring to nurse his broken heart in silence”

Derek had gone to his board meeting on Thursday, as he walked into Hale corporations in his Zegna bespoke suit, he could feel the eyes of everyone on him as he walked into the room.

Ignoring the prying eyes, he strode into the meeting room, looking for his customary seat at the table.

He furrowed his eyebrow in confusion when he noticed someone had taken his spot, Niall Addair, a brash Irish businessman who commanded the Aoife steel manufacturing corps.

Derek forced his ever frowning mouth to reconfigure into a smile.

“Hello, Niall, nice to see you here”
Niall offered a similarly forced smile back, “Ah, fancy seeing you here” he replied.

_Fancy seeing you here?_ Derek wondered, _what kind of greeting is that?_

After sitting through the meeting, it became apparent to Derek that Hale Steel had started vetting replacement board members in anticipation of his demise.

Mr. Stevens, an alpha and longtime family friend, advised,

“Derek, you should really try to enjoy your last few days, spend time with your family, and do the things you love. No reason to be at boring old meetings with foggies like us”

“You mean you want me to retire?” Derek asked pointedly.

“No” the old man hesitated, “I’m just saying that you should take it easy”

“I’M NOT DEAD” Derek exploded angrily.

“Well, no yet,” the elderly man pointed out, “but in another three to four weeks, you will be”

“Stiles is coming back,” Derek insisted, “he promised me”

“Really? That’s great” Mr. Stevens answered, in a placatory manner.

“Then this will all be a wonderful vacation for you,” Mr. Stevens finished as he stacked his documents neatly into his briefcase and turned away.

Derek was left with a burning hole in his heart. Mr. Stevens had been a family friend for years, even before his parents died. When Talia and Michael did die, Mr. Stevens had been the one to send gift baskets and take the young Derek out for fishing and hunting trips.

Derek thought that he and the man whom he once called grandpa had a special bond, he couldn’t believe that Mr. Stevens was more concerned about the company than his well-being.

It was another sharp betrayal, but then again, betrayals were nothing new to Derek or the Hale family.

His heart hurt.

Present day

With nothing to do, Derek spent time reading about omegas of old. In some societies, they had been brave and powerful warriors, strong leaders of their tribes and people, fearless explorers. As a young alpha, Derek was told that these were all old tales, but now, looking at Stiles, he wondered if some of these words could be tru

At night, Derek ached for Stiles. He wanted to reach out through the bond to touch his mate but that was exactly what caused this problem in the first place, right? Chasing an omega who did not want to be chased, pushing for what he wanted to the ignorance of all else.

Every day was a new agony, every second in which he hoped for the phone to ring, to hear his omega’s voice.

Every day in which he waited to die.
Death didn’t seem to befall him like a catastrophe, instead it crept on him slowly, like a sluggish storm cloud, and life lingered quietly, like the way the sun lingered during the height of summer.

The morning before Laura’s visit, he found himself out of breath after his morning jog.

He tried to eat, but food was slowly losing its taste. Even when he looked in the mirror, he could see that he was slowly wasting away.

He looked at the picture of Talia and Michael on his mantle.

It was their wedding day.

His mom looked resplendent in a red Vera Wang wedding dress. The bottom was filled with so many ruffles that it floated like a cloud, her fierce red lipstick and black eyeliner emphasized her strength and power. Talia was not a woman to wear white, to be filled with sweetness and lace, but a strong and passionate woman who would kill to protect whom she loved.

Even as a young cub, Derek had always feared his mom, she was the enforcer of the house, the one to set punishments and enforce eating vegetables, while his dad was more easygoing.

But though Talia’s steel glare would pierce anyone else, when her eyes settled on Michael Hale, her eyes would soften like honey. His mom always looked at Michael as if he was something infinitely precious, always held him with the softest embrace, and always kissed him with an expansive warmth. Their bond had been so beautiful that its glow suffused the house, like a tangible light that the younger Hale’s could feel in their bones.

In this picture, captured during the wedding dance, Talia was resplendent in her vermillion dress. Michael wore a black bespoke suit, and his face was turned to hers, mouth widened in a grin. Michael hale looked like he’s just won a million dollars, like he was filled with joy. Talia’s face was angled towards him, her eyes filled with such a tenderness it still hurt Derek to see.

Around them the green trees advertised summer, and flickering yellow lights were thrown around pillars like garlands of stars.

Derek’s mother and father were true soul mates and he had always wanted, always dreamed of an omega for himself, one to fill the loneliness inside him that had opened wide when he lost everyone he loved years ago.

Derek looks away from the picture

Away from the love that blooms across his parents’ faces.

Laura is sobbing alone on the white couch.

He puts his arms around her, feeling how bony and fragile his big sister feels.

And the sad thing is,

This is the closest he has felt to his sister in a long time.

The cell phone lies discarded on his kitchen countertop, near the sink.

The minutes tick by inexorably and still the phone does not ring.
In which all the rules are broken.

Chapter Summary

Stiles gets to Asuncion and Derek finally feels free.

Chapter Notes

Author note: I just want to thank everyone who reads my stuff and comments. Sometimes I wake up and I don’t feel like writing. There are weeks, even months that seem to stretch long into forever, when even opening a word document seems like a chore. But every once in a while, I’ll open up my computer and going to AO3 and see some really sweet, heartfelt comment written by one of my subscribers and it’ll bring tears to my eyes and then I feel like I need to try to write again. So….. thank you guys.

Stiles

Stiles is sitting in his room. It’s not an extravagant room, nowhere near as beautiful as the luxurious Hotel Sofitel he stayed in Montevideo or his luxury flat in New York City. Gone is his comfy couch. Gone is his custom coffeemaker and his budding collection of baseball mittens. His shirt is one of the tacky cartoon shirts he found at one of the charity bins in the hostel he is staying at. He is in a strange country where he doesn’t speak the language. He has no job. No one knows who the hell he is and he has never looked so dishelved and dirty in his life.

But fuck it, he’s free.

What does freedom feel like?

It is the millions of things he doesn’t have to worry about when he’s going through the day.

His first day in Paraguay, he’d rooted through the charity bins for “alpha” scent spray before realizing he didn’t need it anymore. It was okay to be an omega. Okay to be who he was. He didn’t have to posture anymore, check every smile, action, and gesture so that he seemed “alpha” enough. No one cared what his gender was. He walked out of the doors in the morning, feeling naked, knowing his body scent would broadcast to the world “OMEGA. OMEGA. I’M AN OMEGA”. He waited for passerby to stop him, a policeman to arrest him, for a nice alpha to ask him what he was doing walking the dangerous streets alone.

But no one did.
What does freedom taste like?

It tastes like the Carrulim the hostel workers offered to all the omegan immigrants, who had come to the hostel cold, and tired, dirty and weary, malnourished and afraid.

The sweet flavors of sugar, ruda and lemon sparked with intensity on Stiles’s tongue. Strong and delicate, bitter, yet sweet, to Stiles those flavors would always remind him of freedom.

What does freedom smell like?

It smells like Stiles crying his eyes out, kneeling on the ground of Paraguay, nose against the rich loam of the earth, the trees covering the sky in a brilliant green above him, repeating to himself, “that’s it, I’m free. I’m free. I’m free”.

When Stiles first crosses the border to Paraguay, after the obligatory breakdown, he is met by Paraguayan border officials. The bland tint of beta both officials exude makes him a little anxious, because he knows he reeks of scared, almost bonded omega. The officials wear black pants and shirts, topped with an almost comical red hat. One of them pinches his arm, and brings him closer to examine him.

The man pulls out a black wand that emits a blue light and passes it over Stiles’s body, as the wand passes over Stiles, the man announces Stiles’s secrets as if they are written on him.

“Omega. Fleeing a life bond. Name is Stiles Stilinski. Entered into our system as number 2038. Recently suffered a devastating heat. Has lost 15lbs in the last few months. Malnourished but not starved”

“Any intentions to disrupt our government? Terroristic desires?” the other official asks the first.

The first official passes the black rod over Stiles again, “Not that I can read on him”

“Ok, let’s go” the first official says, bored.

They bundle Stiles into a black armored car with a bunch of other omegas toward an unknown destination.

Stiles wonders whether he has just exchanged frying pan for fire.

The omegas are driven for hours and hours. The armored car is hot and several omegas pass out from the exhaustion. They cannot see where they are or where they are going.

Stiles is worried, but knows he must trust in his wits to keep him alive.

The door opens and the omegas are herded out of the car. They all blink into the sunlight and look up.

Most American omegas have been told that Paraguay is a hell hole, full of drugs and crime. Little omegas are shown pictures of starving children begging in the street, malnourished women with their bones sticking out, already the living dead. Omegas, alphas and betas alike are told, “Running away to Paraguay is stupid, because Paraguay is awful”.

...
In fact in America, “running away to Paraguay” was synonymous with making stupid decisions

And that’s why all the omegas, even Stiles, were shell shocked when they left the car.

Skyscrapers of different colors and shapes pierced a perfectly blue sky. Paved white roads stretched as far as the eye could see, Cars instead of driving on the roads, hovered over them like tiny airplanes. Underneath their feet, if they strained they could hear the quiet hum of the underground trains. Apartments were built in red brick rock and little gardens topped every apartment roof and dotted the side of each sidewalk. Above them, in the sky, hovered another floating city which hovered, moving back and forth like an airship. The city was topped with gold and silver buildings, and a huge glass dome that shimmered like a rainbow.

And then Stiles realized that everything he had ever known was a lie.

One week in

Stiles is folding laundry. One corner touches the other, the big white sheet flaps in his hands, rustling slightly against the static white sky. He is standing in the courtyard of Centro Familiar de Adoracion, the lush green courtyard around him held a garden filled with peaches and sweet smelling oranges.

Centro Familiar de Adoracion was a giant white church, constructed before the Third War. It had a kind of retro inspired white granite structure, and tinted black glass windows that climbed as far as the eye could see. Inside, there was enough space for 15 rooms, each with 4 bunks to a room, a large pantry/kitchen and an assembly hall. All omegas were assigned to different duties, some were given the job of helping with food preparation, others cleaned, and some like Stiles helped by working in the laundromat. When not working their requisite shifts, they were given the opportunity to take classes in how to speak Spanish, Paraguay’s laws and customs or given the opportunity for free onsite counseling. Job fairs would rotate periodically through to offer the omegas jobs, and once an omega saved enough he or she would be eligible for a subsidized apartment in Asuncion or it’s outlying cities. Stiles was told that Adoracion was only one of 15 churches throughout the city that existed as refuges for fleeing omegas. Stiles had struggled, looking for Inez, Allison, Alberto, Lawrence and Juanita. No such luck.

He worried and misses them everyday.

Despite the kindness and all the amenities, it is not easy for Stiles, living in the omega refugio.

At night, the omegas toss and turn. Some cry out in their sleep, “No, No por favor maestro, no. Porque, Lo siento” and then silent sobs. Stiles can never seem to get a lot of sleep on the lumoy beds and the cries cut him to the heart.

He often ends up walking upstairs to the church and looking at Asuncion through the giant tinted windows. From the windows, he can see the whole city’s sprawl, in the Fondos, or the bottom, as the locals call it, a network of six gardens cover the city, connected by a giant manmade lake in the center stocked with fish. Beautiful white sidewalks and white roads crisscross across the distance, reflecting off sunlight. But the Fondos are mostly residential, with the exception of a few skyscrapers made of glitering obsidian glass.

Above him, is the real Asuncion, the seat of Paraguay’s power, the two floating islands, El Águila and El Zorro. He can only see the glitters reflection from the his spot in the fondos, but from what he can see of it, there are huge buildings on every corner of each island, giant multicolored glass domes, and shimmering fountains.

The air trains run back, are like sleek, silver and black snakes, and they run back and forth between
the Fondos and Asuncion at breakneck speed.

Stiles wanted to go to Asuncion, wanted to understand and explore a giant floating city that he had never imagined was even possible. His heart thumped inexplicably in his chest with excitement and the desire to rise from his lowly position also consumed him.

But on nights like these, Stiles had never realized that freedom would be so lonely. He missed his father, whom he tried to avoid thinking of, Juanita’s innocent hugs and even, sometimes, at 2 a.m, when he couldn’t ignore it anymore, Derek. The aching bond called at him like a yearning chasm. The phone he carried with Derek’s number would speak to him, “just call me. Please. Call me”.

Stiles couldn’t.

He didn’t know what sparked that impulsive kiss, but despite all Derek had done, Derek was an alpha. To go back meant certain death, and then what would it have all been for.

He wrestled with these questions late at night, and they like smoke dragons, would dissipate in the morning.

"Two weeks in"

Stiles is in a class about Paraguayan culture. The woman is speaking in careful, slow Spanish, so that all the omegan refugees can understand it. Refugees. It is not a word Stiles likes to use, he prefers to call himself an immigrant. Refugee sounds like he was feeling war or violence or death, But he wasn’t. America wasn’t that bad anyway. He fingers the small gold card with his refugee identification number in his pocket:2038. Each refugee is given a 4 digit number to allow them to legally stay in Paraguay. “10,000” Stiles thinks, there can only be 10,000 possible combinations of those 4 numbers, “only 10,000 other refugees like him. It seems like such a small number”.

The woman continues speaking,

“In Paraguay every teenager at the age of 16 signs up for the great match. In the great match, each person gives a genetic sample of themselves to the government and is matched with their perfect other half. After that, the couple and their families meet each other that Sunday, lovers day. However, though each person meets their perfect match, they are encouraged to delay bonding until the age of 25 at least. It is considered quite foolhardy to bond before one’s 25th birthday. The laza ceremony, is analogous to what Americans consider a …..” she searched for the word, “wedding?”. At the laza, alpha and omega, or sometimes, beta and beta, pledge love to each other and tie themselves in a bond.

Of course, about 15% of people do go unbonded in any given year, usually schools offer counseling services to help those people get through a difficult time.

Stiles doesn’t agree with this nonsense, he raises his hand, “Excuse me, how can anyone just delay a bond like that? Bond blocking drugs are dangerous and sometimes fatal. This cannot be true. Science hasn’t advanced far enough to create drugs that can successfully block a bond”

The woman shakes her head, “American science hasn’t progressed that far, but Paraguayan scientific labs are 3rd best in the world. In fact, the omega who created it, Alonzo Scibek, won an the Omega Federation Bunsen Award for his work”

Stiles presses further, “ Do you mean omegas in Paraguay can delay the bond till whenever they want with no adverse effects?”
“Well,” the woman hedged, “I wouldn’t say no adverse effects. We have heard of blockers leading to headaches or tachycardia in some people and one blocker might not work for every omega. But for the most part, one can delay or weaken or break their bond as they wish.”

“break?” Stiles asked, his voice sounded small to him,

“yes, break.”

“Won’t the alpha and omega die if their bonds are broken?”

“As little as 50 years ago that would have been true, but sue to scientific advances, we are now able to break bonds without killing alpha or omega. Of course, neither partner will ever be able to bond again and the requisite bond sickness is very distressing and many need weeks of recuperation, But generally both survive at around a 75% rate”

Stiles’s forms slips down into his seat, mind whirring with new information.

After the class ends, Stiles talks to the teacher, “Say,” he begins, “I have an alpha and want to break our bond, can I do it in Paraguay and have both of us survive?”

The teacher pursed her lips,” If you do want to break your bond in Paraguay, you would survive but he would… not unless you brought him here. Unfortunately, America does not have the technology to properly take care of alpha in the throes of bond sickness. They haven’t developed the necessary medications yet,” she explained.

“How do I bring an alpha here?” Stiles asked eagerly.

The woman’s face closed down, remote and cold.

“You can’t. We do not accept American alphas in Paraguay”

And she left before Stiles was able to ask why.

Derek

Derek woke up to a text from his sister.

The Midsummer Ball is tonight. I expect you at 8.

The Midsummer ball was an annual alpha/omega ball in which the alpha and omega sons and daughters of the elite came together to dance and to be matched into societally acceptable pairings. True love was all good and well for the masses, but the elites would never let some scruffy alpha or omega from an unsuitable family marry their precious offspring.

Derek sighed, his bones ached nowadays, he was often tired and he’d had this unrelenting headache for the last few days.

Sorry, I won’t be able to make it.

He texted back.

And cue the call from his angry sister who was just so upset about how their social standing could be affected by his refusal to show up to a simple dinner ball.

But, Derek felt like pleading, I’m tired. And I’m already mated, no one can be matched with me.
But, Derek felt like pleading, I’m dying.

But Laura’s voice was uncompromising and she was the eldest sibling and the closest thing to a mother Derek has had ever since the fire. So when Laura says “jump”, Derek asks, “how high”.

The small phone that sits in a position of prominence on his wooden oak cabinet, waits, unrelentingly, staring at him with a blue screen that represents desperation and hope.

But nothing fills his empty days and no call pierces the night with Stiles’s soft voice calling his name.

And so it goes.

Time is moving on. Derek has resigned from his position on the board, at first, he could still muster up the strength to go. But for the last few weeks, Derek has been too tired to complete the requisite research on companies Hale Co. want to acquire, getting out of bed was an ordeal, so before Mr. Stevens can make any more stupid comments about “considering how one should spend the last minutes of their life”, Derek beats him to the punch. He resigns.

Now his days are spent taking morning walks around his neighborhood, and afternoon jogs up and down the nature trails. He reads and reads. About stories of omegas of old, collecting books about the not-quite-true and the impossible. He reads and he imagines a life far from his a world in which these stupid laws that divide him and Stiles didn’t exist, a world in which his omega loves him.

In the afternoons, he drinks lemonade tea on his front porch looking at the coral orange frangipanis bloom in his front yard. There is a sweetness to the last moments of life.

And he writes. He writes letters to his sister, about things he wants her to remember about him after he is gone.

He writes a sheaf of letters to Stiles that he thinks will never be sent.

As the days pass, Derek is more and more resigned to his fate. Maybe death won’t be that bad.

Which is why he is so irritated by this silly request from Laura. He stills has more books to read, more letters to write, more frangipani blooms to watch. Why is she wasting his valuable time?

But he’s a good brother so he pulls on his cravat, pulls on an old gold colored mask, buttons himself into his cleanest Zegna suit and goes.

The limo driver drops him off at The Plaza at nine o’clock.

It wouldn’t do to be early of course, the rich always arrive fashionable late.

It’s a luxury high end hotel, and a reservation comes with a Rolls Royce to drive one around town, your own butler and 24 hour room service. Gold chandeliers decorate a ceiling filled with ornate white and gold tiles, from which a central gold sun expands outwards into the distance like a sunflower unfurling its petals. The wooden floor is gleams as if a foot had never stepped on it. Multiple white marble archways supported by Ionic columns line the walls, given the plaza a Grecian feel. Above the archways, tiny figures of glorious alphas long gone posture and fight in low relief.

By now dancing has already begun, champagne flowed free and easy in the world of the upper class and the noveau riche. Derek takes a flute himself from an eager waiter and prepares himself for what he knows is to come.

The celebrants are all in masks for the Midsummer night ball. And each mask was symbolic. The
quality of the mask reflected the wearer’s class. Someone in a mask encrusted with gold and garnet jewels signaled, “I am so stupidly rich I can spend nearly 10,000 on a mask that will be outdated in a year”. Each year, different mask designs were popular, and those who wore designs that were passé could expect themselves to be lambasted by the tabloids mercilessly.

It was all very stupid and shallow, and Derek, ever shy and reticent had never liked going even when he wasn’t dying of bond sickness.

As he walks toward the center of the ballroom, he notices his sister Laura looking stunning in an Alexander McQueen inspired gown, rimmed with panda fur and with diamonds encrusted on the bodice. A sleek silver mask with fox ears rests upon her face, unadorned with jewels or any other designs. She stands regally, with her hair pulled back into a sleek ponytail, looking for all the world like an ice queen ready to reclaim her frozen kingdom. He acknowledges her with a nod.

Derek flits from conversation to conversation, working hard to be witty and charming, keeping the ambience light and convivial. When anyone prods him about his mate, he tries to be vague, hoping that his reticence will make him seem mysterious instead of unsure.

As he flirts with the eligible omegas and tries to remember to waltz with the “right” families, he remembers the last time he came to this ball.

Then he was 16, and the ball was not a tiring chore but an exciting event, finally a chance to be seen as an adult like his brothers Matt and Seth.

He had gotten to the ball, keeping close to the wall and sneakily trying to get some extra champagne while being watched by his eagle eyed uncle Peter.

It was then a woman had walked into the room in red glass slippers and a sparkly open backed Michael Kors scarlet colored gown, her blonde hair curled around her, scales adorning her lizard like mask.

He had danced with her all night, entranced even though she was far too old for him. His 16 year old ego swollen with the thoughts that such a beautiful mature woman would choose him as a partner. She had guided him through the steps of the foxtrot even though his feet were clumsy, smiled at all his stumbles as if he was endearing. By the time she had given him her phone number that evening, she had him eating in the palm of her hand.

Kate. The name felt like dust in his mouth. The ashes she had left of his life and home, the hole he tried to fill incessantly, yawning underneath his feet.

Oh how he wished he’d never met her.

Derek eventually tires of dancing after two hours, his stamina weakened.

He walks out the door to call a cab to take him home.

He knows that the tabloids will paint a picture of him as this fatigued alpha, dying from an illness that cannot be cured.

He knows that his sister Laura will be disappointed that he didn’t at least try shoulder on with the famous Hale stoicism.

But well,

That’s the wonderful thing about dying.
He no longer has to care what anyone thinks.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was tough because while I had always planned what I call "the inversion" of everything kind of in Paraguay, I got really caught up in the world building and it's kind of tiring. I'm still trying to figure out how to get to where I want with Paraguay. I have to admit that I liked writing Derek's POV a lot more this time.
Laura: Laura stood in front of the huge picture window in her office wearing a perfectly cut blazer, white blouse and black pants from Dolce and Gabbana. Outside, New York City bustled with the sounds of alphas and betas getting ready for work, busses moved to and from, the subways creaked on their overhead rails as the sun towered over a cool white winter sky. Somethings had not changed in over a hundred years and never would. New York City was rebuilt exactly as it was before the fall. The towers glittered as beautifully as ever, the two Freedom towers rose above the Skyline, an enduring tribute to the lives lost over a hundred years ago and Laura stood in front of her window in the center of it all. A knock sounded at her door.

“Send him in” she yelled out to her secretary as she continued gazing over the world she had made.

As a young alpha, Laura wanted to set her own way. She dreamed of being a painter, of creating beauties like the Rembrandts on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Like Monet, she imagined herself in different locales, capturing landscapes at night, morning afternoon, when few people were around, her tiny paintstrokes infusing a sailboat with color, luminously making the bay water shimmer with a promise of an approaching sunset.

But then the fire occurred.

And she had lost everything.

She had been vacationing in Milan when it happened, it was the summer after art school and she was trying to find herself in the ruins of civilizations long gone, in the slate mountains that towered above the skyline in the refuse filled waters of the Adriatic Sea.

And then she had gotten the worst call of her life. She had not believed it. But when she saw her family home, in smoking ruins, when she saw her brother trembling in the hospital, her uncle ranting and raving from a face covered in scars, she knew the impossible had happened.

She hadn’t allowed herself to cry, mostly. She had to be strong.

So she had given up those dreams of art, and taken the reins of her parent’s fledgling company, “Hale Shipping Co”. Under her tutelage, the company had gone from a million dollar company to a multibillion dollar company. She had pulled her black hair into a severe bun, and let her dreams be eaten. She had sent her brother off for counseling and to boarding school, provided a safe place for her uncle to nurse himself back to health and now she stood on the cusp of 32 and wondered whether anything she had ever done was worth it after all.
Her empire of dust.

The door opened and Mr. Smith walked in.

She did not acknowledge him, her back was turned to his face.

“Laura” the OCS agent began.

Laura did not answer.

“I am sorry” he started.

“Sorry doesn’t cut it. Sorry doesn’t matter when my brother is dying. Do you know that some of my employees have claimed they were “sorry” after making million dollar mistakes? Did you think a “sorry” stopped me from firing them?”

“I tried, Ms. Hale, but he decided to let the omega go”

“How is that my problem?”

“Well, it would be easier if your brother was cooperative….”

“I’ve been wrangling with an uncooperative brother all my life. But that has never stopped me from getting my way. I don’t think this despicable failure of yours has anything to do with my brother’s lack of cooperation. But it definitively does have a lot to do with you failing to be there at the Friendship Bridge to bring the rogue omega into custody. Or do you really think that I find out that you were not there?”

“I was very ill, Ms. Hale”

“Surely, not deathly ill, since you’re still alive before me. But I suggest you enjoy the little life you have. If my brother dies, I won’t hesitate to release all the lovely information I have collected on SPCA2, I can imagine what the outcry would be when the news tabloids hear how you “train” unruly omegas. And then when I am done exposing your entire organization for what it really is….. I will end you.” Laura smiled to herself at the thought.

She could just smell the fear wafting off of Agent Smith and it smelled delicious, so satisfying to extract some blood, to put some blame on the Agent for the agony she was feeling.

“Don’t be too hasty, Ms. Hale”

Laura turned around and took a seat at her desk, “or what will you do? Dose me with SPCA2 like one of your “compliant” omegas?”

The Agent tried to look calm, “I know some secrets you’d probably rather keep close to your chest too. Especially about the ways Hale Shipping Co. managed to mastermind such a meteoric rise and compete with all the other conglomerates.”

Laura’s eyes narrowed, “All my maneuvers were strictly legal.”

“You know as well as I do that there is a difference between being legal and right” the Agent replied.

Laura took a deep breath to calm herself, *the idea that such a low level idiot like the agent would dare threaten her was insulting.*

“You and I both now that the information you have may damage my reputation slightly, but I could
and would end you. So let’s stop fucking around. What information do you have for me?”

The agent’s scent of reeking fear lessened slightly.

“I have found where the boy’s father lives. We might take him into custody in an effort to force the boy out of hiding”

Laura laughed.

Her rich vibrato rocked the room for nearly 30 seconds before she managed to control herself.

“Is that all you can offer me? The omega in question is half way across the world, in Paraguay to be exact. How will he know that his father is even imprisoned and more than that, do you really think that will entice him to come back? You’re even more stupid that I thought” Laura finished.

“You’re right” the Agent finished, pulling at the lapel of his bespoke suit, “it won’t be enough. And that’s why I have a bigger offer for you.”

Laura’s heart pounded, this was the moment, and she could smell the blood in the water.

“We go to war”

Even Laura, who was famously unflappable found herself shocked.

“War? With who?”

“The omega federation. I’ve been talking to senators about your brother’s case and creating a network of alphas who have lost their mates because their mates have run away. The USA’s birthrates are getting lower each year, the average beta is lucky to have 2 children and our replacement rate is 1.3. In less than two hundred years, at this rate, our population will shrink by 130 million people. We need every omega we can get, because only omegas are capable of having more than one child safely. Senators have agreed that the omega runaway rate is a problem and people are incensed by cases like your brother’s.”

“But,” Laura furrowed her eyebrows, “It’s not the omega federation that is truly contributing to our great loss of omegas, it’s the OCS. In your organization, an omega is more likely to die than reach age 18. Moreover, SPCA2, does render omegas docile, but it also has been correlated with infertility. There is no way support for this war could be sustained when the facts come to light”

“Unless” Agent Smith pointed out, “Paraguay attacked America first, then in the flurry of recriminations and grieving over the terrorist attacks, we could convince America to go to war and end the runaway problem once and for all.”

“War is good for shipping companies. But,” Laura paused, “are you sure America can win this war? Contrary to government propaganda, Paraguay is actually more technologically advanced than America”

“But America has a larger population, a more sophisticated and highly funded navy and more allies” the Agent pointed out.

“America has lost wars with countries that were less advanced than Paraguay.” Laura noted, “Either way, war is good for my company so I don’t care. But if war will help me convince the government to send in a Special Forces team to find my brother then I don’t care what the outcome is”

“So I will have your full cooperation on this?” the Agent asked.
“Yes, but not money. I already gave your organization a charitable gift of 20 million, and I haven’t seen results. I don’t play games with my money. See yourself out, Smith”

The Agent walked out.

As the door closed, Laura massaged her temples.

“So. … War”

She did not expect that this would end well.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is short because there was a lot going on and I figured it would be better to keep the rhythm going and update this week than wait until later.

And things are finally falling into place for this story……
Derek:
Sometimes dying was fast. And sometimes it was slow. It was so strange to Derek, somedays he felt a new flush of energy pushing him to hope that his body had somehow against all odds, defeated the sickness. At other times, he felt so tired that he could barely get out of bed, watching old cartoons from his plumped pillows. He had given up hope that Stiles would call and truly he understood. Stiles had been continually clear about not wanting to be bonded to an alpha. And even his kind gesture would not change the desire to be free. He rocked back in the chair on his front porch, watching a dandelion tuft float by, as he thought of freedom. He felt imprisoned here, in his own body, unable to run around a block with getting tired. He felt imprisoned in the wrong country, a continent away from his mate.

Sometimes he was angry with Stiles.

What about his freedom?

It was on this beautiful morning, around 10, that he heard a ringtone play. At first he thought he had imagined it, the guitar thrumming, and the dissonant keyboard chords. The hum “Come on baby, light my fire”. He had dreamed of this song every day of the week and woken up to hear only silence.

So he ignored it, rubbed his eyes and assumed the sound would go away.

But then it rang.

Again.

With a strength he did not know he possessed, he got up like a lightning bolt, and dashed to the kitchen countertop, where the cellphone sat blinking, near the sink.

The name flashed on the screen
Stiles.

His heart beat double time.

He swallowed thickly,

“Stiles?”
Freedom aside. *Which was great, who was he kidding?*

Life was not necessarily going great for Stiles in the magic place that omegas now know as Paraguay. After three weeks in an omega hostel, Stiles had gotten tired and decided to transition out of the omega hostels and mingle amongst the regular Paraguayan society. Unfortunately, speaking only broken Spanish, Stiles struggled to get through the day, forget about achieving the success he had once had in America.

At Segunda mano, Stiles had bought a suit, that fit almost as well as his old suits used to. In order to afford a suit, Stiles had to strategically skip a few meals for two weeks. But it was worth it. A ticket to a better life.

He brushed up his resume, hoping to apply to financial security firms in Paraguay, after all he worked for Baroff & Sons, he was smart, he had the qualifications—he would find *some* firm to accept him.

Stiles’s first interview was for a junior analyst position at La Ultimá Linea. It was not the top firm in Paraguay, but hey, he had to start somewhere, right? He swallowed the weak tea he had bought from the street vendor that morning, and ironed his worn, but clean white shirt. Swallowing a lump in his chest, he picked a suitcase that had seen better days off his table and headed to the official building.

Standing there, he noticed that he was one of the oldest applicants for the job. His shoes pinched his feet. Stiles looked at amongst the other alphas, betas and omegas he could identify by scent. They all wore freshly pressed bespoke suits from top designers like Zegna and Armani, their tie clips were silver and gold, suitcases black and polished to a reflective gleam. In his ill-fitting suit, Stiles felt his face burn with shame. He was in a position he had never been before, an underdog.

Yes, in America, Stiles had been an omega. But by going to the best schools, excelling and hiding hid secondary gender, Stiles had always been at, well the front of the line, the top, staring at all those peasants at the bottom. And now he was a peasant. Stiles didn’t like this one bit.

He listened to the conversations of the other job applicants as he waited. They talked about skiing vacations, complained about the expense of the laza, and spoke on and one about the places in which they interviewed.

Stiles looked at them with envy, their lives were *so simple*, they didn’t have to wonder about whether their mate was dying miles overseas (not that Stiles cared or worried about it at all. Or anything.), they never had to worry about hiding who they were, or losing someone who meant everything to them. In a world like this, Stiles would have grown up knowing what a heat was and how to delay it. In a world like this, he would have access to safe heat blockers and bond blockers, in a world like this, Theo would be alive and he and Stiles would still be together.

Stiles swallowed the sadness in his throat.

It just didn’t seem fair.

When Stiles was called into the interview, he took a moment to center himself, to wipe all traces of emotion from his eyes.

He pulled his lips into a smile and headed in.

An alpha who looked to be about his age sat on the other side of a wooden desk in a swivel chair. The man swiveled around to look at Stiles. Smiling and extending a hand in a firm handshake, he greeted, *“Buenos Dias Stiles, Me llamo Rodrigo Bonaventura”*
Stiles smiled back and tried to reply in what he hoped was not broken Spanish.

Stiles looked up at the man, not long ago he had sat in that same seat, making the life or death decisions that would choose the ones who were worthy of Boroff and those who were not.

But he had hope, right?

Paraguay was a land of opportunity, and if he tried hard enough, worked long enough, he would be able to succeed.

He had to hold onto that dream, because otherwise nothing else mattered.

“So, Stiles,” the man began, “he had a very deep, pleasant voice, “I see here that you are a refugee omega from the United States”

Stiles fixed his tie ever so slightly, “Yes, I am”

“Do you have your Omega Identification card?”

Stiles pulled the card from his pocket, he had been told that he would need to bring it to the interview.

The man examined the card for a few seconds, “Okay, 2038. Great” he muttered, then scribbled a few things down.

“So tell me about the experience you’ve had that qualify you for our position” the man began.

Stiles had practiced his spiel and hat it cut down to 5 minutes.

Stiles began, “In my position as a senior associate at Boroff & Sons, I”

Stiles continued on his pre-prepared spiel until he noticed that Rodrigo seemed unfazed.

“So do you know how to use the portal IS system?”

Stiles wondered whether he should lie. He realized he paused a bit too long and the moment had passed, “No, but I am a quick learner,” he said, trying to save himself.

“I see your firm was based in America. The thing is America’s technological system is so backwards that the few Americans I have hired have no idea how to work with our financial systems. In America, you cannot even forecast whether the stock market will go up or down for any stock on any given day, right?”

Stiles shook his head, “Regrettably, no. However, I am sure anyone can learn.”

Rodrigo continued unheedingly, “I’d rather have someone I didn’t have to teach to do the job, Mr.Stilinski-Stally?”

“Stilinski,” Stiles helpfully supplied.

Stiles pressed a bit harder, “However, my background can help me bring a different perspective to your company”

Rodrigo scoffed, “different perspectives? Good try. Honestly, I don’t believe half the omega refugees here even had any jobs besides cleaning or other menial work. I mean, you’ve been spinning some type of lies for me for nearly an hour. Bla bla bla, you were a senior associate accountant. Nonsense,
your story is just as bad as your Spanish.”

Stiles’s face burned with shame. And for once, he had no idea what to say.

“Mr. Rodrigo, look up my name on the internet. it is all true,” Stiles managed to say through his shock.

“I don’t have time for your lies. However, we do need a bathroom sweeper downstairs. See Mrs. Medina at the front desk.”

Stiles was ushered out of the office.

Later, in his small bed in lower Asuncion’s refugee housing, Stiles tried to understand what had happened.

To understand it, he first thought about his apartment. In lower Asuncion, Stiles lived in a small one bedroom apartment. The distance between his one window to his door scarcely less than three arm spans. His bed occupied the left side of the room, covered with flimsy blankets. At night, one could hear the rats gnawing against the electric cords in the walls.

By day, he was engaged in an unending war with cockroaches. No matter how much he cleaned. Hell, even the refugee hostel was more sanitary. He considered himself lucky because he had a room of his own. In lower Asuncion, many of his omega compatriots live with two or three families to one room. He didn’t know how they did it.

Downstairs, there was a central kitchen and 3 washer/dryer sets for about forty families.

He had to quickly carry all his pots and pans back after he used them or they would be stolen a lesson he had learned forcibly when he accidentally left his favorite frying pan downstairs for an hour and it had mysteriously disappeared forever.

Walking out to the window, Stiles looked over the refugee section of the city. The window was his one solace, from it he could see the rest of Lower Asuncion and the floating islands up above like tiny specks in the sky, shimmering with light.

It had become clear to Stiles what was happening, he was poor and a refugee.

He was foreigner, people could not understand him. He didn’t speak Spanish like the native born Paraguayans. He was a nobody, because money is everything.

So when people saw his blue identification card, they weren’t really seeing him, but that card and what it signified.

His neighbors, a family of eight was screaming next door. Stiles’s mind struggled round, thinking about how he could overcome this new barrier before he fell asleep.

In the days that followed, Stiles went on a few more interviews.

He tried lying and saying he knew how to use the portal IS system. But even then, the interview always seemed to go wrong somewhere.

He tried not listing his omega refuge status on his applications. But as soon as he showed up for an interview, the interviewers would take one look at his cheap clothing, hear his strange accent and they would know.
At the end of the first week, Juan Calderon, his apartment’s superintendent, dropped by to remind Stiles that his rent was nearly due.

So reluctantly Stiles hung up his suits and rode the bus to El Paraguayita to find a menial job.

Stiles had not cleaned floors, scrubbed tables or washed dishes since he was in high school working as a custodian to save pocket money for school. He looked at his palms, the smooth skin a testament to years of desk work and sighed.

El Paraguayita was a busy place, the large lunch hall boasted shiny cherry wood chairs, spacious lighting, cheerful walls covered with murals, sweet food smells and happy faces.

Stiles’s stomach grumbles as he listened to the chatter of different patrons during the lunch hour.

The manager took one look at Stiles’s application. He sighed.

“You’re hired,” then he gave Stiles a white towel and a yellow sponge. “Someone threw up in the male bathroom and it’s a mess.

Get to work”.

By the end of his first day, Stiles wished he could quit. He had cleaned shit and piss of toilet seats, put his hands in so much vomit the smell wouldn’t leave his lungs and no matter how hard he cleaned, it all went to shit in about an hour or so. At night, he tried to scrub the stains off his fingers, but he felt like he would never be clean.

After one week, Stiles had to pick up another job because with one job he couldn’t pay both his rent and have enough food to eat. With the little money he had saved up, he bought a Spanish to English dictionary and tried to learn the words of his new tongue.

Sweet words like hija, amar, dulce, naranja, las uvas, mangoes, pina, platano

Cold words: frio, odio, morir

He listened to the sounds around him and tried to practice their accents to himself in the mirror, or in the train in the evening.

Sometimes Stiles indulges himself, allows himself to wonder why he ever left America. Left his amazing job in order to suffer hear at home, cleaning floors and washing dishes and picking up shit.

But then he walks outside without the stench of clying alpha perfume in his nostrils and he remembers.

He tries to believe in the dream. That he could be like one of the other omegas around him in his own apartment and free. Saves money little by little by skipping meals to pick up books on the portal IS system so he can be better prepared. He doesn’t have a plan right now, but he has a roof over his head at least.

That’s not so bad, really?

It is one day when Stiles is cleaning the floor of the restaurant near evening that an important man comes in for dinner. Stiles doesn’t know much about him, except his name. Raphael Eduardo, an important technology magnate in Paraguay who is worth about 6.8 million guaranis.
He lives on the isle of the Aguilas, and his suit is a double breasted blue immaculate Calvin Klein wonder. Stiles wants to be like him, he wants to be him. Raphael meets another man, at the table, who is also dressed impeccably, wearing a gray overcoat. They both begin to talk.

Stiles is both cleaning the floor near the man and listening in to the conversation. He notes curiously that the second man never removes the gray overcoat he wears. Stiles has always been pretty decent with languages and due to his intense study his skills have been growing prodigiously.

The men are talking about bonds and companies, selling stocks and funds. Stiles listens curiously as Raphael announces his plan to start sending certain shipments out to America and how those shipments will be packaged and travel securely.

As Stiles is working, he notices the sleeve of the other man fall slightly, zeroing in, he notices a flag tattoo on the man’s left forearm. Stiles has seen it somewhere before.

Stiles closes his eyes for a second and tried to run through his photographic memory, “Where oh Where has he seen that tattoo before?”

The flag of Peace.

And suddenly Stiles realizes three things,

The shipments Raphael is speaking about aren’t high tech gadgets or necessities. He plans to smuggle omegas.

Second, The flag of peace is there to assassinate Raphael.

Third, The reason the man isn’t taking his coat off is because he is wearing a bomb.

Stiles makes a quick calculation again. If he yells, “bomb”, perhaps no one will believe him and he will be just be fired. Or perhaps the assassin will be forced to reveal himself, by blowing up the entire restaurant and killing everyone, including him. Thirdly, he could let his manager know of the bomb, get everyone evacuated from the restaurant, and win a hero’s acclaim. But the next day, he would be back to scrubbing toilets and what was in that for him?

He hates the idea of smuggling omegas into America. America is a horrible awful place for omegas. Really, Stiles should let the assassin kill Raphael and call it a day. No one could blame him, he was just a custodian.

But there was the point, Stiles didn’t want to be a custodian for the rest of his life. He wanted a job. He wanted a nice apartment. He wanted to goddamn stop scrubbing piss from idiots who couldn’t seem to aim properly into the toilet bowl. And this might be his only chance.

Swallowing, Stiles felt an uncomfortable queasiness in his gut. He usually never felt bad about screwing anyone else over, but for some reason lately, his conscience had begun to assert himself, speaking to him at night, in cold whisper, “Have you learned nothing?”


Stiles dipped his mop into his plastic bucket and, moving near Raphael, began to mop the floor around him, then ever so carefully, Stiles tilted the mop at the right angle, splashing dirty grey water all over Raphael’s immaculate suit.

Raphael was enraged.
“That’s a 5,000 dollar suit!” he screamed incoherently.

Stiles pitched his eyes down, “I am sorry sir, Lo Siento. Fue un accidente. Por favor” Stiles begged.

“I want to see your manager”, Raphael thundered.

Stiles begged a little more, “Please, don’t do that. This is the only job I have.”

Then Raphael gripped both of Stiles’s arms with his vise like hands, “Now!”

Stiles sighed, appearing resigned, “Follow me sir,”

Then instead of taking Raphael to his manager, he took Raphael outside the restaurant.

Stiles immediately dropped the meek and downcast look.

“The man you are meeting is an assassin”

“What? What kind of nonsense is this?” Raphael blustered, “where is your manager”

Stiles continued, “While you were eating, I noticed a white flag on his left forearm, one of the symbols of The Flag for Peace, an omega rights organization. He means to kill you.”

As Stiles spoke, he realized he had miscalculated, Raphael was smart but arrogant, too much for his own good, and he would never believe a no-name omega janitor. Especially when his tale sounded so improbable.

Stiles was running through different scenarios in his head when he had a stroke of good luck, a bang resounded, rocking the floor under his feet, sending him flying.

The bomb had exploded. Somehow, the assassin had realized that his cover was blown and did the only thing he could to avoid capture.

Committing suicide by bomb.

Raphael’s mouth hung agape, he turned to Stiles with new, hungry eyes.

It was later, after the sirens, after being whisked away in a black car, that Stiles was finally able to negotiate his terms with Raphael over a glass of Dom Perignon.

Stiles swirled the vintage champagne in his wineglass inhaling before he tipped the glass towards him.

“I know you’re smuggling omegas,” Stiles began.

“Tell me why I shouldn’t just have you killed for knowing that and leave your body in some dumpster to find”

“Probably because, I have a friend instructed to call the police with details of your entire operation, if he doesn’t see me by 8 am tomorrow” Stiles bluffed.

“That’s a lie” Raphael countered.

“Perhaps,” Stiles replied keeping his heart beat steady, “but is it a risk you’re willing to take?
Especially when I want so little?"

“Name your price”

“I want a position at Cueva Roja as a junior associate,” Stiles voiced.

“Paradiso? That’s silly. You don’t even have the skills to succeed there. Have you ever gone to college, even? Why don’t you just take 5,000 guaranís and we’ll call it a day.” Raphael said dismissively.

“I see you don’t do your homework,” Stiles replied, “My name is Stiles Stilinski, senior accountant at Boroff & Sons. I can very well tell you that I am one of the best at my job.”

Raphael looked on in disbelief, “I am familiar with that firm. It is the best of a bad bunch. Being that America’s technology is nearly fifty years behind everyone else’s. But why would a senior accountant at Boroff be working as a janitor?”

There was a moment of silence.

“There can only be one reason why,” Stiles supplied helpfully.

“You’re an omega”

Stiles nodded quietly.

“Very well, you can start next week Monday. You will tell no one of what happened here and I will fax you the documents you need to sign” Raphael finished, he handed Stiles a wad of guaranís, “here’s some cab money”.

Stiles stood up to leave, placing his untouched glass full of champagne on the table.

“You don’t like my champagne?” Raphael commented innocuously.

“Not at all, I love Dom Perignon. I just happen to prefer my wine without rat poision” Stiles explained.

“Good try, Senor Eduardo. I look forward to seeing you on Monday.”

Stiles hailed a cab after walking for about thirty minutes, and dusting his body off in case he was carrying any bugs.

After thirty minutes, he called a cab and led the driver on a circuitous route to his residence.

In the lobby of his apartment? ( or was it really a tenement?), the doorman was listening to the nightly news.

“5 people died and 12 were injured when a suicide bomber detonated his vest in the middle of El Paraguayita, a popular restaurant in downtown Asuncion” Stiles heard.

He went to his bathroom and threw up.

All night. The images of the dead bodies assaulting him, the choice he did not make, His throat was raw and scraped by morning.
In which Derek and Stiles are oceans away and yet have never been closer to each other.

Raphael made good on his promise. Stiles had a job at Cueva Roja. It took a week to prove himself, but he managed to do it. And before he knew it, Stiles was one of the most promising junior associates at his firm. The salary advance and sign on bonus at his job had given Stiles enough money to move into a solidly middle class neighborhood where the walls were not thin and he didn’t have to hear the screams of a family of eight fighting on the other side of the wall.

All in all, things were good.

Or they should have been.

Except Stiles could no longer sleep, it seemed that as soon as his life was stables, the nightmares had come with a vengeance.

The guilt overshadowed him of what he had done again to get that safety, that security, the nice apartment and the corner office. He saw the images of the alphas he had killed in the truck on his way to Paraguay. The images of the bombing victims at La Paraguayita show up as faceless mouths in his dreams, calling him in the voices of Alberto and Juanita. Derek cries for him, he lies on a white hospital bed, tubes slithering in and out of his wasted form.

Stiles waked up with wet tears on his face. And a need for stronger bond blockers.

The bond blockers in Paraguay are great. Decades of tinkering, and investment into technology had given Paraguayan citizens bond blockers that were safe and effective with little side effects. In fact, Stiles knew he should get his bond broken, right. But he couldn’t do it. For some reason the promise he made to Derek stuck in his mind.

It the third night of the week, when Stiles saw himself standing in the middle of Times Square, the red brick contrasting with the asphalt road, Derek’s body cradled in his hands. Derek was bleeding from his nose. His mouth, his ears. Little red trickles of blood tracked across white skin and Stiles was screaming so hard, he felt like he would never be able to stop.

“Please, Derek, Please. Please”

And Derek just said nothing and his body felt colder.

Stiles woke up screaming.

And finally, he relented and fished out the little black phone he had been hiding in his backpack and dialed 2, calling Derek.

*He just needed to know that Derek was alive.*

Then the nightmares would go away.
Derek picked up on the first ring.

“Stiles?”

**Derek**

The first time Stiles called he just wanted to know if Derek was alive. “Are you alive?”

“Yes” Derek responded.

Then the phone turned off.

Derek had felt like throwing the phone across the room in frustration.

But he didn’t call Stiles back.

He knew that this whole chase had been initiated by him.

He needed Stiles to feel he had some control. So he didn’t call Stiles back.

But the calls kept coming. Usually in the late afternoon for Derek.

He once asked Stiles what time it was in Paraguay, Stiles had paused and then responded “2 AM”.

The first few conversations were just

*Heavy breathing.*

“Are you still alive?”

“yes”

Phone disconnected.

Then, Derek responded to Stile’s question with a “yes, how are you?”

“I can’t sleep,” Stiles responded, “I keep thinking of all the bad things I have done”

Derek tried to send reassurance over the bond, but he felt a wall. Probably, he thought, because they were so far away, and their bond was so new.

So instead Derek said, “Tell me about it”

Stiles sighed, “Who cares if you know anyway? I mean, you can’t judge me or kill me, you’re an entire continent away. I helped kill two men.”

Derek swallowed the horror that he felt, but he sensed in Stiles’s voice that there was something more, “Why?”

“They were trying to smuggle me and the other omegas into slavery”

“So you killed them to survive?” Derek prodded.

“Well, not exactly,” Stiles continued, “really my friend shot one and the other was already dying. But I threw their bodies from the truck without even a burial. Their—their faces haunt me, Derek” Stiles said softly, trying not to sob.
“I can’t sleep”

Derek spoke soothingly, “You didn’t kill anyone. You didn’t do anything that anyone else wouldn’t have done in that situation. If you hadn’t gotten rid of the bodies when you did, then you would be captured and sold into slavery and maybe you and the other omegas you were with would have died. It’s not wrong to do those things to protect others” Derek finished.

Stiles sighed.

“Thank you, Derek”

As time went on, Derek could feel the wall between them both, a wall that had stood strongly, in their bond, breaking down little by little. He could feel Stiles’s excitement one day over the phone. Carefully he asked what Stiles was so excited about, “What’s going on?” Derek asked.

“I solved a really difficult counterfeiting case,” Stiles burst out excited. Stiles went on and one about how the counterfeiter had created hundred dollar bills using car paint, carefully printing the bills of receipt paper to get the right sheen, and how Stiles had looked at the paper and realized that something was quite right so he’d shined the bill under a UV light and realized landmarks were missing. As Derek listened to his mate speak with such excitement and enthusiasm, he had a glimpse of who Stiles was, could feel the joy in Stiles’s heart intertwine with his. He had chased Stiles through two continents and four countries but now he felt closer to Stiles than he ever had been.

He wished he had known this then, he wished that instead of Stiles telling him this by telephone, he had Stiles in his arms and they were sitting at a movie theatre, trading secrets over buckets of overly cheesy yellow popcorn.

Talking with Stiles was the highlight of Derek’s day. For some reason, perhaps because of their daily talks, Derek’s bond sickness had stalled.

Maybe it was the warmth that seemed to be slowly coming from Stiles or the burgeoning affection he heard when Stiles called him each day.

Derek would get up, have a walk around the block, read or write and wait until around 6 Pm for Stiles’s calls. They were becoming more regular as time went on.

He learned Stiles’s favorite childhood book: Goodnight Moon.

Favorite movie: Pulp Fiction.

And he told Stiles that his favorite colors was dark blue, favorite flavor: cinnamon.

He told Stiles about his childhood, leaving out the parts concerning Kate and the fire. And Stiles spoke longingly of his father John Stilinski.

He could feel the moments when Stile’s voice would trail off into sleep, and Derek would quietly reach out a tendril of thought through the bond and wrap Stiles in affection and warmth.
Chapter Summary

In which Stiles is pushed towards something he does not want to face.

**Stiles**

Stiles had never felt so good. He didn’t know how one conversation a day, could make such a difference, but he felt centered lately, like something that had been missing was being pushed slowly into place. Like an empty space inside of himself being filled. A few days after he started talking to Derek, he woke up and the morning seemed filled with wonder. At work, he found himself humming cheerily about one figure or another and late at night, he couldn’t help racing home to talk to Derek. Learning about Derek was like open a set of Russian Matryoshka dolls, every time he listened, he saw more surprises inside. He would let Derek tell him stories of omegas and alphas long gone, written in those medieval books Derek had taken to reading. About how omegas and alphas of old could speak without talking, thoughts leaping from mind to mind as clearly as a flowing river. And as he talked, Stiles would fall asleep into that warmth, into the cadences of that voice. Sleeping a refreshing sleep.

Stiles was sleeping a whole lot better. And if he woke from a nightmare, he called Derek and Derek’s voice, just the feel of him would calm Stiles somehow. Stiles didn’t know what it was, he had not felt like this about Theo, Theo’s presence was all consuming in his life. A deity that demanded obeisance. Felix was like a waterfall, a trickling brook on a warm day. But Derek? Derek was like a strong pillar, quiet but immovable. He was the warmth of a raging fire on a February night, a north star pointing in a direction that always seemed true. He was like being enfolded yet never wanting to let go. Felix was a ditty, but Derek was a full throated, symphony filled mixing saxophones, flutes, harps, pianos in some kind of jubilant encore. Stiles didn’t want to feel these things, but in some way he knew that Derek was all he had ever needed in his life.

At the end of the summer, Cueva Roja’s profits were up. They had made some good decisions with the stocks and won some influential accounts. All the associates went out to a bar to celebrate. The celebration went deep and long into the night. Alcohol was drank. Libations were poured. Laughter was had.

At 2 am, Stiles asked his colleagues to excuse him and stepped out.

He knew Derek would be waiting for his call.

“Derrrrrrreeeeekkkkk,” Stiles laughed, a bit tipsy

“Are you still alive?” Stiles joked, recalling their first conversation.

Derek chuckled, “not dead yet”

“You sound drunk,” Derek pointed out.

“Nuh-uh,” Stiles replied childishly, “just tipsy”
“Drunk” Derek finished.

“Yeah, I’m kind of wasted,” Stiles admitted. “I just wanted to call because…..welll “

Stiles searched for a word to encapsulate his feelings. It wasn’t that he missed Derek or liked hearing his voice or..

“Because, you know, I just wanted to say hello”

“Well, hello” Derek laughed back, “call me again when you’re sober?”

Stiles listened to the voice again, “ok. Ok”

Stiles ends the call and fits the phone back in the pocket if his suit, where he always carries it.

“Who was that?” Stiles turns around. Jose, one of the other associates had heard his call.

Quickly Stiles drew his mask back, trying to wipe his face of all emotion.

“An old friend” Stiles replied.

“Really?” Jose asked, quirking an eyebrow, “because it didn’t sound like you were talking to an old friend.

It sounds like you love him”
Choices We make

Chapter Summary

And Stiles makes choices

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Stiles

Stiles sat in a doctor’s office, in a thin paper gown, trying to learn why his bond blockers no longer worked.

He could feel the thin thread that connected him to his mate inside his chest, somewhere above his soul. Quiescent, it lay inside him, pulsing like a second skin.

As he sat on the plastic bed of the doctor’s office, Stiles thought. A lot. He thought about the way Derek’s voice sounded, warm and rich and full of honey sweetness. He thought about the tendril of warmth that would wrap him up when he had nightmares or couldn’t sleep at night.

I can’t sleep because of all the bad things I’ve done.

Sometimes when you love someone so much and they’re far away from you, you like to imagine them at any moment of the day. You look at the clock and you can see in your mind’s eye what their form as clear as day, the color of their eyes, the clock in their room on the wall telling you it’s that time of the day.

It is probably night in America, Stiles knows. And he can see Derek sleeping, his form, broad shoulders, bright blue eyes illuminated by the moon’s glow that streams from the window. He can see it and he misses Derek so much, with such a longing it feels like an elemental force. As if something inside him could pull him inexorably towards Derek like gravity pulls one to the ground.

Derek, who would never know, or imagine what he was doing now.

Doctor Emilie walks in, and Stiles tries to will this image away.

The doctor speaks, “I’ve reviewed all the test results and I think we can say definitively that the reason the bond blockers are not working is that a tertiary bond has already formed between both you and Derek”

Stiles sat in shock.


The doctor furrowed his eyebrows.

Stiles calmed his ever beating heart as he tried to explain.

“We haven’t had sex. I’m not even anywhere near my mate, he’s a continent away. I’ve never even
accepted him as my mate,” Stiles explained.

The doctor sighed, “I see you have come from, Estados Unidos….America, am I right?”

Stiles nodded. What did his country have to do with this?

“Americans are taught a lot of myths about bonding that are not true. One of the biggest myths is that sex is needed to complete a bond. The truth is that while sex is important, it’s only necessary and not sufficient—”

“The real mark of bonding is the feeling of love, and affection on both sides. That mark can be confused with sex because of all the hormones, oxytocin included, that are released during sexual intercourse. After sex, people feel bonded, but the real cementing comes days later, when both sides accept that they are two pairs of a whole. We’re still studying why the final bond cements the way it does but the point is you don’t need to have sex to be bonded,”

A moment of silence wrapped the hospital room.

“Can I break a tertiary bond?” Stiles asked, quietly.

“You could try. First you cannot contact your bond mate in any way, shape, or form. We could then hope, with time, that the feelings on both sides would fade. I can prescribe you stronger bond blockers too which might help you succeed, but the truth is I don’t know if your effort will be successful,”

“So am I stuck like this forever?” Stiles asked with a hysterical bent to his voice.

“No,” the doctor explained, reassuringly, “But of those who tried to break tertiary bonds, the literature is split as to their success. Half successfully broke the bond and the other half failed. It’s all up to you,”

Stiles left the doctor’s office with two packs of extra strength bond pills.

All up to me, the weight of that decision lay heavy on Stiles’s chest.

*It’s all up to me.*

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone, Sorry I have been on hiatus so long. It's been stressful here lately, btw work, applying and getting into grad school! And well everything else and I struggle with writing about love so it was tough to write. Let's see.
What Freedom means to me

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Stiles carries the pills in his pocket. They whisper to him, _Freedom is what you’ve always wanted_. He carries Derek in his heart, and he can see his mate’s face, those eyes just looking and looking at him with oceans of sorrow inside them.

Stiles wonders what freedom means to him. Wonders whether it means the long nights of no sleep, the nightmares that cannot be soothing, and the aching loneliness inside of him that he had never noticed until it was filled. He tosses and turns at night thinking about it.

And in the morning, those pills are still in his pocket and he still does not know what to do. And he hasn’t slept and his eyes are red (of course not with tears, right, he wasn’t actually crying).

The next night Derek calls him and Stiles wills himself with everything inside him not to answer. And that’s hard because when he hears the phone ring he aches inside. Sometimes he tortures himself by listening to those messages.

_Derek: Hey Stiles I haven’t heard from you for a while. Just calling to say hello._

_Derek: Hey Stiles, it’s midnight where I am and I miss you, call me back soon._

_Derek: Stiles, is everything okay? I can feel our bond growing weaker, I miss you._

_Derek: Hey Stiles, I am worried, I can’t feel you with me. I miss you. I love you._

Stiles sits on his narrow bed and listens to Derek’s messages, and each message brings a fresh new wave of pain. But it is worth the agony, just to hear Derek’s voice again. The sweet, deep rumble of the alpha tone, the way he says “Stiles” so delicately, each word caressed with affection. It is the only thing that sustains him through these long nights. The only reason he keeps on.

Not sleeping and barely eating takes it’s toll on Stiles’s work. He is no longer as fast and quick and efficient as he once was. And the bosses notice it. His coworkers don’t want to talk to him because all Stiles wants to do is sleep. And there is a deep bone sickness inside of Stiles that won’t leave him. It’s like the bond blockers aren’t working, the misery all over again.

At work, in the third week, Stiles has nosebleeds, he looks in the mirror at his face, the paleness, the dark shadows that seemed to be permanently carved under his eyes.

And Stiles can never recall feeling like this. No matter how awful everything was.

He doesn’t want to try anymore. He doesn’t want to get up in the morning. He just wants to die and for it to be over. He wants the darkness that stretches out longer in front of him every day to end. And he doesn’t care how it ends. Just that it does.

He can’t feel Derek anymore. Not inside him and he doesn’t even feel himself. Like Derek took a part of him away and stole it. And now Stiles can never be whole again.

In the third week, he breaks down and he calls Derek. He calls and he calls. And no one answers. He begs Derek and he says he is sorry. He misses him. And Stiles does something he hates to do, he cried on the phone. And when he gets no answer, Stiles cries to himself in his room. Derek must
have given up on him. Derek must have forsaken him. He had something so precious, and even now, not knowing what love is, Stiles is trying to feel out the edges, trying to imagine and describe what they had, but he can’t. He only knows it is shattered and broken.

Sorrow gives way to acceptance in the fourth week. Stiles stops taking his pills. He stops caring. He stops going to work, who cares if he’s fired. He stops thinking about anything but the feel of a gun on his forehead. The smooth black metal. The end of the ever-stretching darkness.

It is on a Friday when Stiles is sitting in his room, thinking that his phone rings.

Derek’s phone.

Heart in his chest, Stiles reaches for the phone.

He hears a voice, “Is this Derek’s mate? Stiles?”

Stiles says nothing, shocked, who could this be?

“Well, fuck you, you omega whore, Derek’s missing,”

Stiles’s throat goes bone dry. He doesn’t hear the insults or anything else except “Derek’s missing”

Stiles clears his throat, “He’s missing?

How? Who is this? I’ll do anything, just please bring him back to me?”

Laura was shocked by the desperation she heard in Stiles voice.

“I’m his sister,”

Stiles’s mind was razor focused, “What happened to Derek?”

And so Laura began to tell her tale……

Chapter End Notes

It’s time to see what makes Derek tick. and understand him more.
Laura hadn’t understood it, but a few weeks after the Midsummers Ball, it seemed like Derek was on the mend. He was smiling when he saw her. He had the energy to run around the block again.

*Maybe Stiles wasn’t his mate, after all no one who truly loved her brother would make him suffer so much*, she had thought.

Laura was curious when she saw him grinning ear to ear, the light in her brother’s eyes, the life he had been missing. She asked, teasingly, with tender curiosity but he dodged all her questions. Derek could be perfectly opaque when he wanted to be.

She searched some internet articles about bonding on her phone, trying to ascertain if this was some new phase of bond sickness, with something dark lurking around the corner. But none of the articles she read could explain it. And well, why look a gift horse in the mouth?

Then suddenly, like a storm, as soon as he started to feel better, he got much worse.

His face seemed pinched and sickly. He didn’t answer her calls. She stayed at his bedside one night when he thrashed in the throes of fever, calling for “Stiles” over and over as if it was the only prayer on his lips.

The day before he disappeared, he had shown her his phone.

She had come to visit him that Sunday, the frangipanis had died, their brilliant pink petals scattered like so many dead doves on the green summer lawn.

She knocked at his door five times before he answered.

And when he did, it was a gaunt version of himself that answered with shadows under his eyes, not her brother. *This was not him.*

He lay on the couch and Laura sat next to him. For hours they rested near each other in a painful silence that was at last broken.

“I have something to tell you, Laura” Derek whispered.

Laura looked at him questioningly.

“Can you go to the kitchen, on the countertop, near the sink, there’s a box. Can you bring it here?”

Laura stood up, tottering on her Choo heels, fetched the unassuming cardboard box and sat down next to Derek.

“Open it, Derek ordered.

Inside was a flip phone. It was ancient, at least a hundred or more years old by now. Tiny rubber buttons with numbers dotted the pad.
“I’ve been talking to Stiles,” Derek explained, “that’s why I seemed to be feeling better”

Laura was shocked, mouth opened wide, “H-h-how?”
Derek sighed and struggled for breath, “It doesn’t matter anymore. He stopped answering me.”

Laura, always head strong began to butt in, but Derek raised a hand.

“You were right Laura. He lied. He’ll never come back for me.”

Laura’s throat choked red hot, and tears spilled over her eyes. She hadn’t cried in years but seeing her brother so broken before her…. She tried to keep her sobs silent as Derek closed his eyes.

The next day, Derek went out for his daily walk and no one had seen him again. That was one week ago.

Stiles could hear the blame in her voice, the anger, *I did this to her.*

“You killed him. I can’t even feel our pack bond anymore,” Laura said calmly and the cold tone of her voice was even scarier than the anger.

“Once I find my brother’s body,” Laura vowed, “I will destroy you.”

The phone clicked off.

Stiles closed the phone, his hands shaking.


Everything he touched went down in flames.

He could feel Mildred wailing in his ears. *You killed our alpha. Bad bad omega.*

He had always told himself that he made the best choices for himself. It was a dog eat dog world, there was no place for humility or compassion. If he didn’t screw someone over, someone else would do it to him. And so it goes, right? Right?

So yeah, he helped a guy who ran an omega trafficking organization?

But well, he needed a job. And he had one, right? And a nice house in a nice neighborhood where he couldn’t hear families arguing in the other room? It was worth it, right?

So whatever, he pretended to be an alpha and drugged others with his scent in boarding school?

And maybe that might have hurt them or made them feel useless and cheap when they woke up in the morning and wondered what had happened to them, feeling pains inside themselves from touches they never consented to.

But no one caught on to him being an alpha, so he did it because he had too.

And well, yeah he sold out the flag of peace and decimated their organization but

And yeah he promised to come back for Derek but

There were so many excuses Stiles made for himself, so many things he told himself to hide the truth.
The truth was that Stiles looked at himself in the bathroom mirror and he hated himself, his face and what he had become. He was no better than the alphas that used him and he had lost one of the most precious things he had ever felt in his life?

And for what? Was this really freedom? Because it hurt so much.

Hurt so much that even when he put his fist through the mirror and screamed, the glass shards cutting his skin didn’t hurt that badly.

Stiles threw up in the darkess of his bathroom, retching with the weight of all his self-hatred. He deserved to die. He certainly didn’t want to live anymore.

He knelt near the toilet after throwing up for the seventh time that night. His throat was so raw, “Please, Derek, Please, please be alive”.

He chanted it again and again, like a prayer.

Again and again and again.

Stiles could see Derek, almost touch him. He could hear his voice and feel the weight of his breath.

It felt so good, Stiles just luxuriated in that pleasure.

But what was Derek doing here?

It was a small white room, with one exposed lightbulb in the ceiling. No windows. Derek was bound to the wall, with chains of silver, coated with something that smelled awful? Wolfsbane?

Stiles didn’t know how long Derek had been there, but it was long enough to grow a beard, Derek looked weak and he was nursing a black eye and a bruised lip.

A door opened in the south of the room.

A tall woman walked in. She wore silver high heeled boots, and her long blond hair felt to the small of her black. Ice blue eyes examined every inch of his mate with a possessive gaze that made Stiles’s instincts roil. Her fingernails were clean, fastidiously so. She wore a white shirt and some black jeans that moulded to every curve in her body.

“Hi, Derek” she greeted in a seductive voice, “so nice to have you back, love,”

“Kate,” Derek growled.

Two other men followed Kate into the room, both with dark mustaches and even darker eyes, carrying silver tipped whips.

“Let the fun begin,” Kate chuckled.

Stiles watched as Derek was beaten, blood pouring out of cuts in his skin and he felt like screaming, but he said nothing, trying to pull on the bond, make Derek know he was there.

Derek? Derek?

Stiles didn’t get any answer. Maybe his mate couldn’t hear him.
I usually would feel a lot of pressure to write really long chapters especially after a big break. But instead, I'm going to write shorter, more frequent ones. I think it is better for me to write and move the pace along than to wait months to write a really long chapter etc. So let's see if I can keep up with it.
Fifteen years ago

Chapter Summary

Can we all just kill Kate in this? seriously. hate that bitch.

Derek: 15 years ago

*I was as innocent as a lily blooming when you plucked me from my vine*

*I was doe of the pure white in the forest, leaping*

*A graceful gazelle, legs folded and sleeping*

*I was a silver tongued hummingbird about to fly*

*Till you ripped up my wings*

*And devoured me*

*Kate, I was barely more than a child when you destroyed me.*

Derek: 15 years Ago

Derek wasn’t supposed to be here. He was not the smartest of his brothers, nor the strongest. Laura had more worldly assurance, Cora had more verve. He was the mediocre middle, the bland white bread in a sandwich and no one noticed so much he was there. Mostly it was fine, he was good at fading into the background, listening in at corners, being a shadow. There were times when he wanted to see and be seen, but mostly he liked his mother’s smile, his father’s hug, the way his older brother wrapped his arm around Derek’s shoulder and showed him how to hold a baseball bat. He liked being wrapped in the warmth of a large loving family, the feeling you get in the soft breathing of the night, that someone you love is breathing in the room next to you.

He would remember that now, remember it with the pain of memory. The persistence and cruelty of that memory. Remember it years after the fire when everything inside him had burned to dust and ashes, he would still believe that if he strained his ears enough, he would hear David breathing.

Kate appeared on the Midsummer Night Ball. He can still feel the rasp of the scaly red lizard mask across his fingers, the smile her wicked red lips curved under alighting his young body with a fierce desire. She made him feel important in the world, not just one of the brood of the many Hale children in the huge Hale family. After they had danced that night and she scrawled her number on his palm, Derek was entranced.

He called her back the same night, too excited to wait, and listened to her tinkling laughter on the phone. “Why don’t I pick you up from school tomorrow? We can go talk in peace.”

Talia Hale fumed that a 25 year old woman would be “dating” her 16 year old son. It was stupid. She didn’t trust Kate’s glass blue eyes, sparkling like the edge of a diamond knife.
“I forbid you to go anywhere with her,” Talia insisted.

Michael, always the softer one, was more oblique. He sat on Derek’s bed one night ruffling his son’s hair and explained in a loving way.

“Kate is much too old for you, my boy. You don’t even really know yourself yet, and I think you should find someone who is more your age. I know, I know, you’re 16 going on 33, but really Derek, there’s so much you don’t know,” then his Papa kissed him on the cheek.

And still Derek’s heart was not swayed.

In the year that passed after their fateful meeting, he was now 16. He was a man, so his height told him. So the mirror announced to everyone he met. His arms flexed, rippling with muscles. He tried out and made it onto the varsity baseball and basketball teams. Girls smiled when they saw him walk by. He went through puberty, blossoming into an alpha, with a steady gaze that made girls melt and men incline their heads in submission. Je was the ruler of the school, and the world, maybe, an adult now.

And as an adult he knew what he wanted. So what if Kate was older than him? So what if she sometimes seemed more interested in his family and werewolf secrets than she was in him? She was beautiful and mature and so smart in all the ways of the world. He could have anyone. He wanted her.

Of course he would lie to his parents though, they’d never suspect that all those times when he claimed to be at a friend’s house for a project, he was with Kate.

They’d never know that she’d showed up to substitute for his French class one day and they’d shared a few heated kisses in the teacher’s break room. Tongue in moth, searching for dominance, teeth clanging, sweaty and swept with passion.

There were so many things he didn’t know, his father told him.

And even more, Derek thought, that you don’t know about me.

Derek thought he had done a good job of being sneaky. After he graduated high school, he would marry Kate and they move into their own house in Beacon Hills. She told him her dad, Gerard, would help them survive. They’d named their kids, they would have four. He just had to get through high school first, get through his junior year without being caught. And he would have, if it wasn’t for his dad dropping by the High school at the end of the day, and seeing Derek get into Kate’s black Pontiac firebird with two silver bullets painted over the door.

That night, at the table, there was a lot of yelling and screaming, while Derek sat stone faced.

Talia reasoned and begged. Told Derek that the Argents came from a Hunter family, that they were dangerous. That he should stay away. She threatened grounding, privileges taken away, to homeschool him. Derek sat, ramrod straight at the kitchen table, glowering the entire time. His parents were prejudiced, caught up in fighting a century long battle with “Hunters” who, hello, barely existed anymore. Their words bounced of him, like so much noise. By the time he went to bed that night, his mother had extracted a “promise” that he wouldn’t meet Kate anymore.

But promises meant little to Derek, well actually, they meant a lot, but well, he didn’t agree with his parents, didn’t believe them.

He knew, with the arrogance of the young that his parents were simply prejudiced. How could they not see that Kate was perfect for him, the only one for him. He felt inside his heart, that traitorous
lump, that out of all the women in the world there was never one so remarkable as Kate. His parents were fighting past wars he couldn’t see or understand, they fought shadows. Only Derek could see and know the truth. He knew that one day he would be free, to live in that little house with Kate, with their four children. To hear her rich, full throated laughter ringing through the walls. Soon. Someday, Mom couldn’t alpha him out forever.

And all through this, the meetings with Kate never stopped.

He was just more and more secretive. It was a game for him, a game of:

Notes passed through proxies and friends of friends.

Burner phones were bought with code names.

Abandoned shacks in enemy wolf territory to snatch secret kisses under starlight.

It was a game he played with his parents and with himself, all the more fun because they knew it was happening and couldn’t do anything to stop it.

Their dear, sweet, easy going, middle child had, overnight, become a moody and brooding teenager. Slammed doors in the morning and grumpy whispers in the mornings. Often Talia sat listening at Derek’s door after all her children had gone to bed. And she worried, with a that premonition that is a mother’s gift, at the evil she felt encircling her child. Talia took books out of the library: “How to relate to your growing son.”

“A guide to raising well-adjusted young wolves”

But nothing could help her bridge this perverse wall between that seemed to have grown, uncalled for between herself and her son. So many conversations now ended in “I’m fine. I’m okay”. Each word was like a sharp sliver into her heart. Derek, who had once been so open and warm and trusting was now guarded and silent. It did not seem right. She cursed Kate with every breath.

Kate took his virginity that summer before he turned seventeen. Derek had been ashamed to admit it, but he hadn’t been ready. He wanted to wait maybe, until later?

But Kate had laughed at him, “What, are you feeling shy? I’ll take care of you,” she murmured as she unzipped his pants and fitted his cock into her mouth, licking the edges and the tip.

She lay underneath him, her beautiful form spread out over the covers, the curves of her breasts swelling up like Venus in the flesh.

He was panting hard.

“I need you Derek, don’t make me wait,” she said breathily as she turned her dark blue eyes up to his.

And Derek, always powerless to say no, complied.

Kate was always so fascinated by werewolves.

“So you guys are virtually indestructible?” she asked one day, as she panted against Derek’s chest.

“Hmm,” Derek hummed, still blissed out from the sex, “No, we can be killed by wolfsbane, and when someone puts a wolfsbane barrier down we cannot cross it. But that’s a werewolf secret, you can’t tell anybody.
Kate’s smile seemed to be a little more blinding that day, She kissed Derek, tounging at his ear, “I won’t say a word,”

Even now, fifteen years later, Derek struggles to understand, to comprehend the weight of all the lies Kate had told him. When he thinks about it, it crushes him. How he believed every single one, gullibly swallowing every falsehood, so sure of the truth of her love.

Derek had taken Kate to the Hale grounds.

“So you run around these grounds in furry wolf form?” She asked walking alongside him.

“No,” Derek explained, “it’s actually kind of funny, very few werewolves can run in werewolf form anymore. Usually we get our werewolf form as soon as we bond to our mates, but in recent years, finding a mate had been harder than ever,” Derek mused.

“So I have you all in your vulnerable human glory?” Kate teased.

Derek spun Kate towards him, inhaling the sweetness of her long blonde hair, “I guess so,”

Even when the fire started in the night of the Hale reunion, when all the Hale families from far and away travelled to their house to eat and feast for a night. Even when he saw the wolfsbane line circled around his house, trapping everyone in his family but him and Peter, who had managed to escape through the underground tunnels.

Even when he saw the destruction of his home, when he cried as the firefighters told him no one else survived, he didn’t believe it was Kate.

And, he still remembers how pathetic it was when he called Kate twenty times from the hospital, as he sat vigil over his uncle Peter who could not breathe. He left messages on her phone, begging and pleading with her, “Please pick up, I need you, Kate!”

He wasn’t ready for when she did pick up, the answer when he asked her “Did you set the fire?”

“Of course, I did, Derek, I’m a hunter.

Do you think I could every love anyone as stupid and pathetic as you?”
And the guilt licked like a hungry flame

Chapter Summary

Time to show a different side of Laura

Derek

Uncle Peter lay silent in a white bed, burns covering 75% of his body, face and skin wrapped in gauze. Derek sat next to him, if he strained hard enough, he could hear his Uncle breathing. Uncle Peter hadn’t woken up, the doctors weren’t sure why. As Derek held his hand, listening to his Uncle’s labored breath, he thought it was probably because his uncle had nothing more to live for. Uncle Peter had lost his wife, his kids, everything; and Derek could see why his Uncle didn’t want to wake up, be alive, be here anymore.

The guilt licked at his stomach like a hungry flame. It was all his fault, if he hadn’t let Kate in. If he had listened to his mom and papa. So many “if” and “but”s floated in his mind until he could not sleep. And when the ifs didn’t torture him, it was the faces of his siblings, of all the people he loved. He couldn’t go back to the house, he had nowhere to go home to. Sometimes he would just sit next to Uncle Peter, curling in a chair, trying to make his 6 foot tall frame smaller. Trying to disappear.

This was how Laura found him.

Laura had been in Milan, looking for inspiration for her art when she felt a shift, the balance of the alpha powers falling on her shoulders. When she felt her mother dying, the pack bonds breaking one by one, each string shattering like such fragile glass.

And she had come home, to her tiny town in Beacon Hills, the place she’d swore she would never return to.

Derek remembered Laura in two ways, before and after. Before they had lost their parents, Laura was a free spirit. She was the one most likely to give a spontaneous grin. No dark blazers but brilliant colors, red silk suits, blue jumpers, silk green peasant skirts so diaphanous, one could mistake them for a rippling bay. Laura was an artist back then, happiest in her tiny attic room where she would throw paint on the walls and create canvases with an unerring eye for the softest details. Back then her portraits of a flower, of the lush Hale lands hung from every room in the house. Back then her laugh was unforced and carefree. But the fire burned her laughter just as much as it burned every painting she made.

What Derek would remember and never forget though is this: When she came back from Milan, walking into Derek’s room, seeing him curled up on the chair Peter’s body (because Peter wasn’t really there anymore) next to him, Laura had laid her hand on his shoulder.

“We will get through this Derek, we always will.”

That Laura had given him the hug he didn’t know he needed.

Held him in her arms, when Derek had cried on her shoulder like a little boy, “it’s ok, Derek, it’s ok”
Those first few years were not easy. Uncle Peter would not wake up and Laura had to run the Hale Company which was failing. After news of their parent’s sudden death, stock in Hale Co. had dropped and Laura was working round the clock, day in and out to make it right. Before Talia and Michael died, Hale Co. was about to have a public IPO. Now, of course, that had fallen through and Laura had to pick up the pieces.

And Derek? Derek was just falling to pieces.

He barely finished Senior year with a 2.0 gpa. He spent his days skipping school and his nights drinking wolfsbane infused alcohol until he passed out somewhere and Laura had to send someone to pick him up. And every Saturday, they had to drop by and sit with Uncle Peter because Laura hoped that someday Uncle Peter would wake up.

It didn’t help that they had to sell the Hale house and lands because the Shipping Company was doing so badly. He could hear his sister crying sometimes, late at night, when she thought he couldn’t hear. He knew she was tired and overwhelmed and he was only adding to her pain; but he didn’t know how to stop it. Didn’t know what to do. Didn’t have anything but to bury his pain in a gaping abyss of drugs, sex and alcohol.

Laura only got thinner, her angles sharper, falling into bed at 3 AM after exhausting meetings with company shareholders and waking up at 8 am before he had a chance to see her.

After a few months, the crying at night stopped. Maybe she no longer had the strength anymore.
Sober Morning Thoughts

Chapter Summary

I edited out chapter 10 and 11 to take out the promise. And I made some other edits, so I suggest rereading that before coming back here.

Part of the reason I think I struggled so much to come up with this chapter (besides being crazy busy. Yay grad school!) was that I couldn't figure out Stiles's next move. Then I realized I couldn't see his moves because the "promise" didn't make sense. Stiles doesn't know Derek that well or even love him yet, why would he sacrifice his entire future, leave Paraguay and run to America to his rescue.

"Because love," I thought.

but Stiles wasn't having it. At least not yet. I'm sorry guys. We have to wait a bit longer.

Stiles – Now

“IT was easy,” Stiles mused to himself as he flipped the newspaper page, “so easy to say to oneself in the depths of self-hatred, while burning with bone breaking bond pain, that you would change your life. Much like people started the New Year believing they would lose weight or exercise more or learn how to cook. Then by February, many of these same people had given up on their cooking, stopped waking up early to run and even gained more weight. Resolutions were simple. Achievement was the difficulty.”

Stiles had woken up from his grief three days ago.

He had immediately called Cueva Roja to see, well to see, if he still had a job.

Somehow they were not impressed with his nearly one week unexcused absence from employment.

Stiles wrote his resignation letter to the senior officer, so that the kind Senor Antiguas won’t have to do the unenviable task of firing a successful omega employee.

However, one good thing had come out of it, Senor Antiguas had agreed to put in a good word for Stiles at the other firms in the city; Stiles could probably get a new job if he so desired.

Stiles had smiled grimly, booted up the ancient Mac labtop (a hundred years old, but still quite cheap) and browsed for new job openings. He was on the cusp of writing a resume when he remembered.

Shit. Derek.

And so this was how Stiles found himself sitting at his kitchen table, flipping through his newspaper and wondering what he would do in order to keep his accursed promise.

The thing was that night, when he felt Derek’s agony as sharply as his own, Stiles had felt completely undone. His soul yearned to get the nearest plane to America and go SAVE his mate.

But in the morning, Stiles had woken up feeling better, with nothing but a slight stomachache to
remind him that this bond ever existed. A quick checkup with Doctor Emilie had confirmed that his bond blockers were working, and that the bond had degenerated to a wisp of thin smoke, scarcely stronger than a strand of shed golden hair. Stiles could forget about Derek and go his own way, live a life of safety and relative comfort.

Then there was Derek. Stiles struggled with this decision. Stiles understood that Derek was a good man who did not deserve to die; but at the same time, Derek was also an alpha and years of psychological conditioning would be heard to erase. It was easy for Derek to promise the world to his omega, but if Stiles inextricably bound himself to Derek then how long those promises last?

First it would be:

Omegas are so delicate, let me send an alpha with you to protect you.

And then maybe:

Are you sure an omega should be working as hard as you do, maybe you should read something simpler or take a break? All this stress can’t be good for you.

And finally:

Yes, omegas should have some rights, but they just need alphas to protect them when they walk home at night. Don’t take omega rights too far.

Stiles knew how it worked because he had pretended to be an alpha, he knew their outlines, shapes and thoughts. Even the most tolerant of alphas was not untinged by the belief that omegas were somehow less or inferior. Stiles knew that Derek might not be any better.

But in Stiles’s mind he was always on the Friendship Bridge. The sky was cloudy and grey, the winds whipped around him while the sea green river foamed beneath. And always he was looking into Derek’s eyes.

“I don’t want to be the pursuer and with you as my captive. I don’t want to play this game anymore. Stiles, I’ve been thinking about it a lot. Reading about omegas of old. And I want you to be free.”

“I don’t want to be the pursuer and with you as my captive.”

“I want you to be free”

“I’d do more for someone I love, Stiles.”

The persistence of memory has and always will be a cruel thing. Persistence. Stiles loves that word. Because Persistence is what he feels when he closes his eyes and sees the brown irises seared to his eyelids. Persistence is what he thinks when his mind traces out the contours of that face from memory, the déjà vu of it all, that something as strange as the face of a man he had not seen for months seemed as familiar to him as his own body or breath.

Sometimes Stiles could dare to dream, what would the world be like if he could have made other choices? If he lived in a world in which it was okay to love someone like Derek. If he lived in a world in which he was human or free. He could see the shape of it sometimes in Paraguayan romances. He and Derek could walk to a restaurant in the street, feet tracing cobblestones paths in the brilliance of the sun, with the warmth of daylight on their skins.

In a different world, and not the world Stiles lived in, he would be with Derek now. Derek would wrap his arms around Stiles and Stiles would feel loved and safe.
But in the here and now, Stiles couldn’t justify leaving the only country he had never known, where he could live in relative peace for a man who was going to die sooner or later, whom he didn’t even really love?

Stiles sighed a bit sadly as he sipped the last of his coffee. Oh well. Life goes on.
Laura

Laura was the Ice Queen. She wore her reputation like a shield. She loved it when the newspapers would write and gossip about her. “The Ice Queen destroys another rival” “Laura Hale, wore a suit of regal silver to the dance, looking every bit The Ice Queen”. She fed into the media reports, making sure to speak with a low and calm cadence, rarely letting anyone see her smile. Laura could not afford to be soft and vulnerable or loving. She locked that all away. That was from before.

Laura remembered when she had last seen before. Laura had a tiny little gimmer of before inside her when, at the age of 23 she walked into her father’s boardroom and assumed control of the Hale company. The roomful of men in starched Armani and Ralph Lauren had looked at her askance, had seen her as just a little girl. And to be fair, then, Laura was just a little girl. When she explained her new moves to streamline the efficiency of the company, they had looked at her with barely concealed amusement in their eyes. They voted down her ideas, disregarded her guidance in acquisitions, and spent every other moment trying to tell her about their “really nice nephew who was looking for an alpha mate” or how it was “cute that she was trying”.

The before Laura was sweet and ebullient and funny. She loved colors and clothes and beauty and the green waters of Furore Fiord, on the Amalfi coast. But that tiny girl, with the curious gaze and the luminous eyes filled with wonder, could not keep the Hale fortune together, nor deal with the countless nights when she found her brother passed out on some stranger’s couch. Before could not help crying as she gazed at her beloved Uncle Peter, burnt beyond all recognition, unseeing for months and months, locked forever in that dark white word, that cage that would never disappear from her mind.

So Before had to die. Laura killed it. She grew armor and a spine. She hunted out the secrets of her father’s partners and then at dinners, one by one, she would whisper their worst fears to their ears.

“Does your wife know about the secret villa in Italy, the one where you keep Gianna. I had a lovely talk with Gianna, she’s a sweet girl. When are you going to marry her? She keeps waiting. Your promised.”

Or.

“I know about the 1 million you’ve been skimming off the company coffers. For that building in Dubai. Shame that I could never locate it. Your son is really happy at…..what is it…Hasting’s Academy? The only school that treats his special needs. It would be so sad if he couldn’t afford to go anymore.”

Laura had hired a detective as her right hand. She had spies and spies who spied on her spies. Information was power. It was currency. And with each secret, she gained a new ability to leverage her knowledge into power.

“I want our investment firm to bet heavily against the stock market of Panama. Effective now.”

“Our company needs to be less heavily dependent on the United States for ship building contracts, we need to pursue investment overseas.”

“The board meeting continually requires my attendance once a month. This is a waste of time. They don’t run the company. I do. We will only meet once every three months. You will vote in my favour.”
And for men she could not move or change, she simply would invite them to dinner.

A nice fancy dinner in one of the upscale parts of New York City that had never been touched by the war. She would offer them their favorite meals, laugh with them about their intriguing ideas and then when the meeting was just about to end: “I came to this meeting to ask you to tender your resignation. I would prefer for you to resign instead of having to fire you. You have served this company long and well and you will be richly compensated.”

At first, the men in her corporate boardrooms, “The Mr. Staverlies and the Mr. Rands, Mr. Stevens, Mr. Addair, Mr. Abbasi; they whispered and they muttered “poor thing. Trying all she can, but she can’t hold it together. Female alphas aren’t really alphas, just mistakes, really”.

And then:

“She’s running this company to the ground. Can you believe what she said to me yesterday? “I run this company and you don’t”? How dare this little slip of a girl tell me what to do… Bitch must be on her period.”

And finally they were silent. And they didn’t talk about her anymore. A wise man once said: “It is better to be feared than loved”.

Laura felt that she agreed with him. Fear, she could understand, manipulate and control. Fear she could work with. People were afraid for rational reasons, and could be reassured in rational ways. Fear made people sloppy, made them angry, made them make mistakes.

Love made no sense. People in love acted stupidly. They might think they knew what was in your best interest, and make choices for you that they should not. Laura couldn’t afford love.

Except at home, with Derek, after a tumultuous three years, fending off challengers to her parent’s company, she would come home and find Derek sleeping soundly. She would ruffle his head. She was too old and cold to ever find a mate who would love her. Too stoic to give any child love, but maybe, Derek would carry on the line. She was determined to see a Hale on top of the Company, just as it was always meant to be. She hoped Derek’s omega would bring warmth and color to the house, just like Michael had. She was overjoyed when Derek had scented his omega.

If she had only known then, what she knew now.

Laura lay on the couch in her office. For someone who prided herself in being perfectly composed at all times, not a stray hair left out of sight, she was a mess. Her Emporio Armani silver stretch georgette dress was wrinkled, hair mussed. She had not slept since Derek disappeared and she could not eat or stop crying. She knew she had to pull herself together. For the company. But she couldn’t figure out why she should run the company anymore. She had lost everything she ever loved: Her mother and father, siblings. Peter. And now Derek. She sat in this beautiful office, filled with decadent, richly carved mahogany wood tables and other tasteful accents. And she had never hated anything more in her life. She wished she could be far away. She wished she had been in the fire that day and then she wouldn’t be in pain anymore. She wished she had died too.

She had put a call out to the NCIS, FBI, CIA and the NYPD. She had sent out all her most talented investigators to look for her brother. No luck. No one.

Her secretary came in. Auguste Williams was a plain faced beta. Kind and gentle and unfailingly loyal, she was one of the first people Laura had hired when she became the CEO of Hale Shipping co.
Auguste fixed her eyes upon Laura, who looked so small and crumpled in a couch by the window.

Auguste knew better than to touch her famously prickly boss normally, but today her heart pulled at her. Sure, Laura could be a cold boss, but she was always unerringly fair.

Auguste placed a comforting hand on Laura’s shoulder, and when her boss did not pull away, she spoke in a low, soft voice.

“I’ve rescheduled all your meetings for today and called a cab driver who will be discrete. I think you should go home and get better. I really hope you find him Laura.”

Laura looked up at Auguste through a sheen of tears.

“Thank you so much,” she sobbed, “thank you”.

Stiles

Stiles was enjoying his new job in the Department of Tourism and passport control. If he ignored the screaming nightmares of Derek’s torture he woke up from at least once every week and the hole in his chest were the bond used to be, he would even say that things were going better than ever.

Haha.

He woke up at 8 am every morning, to catch one of the Air trains to Asuncion. There, he and his colleagues would scrutinize the backgrounds of every traveler who applied for a permit to visit Paraguay.

He was scanning for key words that might indicate that they were terrorists, affiliation with Anti-Omega societies or federations on their websites and webpages. 30 years ago, Paraguay had allowed omegas fleeing from America’s restrictive Omega Codes to enter with their alphas. However, one omega and alpha couple, who claimed to be fleeing America, were, in reality, American agents who desired to destroy Paraguay and everything they stood for. The Omega and Alpha couple had entered with ten other alphas. Those alphas had then held 100 people hostage in the Grand Central Bank in downtown Paraguay, eventually killing 50 with a homemade explosive. Ever since then omegas and betas who wanted to travel to Paraguay were carefully screened and Alphas were a non-starter. Ever.

Stiles spent most of his days sitting in a green swivel chair cross checking claims on applications with research he discovered view internet databases. He could read through the applicants’ social media profile and all the views he had ever posted before writing up a short report. Most people who wished to come to Paraguay were denied. Only about 20% of applicants ever made it in.

It was tedious work, mostly boring, but sometimes Stiles would read a particularly profound statement on social media and feel entertained. It was interesting getting to piece together the stories of so many lives. Stiles checked his watch. 12:00. It was his lunch break. Time to open up his brown paper lunch bag and eat a healthy lunch of cheese and ham sandwiches.

Stiles found a quiet wooden table that was bathed in the sun. He opened up “One hundred Days of Solitude”, and began to read. Just as he was turning to the first page, a woman walked over.

“Hello, how are you?” She introduced herself, reaching a hand out to the wary omega.

“My name is Rosa, I noticed you sitting here day after day for weeks. You looked lonely. I wanted to invite you to sit with us,”

Stiles looked up at the smiling, short brown haired woman with laughing who was speaking to him. She wore the sharp uniform of the PPS, Paraguay Police Service. Her navy blue shirt and pants were adorned with gold buttons and bright red piping overlaid the seams of her pants and shirts. At first, Stiles wanted to say no. But he couldn’t be alone forever and it would only help him to make friends with other people in his building. So Stiles smiled, shook her hand and nodded ruefully, “I think I’d like that very much,”

Stiles discovered that us was a motley crew of omegas from different government agencies in Asuncion. Around 12, hundreds of omegas from each department would gather together to talk, gossip and catch up about things that happened that day. Even though Stiles was used to the freedom
omegas in Paraguay, he was still amazed to see the actual realities of it. He saw police officers who carried the distinct omega smell mixing with librarians from the archives, businessmen and women, writers and painters. It was as if no one had told these people *You're an omega. You are less than*. What would it be like to grow up in such a world, Stiles mused? Where he could be himself without worry, a world filled with possibility, where his secondary gender was no more than a detail to his name, another point in the constellation of himself. Stiles liked to imagine it would be like this.

The Omegas that worked in government had certain restaurants that they favored. Congressmen and women liked the ritzy upscale Plata Plato and those who worked in more lowly sections liked La Miel de Abeja Restaurante, which had the richest tomato soups one could imagine. There, Stiles found himself relating crazy tales of his escape from America to Paraguay to a rapt audience. The Paraguayans were fascinated by the concept of America.

“So under America’s Omega Codes, I wouldn’t be able to work?” one blonde haired young man named Mateo asked.

“No,” Stiles explained, “you would be considered too delicate to do so and would need to depend on an alpha the OCS chose to take care of you,“

“Wow,” the man marveled, “I am so glad I grew up here.”

“Maria,” another girl was confused by how unwilling omegas were forced to bond, “bonding has to be a choice,” she pointed out, “you can’t just make someone bond if they don’t want to,”

Stiles shrugged. “I have no idea what they do. I just know that all children who are found to be omegas are taken away by the OCS and I don’t know what happens after that. There doesn’t seem to be a problem with bonding, I guess”.

In turn, Stiles learned about the lives of other omegas. Their happinesses, their sorrows and their desires. And he got to see omega/alpha relationships all the time. Often an omega would drop off their alpha at the alpha luncheon or vice versa. In some relationships, the alpha seemed to be the head; yet in others the omega ran the show. Rosa was telling Stiles about her struggles to find the perfect venue for her son’s laza ceremony.

“So Ricardo told me that he felt the Winter garden at Fondos would be a great idea. Cheap and everyone can go skiing. I put my foot down and said absolutely not, marrying in winter is a bad omen. Obviously the best time would be summer or preferably spring. I’ll have no child of mine shivering on the silver steps when he says the vow,” she confided.

Stiles furrowed his eyebrows, “You said no to him? And disagreed? I thought omegas always had to listen to their alphas,” Stiles pointed out.

Rosa laughed a rich vibrato laugh, mussing up her pink rose silk skirt. “You simply have to stop believing all these outdated thoughts about omegas, Stiles. Omegas are not necessarily submissive, neither are alphas necessarily dominant. Sure, there is a genetic predisposition. But genes are not destiny,” Rosa finished.

*Genes are not destiny.*

Day by day, Stiles’s actual work became less interesting or impressive than learning about the lives of Paraguayan Omegas. He began to listen to the conversations his fellow omegas were having. He started to realize, like one who wakes up from a dream, that he had been fed lie after lie, so many that they took decades to unravel. He had assumed his dominance was proof that he was not like other omegas. He was smarter than them, faster and better. In his private moments, when he used other
omegas for sex, he contented himself by thinking, he was basically an alpha anyway. He had always felt somewhat alienated from his sex. He could never imagine himself as a preening, fawning omega like those he saw in televisions and soaps. The kind who were always clinging to an alpha to come save them. He remembered television shows and the ads he had grown up with, before the OCS had gained so much power. He could still recall being a little three year old boy, playing with blocks, when the television ad came on. “Good Omega”, the ad flashed the words in bright gold letters. The good omega was smiling when his alpha got home, wearing nice clothing. He had cleaned the house and filled it with warm and cheery lighted candles. The Good Omega put a beautiful dinner on the table: lamb, rice, jello pudding, glasses of wine. Five clean children were dressed and placed in clean white satin seats at every corner of the table. At the head of the table, a huge mahogany chair was pulled out for the Alpha, who carried a black suitcase, and was enclosed in a heavy jacket.

“Welcome home, Alpha”, all the children and the omega chorused.

“Oh honey,” the Alpha would state in an approvingly tone, “what would I do without you,” as he patted his omega on the head like a well trained dog.

Then Bad Omega would flash on the screen in red and black.

In the bad omegas house, the chairs were not clean, no dinner was set at the table. He did not dress in his finest silk or suits to greet his alpha at the door.

The alpha would walk in.

“Oh, hey Larry, look I’ve been busy with the negotiations for the Smoot merger. Could you warm dinner yourself?” Crazy kids ran from one door to another cursing terribly.

And at the end: A beautiful woman in a pretty demure gold dress would face the viewer, “Omegas are meant to be in the home and take care of family. Being a good omega and raising the new generation of omegan children is the best thing you can do for your country. Don’t be a Bad omega. Do better.”. End scene.

Stiles had always assumed that this memory was wrong or a dream. None of the history books he had ever read make mention of omegas ever working. He had assumed that the Omega Codes had been there forever and omegas always belonged in the home. But his interactions with Paraguayan omegas were unearthing memories in him that he didn’t even know he had. One night, before bed, Stiles was struck with the force of a memory so strong it took his breath away.

Memory:

Stiles was playing with his toys and trucks in the living room. Vroom Vroom he muttered, making the noise that he believed his favorite yellow truck would make as it helped pull the cargo of Baddies away to jail. He placed one male in the yellow truck cargo bed. The male was a baddie. He was an ekwawis, Stiles knew. One of those people who wanted omegas and alphas to be the same. Bad ekwawis. Another woman wearing white joined the ekwawis, it waz a fwaggie. The flags of peace were a terrorist group, created to destroy the American government. You’re going to jail, Stiles crowed. In the background: Stiles could hear his mother and father talking.

“What do the results say?” Stiles’s mother asked in her sweet lilting voice.

“You knew what it would say Claudia. He’s an omega. I don’t know what to do.”

“We can’t turn him into the OCS. I will never allow it.”

“I’m sheriff, Claudia. I can’t break the law.”
“Leges Sine Moribus Vanae, John. The law is unjust. You’ve seen those omegas given to OCS. Half of them don’t even survive to get to bonding age. They get raped from the age of 9 till they die and those are the lucky ones. If we follow these laws, our son will never get a chance to go to school, to learn, excel or achieve. How can we send our son to death? I will die before I let you do that to our son,”

“You’re right Claudia. I can’t. I won’t do it. But how can I protect him when the time comes”

More whispering in lower tones that Stiles could not hear.

Later that night, as Stiles was tucked into his blue bedspread, he asked his mom.

“Is it true that I am an omega, mommy? Does that mean I have to go with an alfa?”

His mother shushed him with a thin finger placed on his lips.

“You’re not an omega darling, you’re a person. And you’re going to grow up to be and choose whoever you want to. I promise,” she said as Stiles’s eyes slowly closed. Even as Stiles drifted off to sleep, he remembered his mother’s words, “I promise”.

Shortly after that she had the horrible brain scan and been diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia. And Stiles had blocked out almost every memory he had of her. It was too painful. His dad had drunk himself into a stupor, leaving Stiles feeling alone and in pain.

Now:

Stiles looked around with a gasp, startled from the depths of his memory and only now realizing there were depths to his mother that he had never known. As Stiles fell into a dreamless sleep that night, he knew that he had to figure out and learn more.
Chapter Summary

And finally I answer the question you have all been asking.
I was kind of surprised no one guessed it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Laura:

Agent Smith again walked into her office like he owned it. Stiles hated him. She hated his blue ice eyes that always seemed to be staring at her, judging her. She hated his blond buzz cut hair, his flat unemotional speech. His disgusting alpha scent. She wished she could banish him from existence and never see him again. She wished he was gone. But Laura was never someone to allow emotions to rule her judgement. After taking Friday off work, she had pulled herself together, picked up her favorite Tacori Blazer and walked into work in her Nine West heels. Derek was not going to be found if she wept on her couch for weeks on end. The best thing she could do to help Derek was locking those emotions inside of her and forcing herself to move on with the search. She cut her 7 hours of sleep to five and devoted all her free time to searching through Derek’s last movements and communications so that she could learn who might have taken him or where he might have been taken. It was a 3 pm on a Tuesday, and Laura was poring through a difficult patent document for one of her new shipbuilding designs when Auguste told her that Agent Smith wanted an audience with her. Laura grimaced. But she knew that she would need him.

“Send him in”, she told Auguste.

Agent Smith looked a little sicklier than the last time they met. But he was still dressed smartly, in his coal black suit and his hair was still greasy blond.

“I know,” Agent Smith began in a low voice, “that your brother is missing. I want to offer my condolences for your suffering,” He began.

“Save it with the niceties,” Laura snapped, she had less patience and time than ever before.

“Save it with the niceties,” Laura snapped, she had less patience and time than ever before.

“I know what you came here to ask me,” Laura stated.

“Well, I guess I admire your bluntness,” the man began, “Last time we met, I asked you about your opinions on going to war. Then, you were slightly supportive, but still seemed plagued by doubts. Has your position changed?” Agent Smith asked.

Laura waited. Silence was a tactic she had learned to use well. In her beginning years at hale Shippbuilding Co. she had studied every night, preparing to lead a company in afield she had never prepared for or learned about. Sure she had taken the odd class here and there, but she had never planned to be a CEO, she always wanted to be an artist. Not only had she taught herself about building ships, but she read about how to run a company as well. Her favorite book was the Art of War, by Sun Tzu, a book written nearly centuries ago, but still with deep relevance to today.
Silence allowed your enemy never to understand you, to have to guess at your intentions and feelings. It unsettled your opponent.

Laura used the silence to her advantage now, and she was willing to luxuriate in the empty silence for as long as it took to keep Agent Smith talking.

“Even if you find your brother, you are simply saving him so he can die later, if you cannot find his mate. And Stiles is in Paraguay. How in the world are you supposed to find him or bring him here?”

“Even if I could find Stiles, and you could extract him from Paraguay, it will probably be too late for my brother. What do I get out of your little pet war?” Laura countered, stone faced.

“We do have one more card we can play,” Agent Smith stated, “I have contacts in Paraguay, and I could push them to kidnap Stiles, but for a price”

“Support your stupid war,” Laura stated in an unconvinced tone.

“Why should I believe you will be successful now, when you utterly failed me only a few months ago?” Laura asked calmly.

“It was not my fault. Derek chose to—”

“Derek told me you were missing during the later stages of the operation. You were sick with a cold”

“And I thought, Here I am paying this man a salary of 100,000 and 500,000 upon capture of the omega and he’s sick with a cold. What an expensive cold,”

“It was a seasonal”

“I am not finished,” Laura said in a gravely voice. With her steely voice and gaze, Laura in a black Calvin Klein dress, might as well be Queen of England. Agent Smith opened his mouth to speak. Then shut it. He didn’t dare.

“So I did some digging. And then I finally figured it out. Why you smell like shit. Why you joined the OCS. Why you want this war so so badly.

Your omega ran away, didn’t he?

Left you because he hated the brutal lifestyle you put him through. I found cutouts and court documents and pictures of the bruises you left on his face, arms, legs. The one time you choked him and he said he felt like he was “going to die”. I even found a name;”

Agent Smith paled considerably.

“Bring me the picture, Auguste”

“Ah,” Laura smiled, with all her teeth showing, “what a beautiful picture. What a beautiful young omega. Such a shame that Theodore Cascanott is dead.”

And once again Laura luxuriated in the stunned silence.
I'm back baby.

Chapter End Notes

There you go guys, I've been away for nearly a year. So here's my compensation. I hope the Commenter Gods will accept my offering. haha.

School is crazy busy and I barely have a moment to sleep forget about write when I fall exhausted into bed most days. I've been neglecting my work like hell to get this does. Things have settled down a bit now and I hope to update sometime in the next two weeks. if everything goes well.
XOXO

And as always, I love all your comments and questions: I will try my best to answer the, if I can.
Alive and Dead

Chapter Summary

much easier to write now that I have a coherent plan...hmm...

Laura

Agent Ian Smith pulled himself together.

“He committed suicide,” the man began.

“Ah, yes the cover story,” Laura nodded, “but some things don’t add up. For example, why were there cyanide pills in your house? How could he have hid the signs of cyanide toxicity: the weakness and confusion, the headache, the gasping for breath? Surely you would have noticed that something was wrong.”

Laura paused for a moment to give Ian a chance to redeem himself.

“I was away, working on a case, how could I keep track of him every day?”

“No alpha would be so stupid as to leave his non-compliant omega alone. **in the house. While he’s away.** No, at first I thought you were a murderer. Then a contact helped me find a report of the autopsy. Why don’t you read it aloud for me?” Laura pushed the paper over to Ian Smith.


“How odd,” Laura mused, “All the reports I have of Theodore say he was 19 and he had blonde hair and **blue eyes**. However can this work? Can Theodore be two people, both 19 and 25, both brown and blue eyed, at once?”

Laura chuckled. It was not a nice chuckle.

“The man in the autopsy report was not Theodore, so where was he? And how is it that when the parents came to collect Theodore’s things, you had nothing to give them? I realized that the answer had been staring me in the face all along. Theodore’s not dead. He’s escaped to Paraguay.

And this whole war, this whole scheme of yours, leaving my brother when he needed your guidance the most was all just a ploy to use my brother as collateral for your “great war”.

And you’re hurting, aren’t you. Even though you easily broke the weak bond between you, you can never feel quite right. Quite complete. You want to feel whole, hmm…and only Theo can do that for you?” Laura finished.

She leaned back in her chair and closed your eyes.

“What do you want?” Agent Ian Smith muttered, his voice angry and low, and filled with misery.
“I have no use for a man so incompetent that he allowed his own omega to run away. I need a man who is objective, strategic and effective. Call in whatever favors you have to, but the only man I will talk to is the Head Chair of OCS himself.”

Agent Ian Smith bowed, like an alpha who knew he was defeated, and had accepted it with equanimity.

“Ok,”

“And get out of my sight,” Laura growled, “I have no use for alphas that abuse omegas.”
A beautiful dinner party

Stiles

It was a beautiful party. The cozy two story house had a grand formal dining room. The walls were the most tasteful shade of golden yellow, the table and chairs were made of cherry wood, bright but not too bright, polished so beautifully you could see their shine. The floors were also cherry wood too, and they glow with varnish. Upon the table, Rosa had heaped all manner of food. Traditional Paraguayan dishes: Bifé Koygua, a huge slab of barbequed meat covered in mouthwatering spices topped with eggs, green and red peppers and garnished with onions. Guiso popo, a savory soup filled with onions, peppers, sweet potatoes and corn. A mbeju, flat cake made with manioc and corn flour to one side. In the center, in a place of glory, Sopa Paraguaya sat. Stiles had never seen a solid soup before. The Sopa looked more like a pie. It was made of ground corn, cheese, eggs and milk, with a little bit of meat garnished on the side. Rosa had gone to the fisheries to prepare a beautiful salmon, filleted pink with every thin cutlet exposed in such a beautiful mouthwatering way that the eye could feast on its beauty alone. There was much wine and even a little desert Kaguyiy filled with corn, sugar, honey and milk.

Wine flowed from cup to cup. Eyes were bright with joy. All the alphas and omegas enjoyed Stiles’s tales of omega life and his ingenuity in America. The chandelier flickered with candlelight. an archaic touch Rosa preferred. Yes, this Primavera party Rosa had organized, and invited Stiles too was a beautiful gathering.

And yet Stiles had never felt so alone.

He couldn’t help but feel a frisson of pain in his chest when he saw alphas clasping their arms on their omegas shoulders. Or when he saw an omega stand up to kiss her alpha, delicately on the cheek. The way mated pairs sat together in the dining room and played virtual reality games in the living room within the teleVR made him ache deep in his throat. Deep in his heart. Even when they asked him questions, they could never really understand what it felt like to be kidnapped by slave traders in Brazil. In all their gaiety and curiosity when they asked about America, Stiles tried to only talk about how cleverly he fooled every alpha, he could not speak about losing Theo. About seeing Alberto splattered in blood. Stiles could see the laughter around him, but he felt distant and removed somehow, as if the world outside his head were not real, but a mirage, a cruel trick of shadows playing across his mind at night.

Not for the first time, Stiles wondered what had happened to Alberto. Not for the first time, Alberto eyes had flashed across his dreams and nightmares, but for Stiles, nightmares and guilt were just a part of live. Stiles had accepted the reality that he would stay up at least one night a week wondering if all the choices he made were really worth it, or if there was something else he could have done, some other way he could have taken, some stone left untrod. None of these people could imagine what it was like, to live with the ghosts Stiles did, half living and dead and sometimes more dead than living. How could they? They lived in a world of light and beauty, of truth and equality, untouched by so much suffering and pain. It was like they lived on an oasis in the desert and had never seen anything more.

Stiles placed his mask on, the same mask that had gotten him through all his years an American alpha, if he believed it enough it would simply be true he told himself. He would be happy, normal, a well adjusted omega. He would not be this sad thing with a scars no one could see, nursing a wound in his heart and his mind no one would ever know.
“You killed our alpha,” Mildred would accuse him. Often and all the time. And it was okay. In the daylight, where no demons come, Stiles would be fine. He would walk in the night but when he placed his eyes around so many others who were so different than him, Stiles found himself unable to lie to himself anymore.

He made it through dinner and then rose to leave.

“Wait,” Rosa entreated, “you haven’t met my husband!”
Stiles

Stiles sighed inwardly, but outside he smiled, “I’m a little bit tired tonight Rosa, I wanted to get to bed early and I might be coming down with something?”

But Rosa, resplendent in her pink V cut wrapped dress could not be denied. Stiles had come to see Rosa as a force of nature. As a policewoman she was unrelenting in her pursuit of suspects, and as even in her personal life she had an implacable will.

“Nonsense. Let me take you to Ricardo. I think you would like each other. He hates these parties so he always stays upstairs for most of them,” she frowned slightly.

“You know even though we are true mates, sometimes I still don’t understand that man,”.

Rosa leads Stiles upstairs, past a wooden staircase that is a bit rickety, and has seen better days. Stiles walks down a long hallway and into a room three doors down on the left.

Up here, there was silence. And the chatter of the world downstairs seemed further and further away.

Rosa knocked on the door, “come in,” the voice said softly. Rosa opened the door to an expansive library. Books lined the top shelve to the bottom, in every corner, in every room part of the room. Stiles saw words he noticed.

Old books:

*Pride and Prejudice. The war of the Worlds. Cats Cradle. War and Peace.*

New Books:

*What is the meaning of Omega? Why the Zorros are destroying our country…and what we can do to stop it. The mystery of America: A land frozen in time.*

Stiles was overwhelmed by the beauty of so many words, all crammed into this one room.

And in the center of the library was a plush red and gold Persian rug, on it sat a comfortable leather armchair and in that armchair sat a man.

He looked up from the book he was reading and met Stiles’s eyes.

“Oh hello, my name is Ricardo,” Ricardo stood up and walked over to where Stiles was standing, extending his arm in a friendly gesture.

“You must be Stiles”. Ricardo’s blue eyes fixed on Stiles, as if his vision was a knife cutting through the carcass of Stiles’s flesh, down to his soul in the same way a scalpel cleaves muscles from bone.

The Man in the Library

“Make yourself comfortable,” Ricardo stated, pointing to an arm chair Stiles had not seen. “I’d love to chat with you both, but I’ve got to tend to the party,” Rosa stated, waving at both of them.
Ricardo smiled fondly after his wife, “She’s like my Persephone,”

Stiles quirked an eyebrow, “You’re a bit too young to be Hades,”

“Sometimes I feel older than my years,” Ricardo stated, easing himself to his seat. Stiles noticed that Ricardo walked with a stooped gait, taking tiny little steps. Ricardo sat in his chair with great effort.

Ricardo noticed Stiles’s observation. He frowned.

“I guess I might as well say it instead of having you ask. Yes, I have Parkinsons. Most variants of the disease are curable now, but unfortunately mine isn’t responding to any medications. Yes, I have been on the latest trials but they do not work. Luckily, my disease is in the early phase so things are not that bad. I am trying the best I can with the time I have left. I have lived a good life, so please don’t feel any pity on my account. I hate pity,”

Stiles was surprised by the frankness to say the least.

“So what brings you up here? Most people don’t venture up here to visit little old Hades”

Stiles shrugged, ”I don’t know, Rosa simply said she wanted me to meet you. Never told me why,"

Ricardo shook his head fondly, “She’s like that sometimes. Perhaps she thought you would cheer me up. She doesn’t quite understand that I never liked any of those parties. Too many people. Too much noise. No. I love it just the way things are. Up here, with the silence and the quiet where I can think about books in peace,”

“I noticed,” Stiles said.

“Yeah, I saw you looking around at them when you walked in. I work over at the National Library and we just got a shipment of books that were found hidden in an attic in Belgium, from before World War IV. It is an incredibly interesting set,” Ricardo mused.

Stiles felt something inside him, something that had been quiescent a moment ago, quicken into life. “The war to end all wars? Really? No one knows what life was like before then.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Ricardo stated, “didn’t they teach you anything in history class?”

Stiles shook his head, irritation rising in him, the old man must be crazy too, “Not much is known before the War to End all Wars, when mankind was nearly wiped out by the nuclear bomb. They didn’t have alphas or omegas, just some some primitive technology. All the historians are in agreement that the rest is only speculation and hearsay,”

“1984 repeats itself again,” Ricardo muttered under his breath.

“1984? That must have been 1000 years ago? What do you mean?” Stiles questioned.

“What useless shit school did you go to boy?” the man asked.

“Exeter,” Stiles sniffed with pride.

Ricardo sighed, “and yet the feed you with lies,”

“We can’t know everything about the world before the war but the little we know is intriguing. Back then there were a few alphas, betas and omegas. But the world was a human world, with only a few werewolves. America was the shining jewel of the world. They believed in freedom of thought, travel, mind. They had a constitution that enshrined religious liberties along with other rights,”
Stiles shook his head, “That sounds like crazy talk,”

“What’s so crazy about it?” Ricardo asked. He seemed sincere.

Stiles stated the obvious, “How could humans have survived with so few alphas, betas and omegas? Who would be dominant or submissive? How would we decide who would be leaders or followers? Who would bear the children? Or clean up the house and tend the home? That’s why we have alphas, betas and omegas, so everyone knows their roles and their place,”

“Wow, they really brainwashed the hell out of you didn’t they?” Ricardo noted his his gruff voice.

Stiles felt slightly angry. This man was crazy. He probably believed in aliens or that the government was monitoring conversations. This was a waste of his time, Stiles began to stand to leave.

“Wait,” Ricardo placated, “I’m sorry. Rosa tells me I come off a little rough sometimes. I forgot that the American government since The Great Preservation has been teaching alternate history in its schools. I would love to tell you more about what we really know, since I am a historian myself. That is, if you’d really like to know.”

In spite of himself, Stiles knew he would go home to sit in bed, staring at the ceiling night after night for hours on end. He figured he might as well listen, maybe he might be entertained. Stiles settled in his seat as Ricardo began to speak.
Hades Tale

Chapter Summary

Stiles listens to Hades’s Tale

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hades Tale

In the beginning the world was ruled by humans and werewolves walked amongst them. At first, werewolves were seen as monsters and had to hide their skins. But by at least Ancient Egypt, some humans had begun to accept werewolves amongst them. The Ancient Pharoahs of Egypt were all werewolves, it was thought the lycanthropy would make them stronger and more able to rule. And so were many brilliant Greeks. However, in the less tolerant societies, werewolves hid their skins. Humans did not live as long as werewolves, but there were so many of them, like ants upon the earth, they multiplied in each generations. And in the beginning the werewolf omegas could not keep up with the fecundity of human women. And so it remained.

Until World War IV.

The World Wars were all very complicated. World War I, was not really a world war, it was mostly fought due to an arcane series of provocations. WW2 occurred between The “Axis Powers” and the Allies. Horrible atrocities were committed on both sides. Men slaughtered like flies, mothers raped, children dead. World War III occurred when a declining America decided to test its might against China, Russia and the Middle East. Many cities collapses, bombed to oblivion and America ceased to rise as a world power. But the third war birthed the fourth where America, grown paranoid and wary, dropped nuclear bombs in Russia. Russia retaliated and the world joined in. In seven weeks, the world was a garbage wasteland and women and children were dying. It looked like the human race would not survive. Humans scientists wanted to save the few humans that lived, and they realized werewolves were resistant to nuclear radiation. And that is how nearly the entire world became werewolf, only a few humans now remain. Such as the hunter families: Aurum and Argent.

The problem was: while werewolves could live for a long time with radiation sickness, the wombs of omegan men and women were tainted with the horrible chemicals. Those chemicals nestled in the blood, skin and bone and destroyed any hope of survival for the child. Researchers knew they had to act quickly. They came up with a genetic tweak, which allowed omegan men and women to repel radiation from their bodies. However genetic therapy has side effects and all those omegas also became submissive and extremely fertile. For each person who received the treatment, an injection, the results varied. Some omegas were a little bit submissive, others very much so and some not at all. Like anything, the process was complicated. However, governments used this slight genetic predisposition to submission to enforce codes that omegas were to stay home with children and not work. This of course, was not due to the genetics, but simply because governments wanted to maximize the amount of children born to each family and an omega who had to stay at home day in and day out had nothing better to do that, ”

“Have kids” Stiles chimed in.
“Exactly,” Ricardo smiled, his eyes shining, clearly enjoying this conversation.

“Of course. The gene increased genetic predisposition to submission, but people misunderstand submission. It is a choice. It doesn’t mean anyone can simply walk up to you and tell you what to do. It can be controlled and tamped down until it is safe to express. And these omegas of old didn’t simply want to take this loss of right lying down. Even 35-40 years ago, omegas were fighting and asking for equality and they still do fight for equality in countries around the globe,” Ricardo finished.

Stiles sat in silence.

“You look confused,” Ricardo announced.

“I am. No offense, Ricardo, you recounted a very interesting tale, but every single omega I have ever met is anything but strong and fighting for the rights or whatever. It doesn’t make sense,” Ricardo smiled, “That’s what I’ve been researching actually. From the governmental figures, and the few books and interviews I have conducted with American omegas I have realized that something is rotten in the State of Denmark. The American Omegas who I have met are either survivors or timid and afraid. About 45% of the American omegas we receive never go on to live normal or productive lives and simply die in institutions. They are timid, unable to follow directions, or psychotically unstable. Our government can’t figure out why. But I’ve noticed that there has been a change in omegas from America ever since the creation of the OCS.”

OCS. The word struck fear into Stiles’s heart, even know he shifted in his seat, the thought of the OCS uniform, making him feel unable to breathe.

“Interesting, you’re scared of them too,” Ricardo observed.

Stiles shuddered slightly, “only because they threatened my freedom and wanted to mate me to some alpha or place me as a desk slave,”

“That’s not it. That’s not why you’re shuddering or afraid,” Ricardo asserted. His eyes became interested, filled with a fire that Stiles never knew an elderly man with Parkinson’s could be filled with. For a second, Stiles felt like he could see what Ricardo looked like in another life.

Ricardo stood up and walked closer to Stiles, stopping to sit in the sofa right next to Stiles, for once his posture straightened, he looked Stiles dead on, his steps normal, as if everything inside of him was leading to this moment.

“The OCS is doing something to the omegas they take. Giving them something that makes them tired, weak and afraid. Something that shreds their minds, and destroys their wills. There is a reason America’s birthrate is falling from 2,000 births per 1,000 women down to 4 births per 1,000. And it’s not because so many omegas are running away,”

Chapter End Notes

So that explains some of the history. If you don't understand anything I wrote or are confused with Ricardo's account, please let me know by commenting.

I will say this: there will be two or three more chapters that will be slow.
And then everything is going to get crazy and sped up. Really Really Quick.

Be ready and fasten your seatbelts, it's going be pretty crazy.
Hypotheticals

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Stiles

It was Spring in the Fondos. The birds chirped from trees ever blooming with the promise of soft lilacs and pink and green. It was Spring and the skies were clear blue in the day, turning only to a blinding white as the rain fell at night. Asphalts were slick with the whisper of water. Grasses tantalized the world with hints of summer. Lazas occurred with their riots of blue, green, yellow and the softest purple silk garlands festooning trees. It was Spring and the world was in love You could hear it from the hummingbirds chirping each morning, to the butterflies spreading their iridescent wings in the Verano Garden in the Fondos. Mates walked hand in hand down cobblestone streets, following dirt paths. Their worlds so wrapped within each other, it almost seemed like no one else existed.

And Stiles was alone.

It hurt every time, when he sat down for lunch with the other government omegas and watched them kiss their alphas goodbye on the cheek. It hurt when he listened to Rosa speak on the viophone to Ricardo with such love in her voice and her eyes that it felt like a physical force. Stiles could imagine that force bending the universe to its whims and wishes.

Stiles hurt especially, with a deep ache in his soul, as he slept each night in the unremitting silence. No dreams of light or life or Derek. He wondered where his mate was or if he was dead. And Stiles, once again, was filled with questions, with regret.

He’d been questioning himself more as of late. Ever since his conversation with Ricardo, Stiles and Ricardo had become fast friends. Ricardo worked as a librarian in the archipelago, a set of small floating islands between El Aguila and El Zorro. The archipelago was created to be a neutral space between the warring political parties. A place of knowledge. Every day after work, Stiles would meet Ricardo at the archives, Ricardo would recommend a new book on Omega history or Alpha rights and they would take the same sliver Air bus. And they would talk about the latest book Stiles had read.

Through reading, Stiles was seeing new things he had never seen before. Stiles had forgotten what the rush of knowledge was like. Sure he had gone to school, finished college, but in those days he learned what he could to survive. How to fake being an alpha. What an alpha said and did, the posture he held. What books to read so he could make small conversation at parties and make a good impression on the heads of the firm. Financial documents proving financial trickery or fraud.

It had been a long time since Stiles had been challenged in the way he thought, in the way he saw the world. And now, by reading these books, these simple pieces of paper that he would never have had access to in America, Stiles felt he was undergoing a profound change.

Stiles sat with Ricardo next to him and they spoke quietly. Ricardo’s beautifully carved cane was adorned with the faces of different animals. An eagle’s proud beak jutted out from one side. A jaguar’s sinuous form shifted and it’s spot glinted as the sun shone on different parts of the mahogany. A bear lumbered around in the lower middle of the cane and on top of the cane sat a falcon with eyes so fierce it seemed he could look into one’s heart. Stiles admired the craftsmanship of the cane, but he regretted that Ricardo’s Parkinson’s seemed to be getting worse these days. He took such tiny steps, often struggling to make the next one and leaned against Stiles for support.
However, Ricardo’s mind was still as fast as a gazelle.

“I don’t agree with Francisco Casra’s conclusions,” Stiles began, looking at Ricardo.

“How so?” Ricardo tilted his head towards Stiles. Stiles loved these moments, when Ricardo would shift his head just so as if he smelled a new question on Stiles’s lips. He enjoyed so much about the old man. He loved the depth and the breadth of the old man’s knowledge, Ricardo’s willingness to answer any question, how safe Ricardo seemed to make him feel. Stiles felt like he could relax in Ricardo’s presence and even ask uncomfortable questions because Ricardo loved the work of learning as much as he loved anything in this world.

“Francisco believes that Alphas created a system to dominate omegas simply because it was the most economically efficient. I don’t think that is true.”

Ricardo’s eyes sparked with interest. “Well, Stiles, you can’t argue that having a clear division of labour improves society. Society is based on order and that order requires some people to be leader and the others must be followers. Creating a system where those who will be lead are biologically designated makes it much easier to order and stratify systems.”

Stiles shook his head, “But what if an omega is better at a certain task than an alpha. Let’s imagine a world where only the omegas know how to garden and the alphas only know how to hunt. Would it make sense for an alpha to “lead” gardening or make decisions on what should be planted were? It seems that by taking an entire class of people and biologically categorizing them into “dominant” or “submissive”, you create more error or more inefficiency.”

Ricardo smiled, “Remember how we had this same conversation last week and you argued the opposite side? I’m glad I’ve won you to my way of thinking”

Stiles scrunched up his nose ruefully. “I guess so. It’s just so hard to imagine that the concept of alpha and omega was not only designed by humans, but that Alpha does not necessarily mean dominant and omega does not necessarily mean submissive. I could not believe the studies that you showed me which argued that when Omegas from more egalitarian societies were given a chance to lead a group in a simple task like finding balls hidden in different places in the room; they were just as successfully in leading the group as an alpha. However, omegas from societies where omegas were taught to be more submissive struggled to make decisions for the group or give directions.”

Ricardo nodded, “often people are too eager to place all the answers within our genes but genes can be changed by the influences of society. Children who are maltreated end up having deleterious changes that occur to their genes which make them unable to bond, to trust and increase their likelihood of dying early in life. I think the concept of “genetics” is often a cop out, a deux ex machina to paper over the wrongness of our societies,”

Stiles continued, “Even though I read all these stories about omegas in history who have done amazing things, it’s still so hard to imagine that an alpha-omega relationship can be an equal one. I’ve never seen it in real life. All the omegas I knew in America where quiet, never spoke unless spoken too, never looked up, and the only thing they ever wanted was to find an alpha. And when an alpha died, often the omega would die too. It’s just so difficult to square the omegas I read about with the omegas I see today. I can’t imagine what happened.”

Ricardo sighed, “That’s something I hope to address in my next paper. I think there is something deeply wrong with American omegas. Like I said, 45% of American omegas we receive never go on to live a normal life. They endure headaches, they cry at night, they scream for their alphas and have to be institutionalized for their own safety. I have been travelling to our jails and mental institutions trying to speak to American omegas about what life is like amongst the OCS but they don’t want to
talk to me, they don’t trust me because I am an alpha and, well, it’s hard to bridge the cultural gap between Paraguay and America. They use terms I don’t understand."

“Hmm,” Stiles pursed his lips, “Would you like me to accompany you when you interview the omegas? Maybe I could set them at ease. And I would love to learn more, I think about what my life would have been like if I had fallen into the hands of the OCS,”

“My plan has been working well,” Ricardo cackled with glee.

Stiles rolled his eyes, “You are so transparent, I knew all this time that you really wanted my help with your research.”

Ricardo’s eye softened, “I care about you as a friend too.”

Stiles shrugged. The train was descending slowly to the ground and it was Ricardo’s stop.

Rosa was on night shift right now and Ricardo would have the house to himself. It was 6:00 pm and dusk was slowly rolling in, first the sun was dipping a little lower in the sky, soon a tinge of purple would appear from the edges of the clouds and spread into the deepest violet night. A couple disembarked from the Air Train in front of them, the alpha and omega holding hands, a scent of contentedness wrapped their bodies like a cocoon. Stiles’s eyes followed them, lingering on them as they walked further down the street, disappearing into the violet gray silence of Fondos streets.

“Stiles,” Ricardo whispered, his hand rested comfortingl on Stiles’s shoulder.

“I was calling your name,” Ricardo said, “but you didn’t hear me.”

Stiles’s eyes were watering, perhaps from the scent of pollen in the air.

“I’m sorry,” Stiles replied.

Ricardo looked contemplative. He turned to Stiles and tugged Stiles’s arm with as much strength as an old man could.

“I’d like you to join me for tea today if you don’t mind.”

Stiles shook his head, “I am far too busy to…."

Ricardo frowned, “Rosa won’t be home until late tonight, won’t you keep an old man company?”

Stiles smiled ruefully. He knew manipulation when he saw it.

“Ok,” Stiles muttered under his breath, “ok”.

Ricardo refused Stiles’s help with setting up the tea. “You’re my guest,” he stated. Ricardo bustled in the kitchen, putting the kettle on the stove, cutting up sprigs of mint and lemon. Stiles was surprised to see two fresh cups of Jasmine-Mint Iced Tea with sprigs of lemon floating behind Ricardo on a hover dish less than twenty minutes after he had found a comfortable armchair to sit in.

Stiles’s eyebrow raised as he saw the Hover dish floating on air.

Ricardo noticed Stiles’s look. “The floating dish helps on my bad days when I need a hand for my cane.”
Stiles shook his head in exasperation. “Or you could have let me help.”

“I am perfectly capable of making tea myself,” Ricardo retorted.

“But enough about that.”

“Tell me about him.”

“Who?,” Stiles asked, confused.

“I may be old, but I am not blind Stiles. I see the way your eyes linger on the couples walking down the street. How your mouth quivers when I mention alphas. You smell like sadness and regret and brokenness every day. Tell me about him, this alpha that has you heart leaking like an open wound,”

Stiles stood up abruptly,” I don’t want to talk about that. It’s private,” he said angrily.

Ricardo’s voice grew stronger, “Sit down Stiles!”

Stiles was shocked, Ricardo had never raised his voice with Stiles before.

The mild mannered alpha continued at lower volume, but no less forcefully.

“I see you hurting and I want to help you Stiles. I don’t think even you know how sad you smell. It can’t be good for you. Let me help you.”

Stiles bit his lip, a worrying new habit that betrayed his stress.

“His name was Derek,” Stiles began. “He was one of the most eligible alphas in New York City. Anyone else would have been thrilled to be mated to him, but when he walked into my office and declared me his omega, my entire life fell apart.”

Stiles found that when he started he could not stop. It had been so long since he could tell his full story, his true story to anyone. He told Ricardo about the chance, about the few times he and Derek felt each other through the bond. He even told Ricardo about how he felt his mate suffering. As Stiles spoke, Ricardo’s face grew more and more serious.

“So,” Stiles took a deep breath, “that’s why I am so sad. I know I could never go back to him. But for those few weeks when I could talk to him when I was sad. When I felt him every day. When we spoke on the phone and I learned his favorite color and his favorite book, I found this peace that I have never felt since. He made me feel love. He made me feel safe. I have never felt anything with anyone like I f-felt,” Stiles’s voice broke and he felt himself start to cry, “with h-him. And then our bond wasn’t breaking and I was s-s-so afraid. If we bonded, I would never be able to leave. I couldn’t bring him here because Paraguay doesn’t accept alphas. And he was d-dying. And when I had that horrible dream, I felt like I wanted to leave Paraguay and find him,” Stiles wiped his face and tried to gain control of himself.

“But that’s crazy,” Stiles said, almost as if he were trying to convince himself. “How could I leave Paraguay, the safest place I’d ever known and run to America to risk being killed by slave traders or captured by the OCS, just for a man I barely know, who I’ve only spoken with on the telephone for a month? But sometimes at 3 A.M., I feel like I can’t do this anymore. But I tell myself that an alpha will always hurt an omega. That even if Derek promises he will protect me, that he understands me, that he wants me to be free…..he could never imagine what it’s like for an omega. That his promises will turn to dust. That the nature of the alpha and omega bond means that things have to be that way.”
Stiles wrapped his arms around himself, hugging himself before he went on.

“But talking to you….and reading all these stories about alphas and omega pairs who ride into battle together. Fall in love and rule together. Who even communicate mind to mind? It makes me wonder if it’s true. If there’s hope for love with a bond. And I wake up with knots in my stomach because I wonder if I gave up my best chance at ever finding love.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you appreciate this cause I am really tired.
As a little child, all Derek had ever wanted was to be loved. He would run to his mother and father. “Mommy do you love me?”

“Yes, of course I love you.”

“Daddy, do you love me?”

“I love you little pup,”

He would look at himself in the mirror, with his coal dark eyes smoldering with fire, and wonder whether his true mate would love him. Whether he or she would see him and feel joy in his or her eyes. The same kind of joy he saw when Talia looked at his father, Michael. A look that seemed to say that even if they were both stranded on the moon, they would find happiness within each other. Derek hoped for that kind of joy. He thought he had found it in Kate. But she had lied to him. She had destroyed all of the attachments he had and broken him inside. For a long time, Derek had buried himself in meaningless sex and darkness and drugs, until his sister pulled him out of it. His sister had come home late another night, to find Derek not breathing in his room, nearly dead from a heroin overdose. “Please,” she had begged at his bedside when he woke up again, “please don’t make me lose the only thing I have left to love.”

So Derek went to rehab. He talked to a counsellor, he tried to go through the motions, make his sister proud. But no matter what he did, there was always this whole inside of him.

When he found Stiles, he finally thought someone would fill this hole. He chased Stiles across South America and sometimes, privately to himself, eh would wonder if he was doing it right, if he had not just made a horrible and stupid mistake. After all, Stiles did not love him and Stiles admitted he did not love Derek. Sometimes Derek agreed with what everyone had told him. Laura. His friends. The newspaper. Break the bond now. Give up and save yourself. But there had been that night in Brazil. That warmth, that closeness. He had never felt that close to anyone before. Not even Laura. He knew then that he only wanted to hear that coo again, only wanted to feel that love again. He had known it was crazy to let Stiles go, but when Stiles kissed him with that look in his eyes, Derek felt he had made the right decision. He knew he had made the right decision. Felt it right in the marrow of his soul. He had held on to that rightness for all the long months in which Stiles did not call. And then he had heard Stiles’s voice across the cell, miles and miles of distance, mountains between them and he had felt that love. He had been sure, Stiles would keep his promise. He had felt the warmth, of love blossoming in his heart.

Derek laughed to himself as he remembered his stupidities, as he shivered in his cold jail cell, with burns on every inch of his body, blood in bruises all over his back that would maybe never heal.

Every night they fed him just enough to keep him alive. Kate would chuckle as he licked the cold gruel from the bowl like a dog. Every morning, they would pinch him, they would take vials of his blood. Kate loved to torture him. She loved to whip him with the silver steel that would never heal. And then she’d leave him to her men, as a chew toy. Down in the basement of the Argent Labs, they had stolen hundreds of wolves, mostly packless ones, homeless wolves that no one would think to look for. The Argents tortured these wolves until they went mad. Sometimes Kate would release Derek to the mad wolves and Derek would have to hide, run through the Argent’s hundred acre lands, to escape. Derek had tried to flee the Argent property but the fence was electrified by
500 milliamps, 5 times the lethal dose. Derek had seen a wolf try to climb the fence once. He was killed in seconds.

It was good anyway. Mostly because Derek had gotten sick of trying anymore. When Kate left him to the mercy of the wolves the last time, Derek had simply lain down and done nothing as the wolves bit him and tore. Kate’s enforcers eventually had to drag Derek away because Kate didn’t want Derek dead so soon.

But Derek felt he was dead already.

In the darkness, the utter darkness of the prison cell, Derek knew he wanted to die. He was filled with silence. The complete silence from his mate. The complete silence of all those who had ever loved him. He had called the bond, he had cried to his mate. But Stiles never answered him. It felt like at the edge of the bond was a solid steel door that would never be opened. Derek was so tired.

As a little child, all Derek had ever wanted to be loved. All he had ever needed was for someone to say, “I love you so much Derek Hale”.

Derek now knew he would die here, broken and alone. Bleeding in silence.

And he was glad. It was finally over.
“Can I ask you a question, Stiles?” Ricardo stated after listening to Stiles speak.

“Yes,” Stiles muttered, with his head in his hands.

“You said you could feel Derek through the bond?”

“Yes,” Stiles answered.

Ricardo looked shocked. Then he caught himself and shook his head. “Never mind that. Stiles, before I tell you what I think, I want to tell you how I met Rosa, nearly twenty five years ago.”

“Her parents hated me. I had waited for nearly 40 years to find my bondmate. I had kids and a wife. I had a nice little house in the Fondos and a beta, who was kind. Even though our relationship was filled with that rapturous love, we had a steady affection for each other. We were good friends and good partners. We were happy together. I was sitting in the summer garden, one Friday after work, reading one of my favorite books when everything changed. Rosa was 22, she was as beautiful as a midsummer dream. She was my Titania. And when her eyes alighted on me, I could tell that she loved me too.”

Here Ricardo paused.

“It’s a strange world, ours is. When alphas and omegas were engineered to be stronger and faster and more fit, we also lost our ability to choose our loves, our ability to be or become who we really want to be. I often wonder what life would be like if we could simply fall in love like normal people. I wonder what life must have been like before mates existed. Yes, it might be hard to fall in love. But maybe everyone you love holds a piece of you somewhere and you hold a piece of them. Maybe you learn something from dropping all those pieces of yourself and others in so many places where they will never be found.

Anyway, when Rosa and I realized we were mates, we swore we would never consummate our bond. I had a wife. Rosa didn’t want to be shackled to some old man like me.

But even then I found myself taking more walks in the Fondos, hoping for a glimpse of her.

My wife was angry because I had become distant. I was hurting her. When I disappeared at night or at dawn or after work and she never knew where I was. She could sense, maybe feel it, that perhaps I didn’t love her anymore. I was simply going through the motions, a robot in place, trying to do the things everyone wanted me to do, but the meaning, the soul of it, was gone.

Rosa, also, found she couldn’t let me go. She began to meet me for long walks too. We promised ourselves nothing would ever come of it. After all, what could a young 20 year old have in common with an old man like me? I was sure that the more I got to know her, the more I would believe that our match, our bond, was a mistake.

I was wrong.

Even for a young girl, Rosa had such an old soul. She knew exactly what to say or do to make me
smile. And I began to look forward to our talks as the brightest spot in my day.

But I was hurting Rosa. She struggled. She told me, with loving me and knowing that I could never be there for her, never love her in the way a man ought to love a woman. Sometimes she was angry. So when a nice young beta man came along, a boy her parents loved, Alfonso, she decided that it was better to marry him that be alone forever.

She stopped talking to me, and it created this pain, this heartache in my chest that would never go away, even when I was asleep. But I felt that it was for the best. Alfonso could give her the love I knew she deserved.

Or I thought so, but on one of my walks seven months later, I found Rosa weeping,

She had this horrible red bruise on her face.

“Who did this to you?” I asked, shaking, the alpha within me rearing up, scratching at my skin in fury.

“Alfonso,” She sobbed.

“You have to stop seeing him,” I begged her.

She looked at me with tear rimmed eyes, eyes stained red and I never wanted to see Rosa cry.

“You shouldn’t have come” she whispered.

I wanted to shake her. I wanted to beg her. I wanted to fall on my knees and ask her to bond with me right there. But I thought of my wife, Of my children at home.

So I did not.

Ten months later, I received an invitation. To this day I have no idea why she did it. Why would you ask your mate to come to your wedding? Maybe it was because she wanted me to see we were officially over and finished. Maybe she knew what was to come.

At night, I was having these horrible dreams.

I dream of a man who would wrap his fingers around Rosa’s neck and squeeze until she stopped breathing. I dream of a million bruises excused by failing down stairs, hitting an arm, being so clumsy. I dreamt of her crying for me alone in the night.

When I got that wedding invitation, I felt that my inner alpha would no longer give me peace. I knew what I had to do.

The wedding was beautiful. Rosa was dressed in white with a blush of coral. She was holding six flower stalks from a pomegranate tree. Our favorite one.

I had dreamt we spoke the night before her wedding. In the dream, she was sitting on her bed alone, her eyes turned to the wall, her face in her hands. We had spoke in the dream, embraced and I told her of my plan. “Carry six pomegranate flowers from our favorite tree,” I had told her. “And I’ll know your answer to me”.

I slipped in at the last moment in the wedding. Everyone’s eyes were on Rosa, the beautiful blushing bride and Alfonso.

I wondered if I had imagined it. If the dream was crazy, if I wasn’t going to make a fool out of
myself.

“Does anyone have any objections to this love? Speak now or forever hold your piece,” the master of ceremonies intoned.

I stood up.

“I do”. Everyone turned to me in shock, gasps explode all over the room. I looked at Alfonso’s face, he seemed angry.

“Rosa is my mate and I love her. And I believe she loves me too. She cannot get married today because they are not a true match. We are.”

And with that, Rosa ran out of the altar into my arms and the car I had idling, waiting to whisk her away.

She smiled at me.

“I dreamt of you last night. And I thought it was just a dream. I hope you would come for me, Ricardo. I brought you our flowers. Our sign.”

Rosa had hidden a red dress under her wedding dress, which she unzipped as the car drove away into the night. We eloped that night, Stiles. And we were married far away from friends or family. But our bond was finally finished, and it stretched between us like a living, breathing thing. Even now, when I close my eyes I can feel her. I can see what she is doing right now in her day. It’s more overwhelming and beautiful than anything, Stiles, to feel a bond that is complete. I never feel like I am alone, even when she is working late, I am always insider her and she is always inside me.

Her parents hated me. My kids were angry, they eventually forgave me but my wife never did.

I’m not going to say it was easy. I am not going to brush off all the hurt, the pain, the damage we caused that we slowly had to mend. Love isn’t easy, Stiles, it’s never easy. Our scientists, even though they created perfect matches, couldn’t solve that for us. Love is messy. It is dirty. It is complicated. It is dark. “The course of true love never did run smooth,”

But it is worth it Stiles. Because every single day when I wake up, I am happy because Rosa is at my side and I know that she feels the same. And she gave me two beautiful children.

Stiles, you have to fight for your love. I can’t tell you what decision you should make, but whatever decision you do can’t be informed by fear. Never make decisions based on fear Stiles, because life is risky and twisty and dark and way too short.

The Ancients, pre-World Wars 3 and 4 had this beautiful saying about love. They said it was the only thing that was true in this world with no hope or certitude or peace.

They were right about that Stiles, they were right.

There was silence after Ricardo’s story.

“Is it common that alphas and omegas speak through dreams?” Stiles asked, anxiously.

Ricardo sighed.

“It is rare for an alpha and omega to have such a strong bond that they can speak through dreams or
mind to mind. In the old days, when alpha and omegas were strong. When the packs were full of pups and the Omega Codes did not exist, I have found tales of alphas and omegas doing extraordinary things. Some old alphas and omegas could speak mind to mind, sense when the other is dying, draw upon each other’s strength. In fact, I’ve read even crazier things, which alphas and omegas could once fully transform into wolves. But we haven’t seen those abilities in generations. This is why it is so important to discover what America is doing to omegas, to make our race whole. I think we are getting weaker and weaker, losing more and more of ourselves.”.

Stiles and Ricardo talked a little more that night before Stiles left, and caught a cab home. As he lay in bed that night, he imagined Ricardo at the wedding, the red of Rosa’s lips, the brilliant incarnadine of the pomegranate flowers. And he felt something inside him shift.

Maybe, Stiles wonders, I can build a world, out of the world that is, a world where I can be with Derek.

The hope unfurls like a fist in the stomach
Laura

The head of OCS operations was a very interesting man. He didn’t seem very interesting though. Middle aged and pudgy with non-descript eyes and hair, Arthur was a man who could blend into any scene, fit into any cameo. He was the taxi driver you would ignore as you paid the fare, the father who helped his kids cross the street, the nice security guard behind the desk at the hotel. Which is that he was everything and nothing at the same time. This was, Laura, mused, why Arthur was so successful.

Arthur had explained his plan to destabilize Paraguay.

Too many omegas were fleeing the United States, at larger and larger numbers. Even though America had caught most of them, still more of them left every year. And each omega lost was another alpha without his mate. If Paraguay was destabilized, or even worse, became more hostile to omegas, they might have a hope of keeping more omegas in the United States. Alphas were never quite balanced without their mates. Neither were omegas. Omegas who ran away didn’t realize that they would die eventually go crazy without their mates. They were hurting themselves.

Hale Shipping Co would gain a tremendous amount by this war. First, if America and all its allies went to war, Arthur would guarantee Laura a prime shipping contract, worth over 4 billion dollars. Hale would create all of America’s warships and rebuild America’s outdated naval fleet. Even more, any Paraguayan technology would be sent to Laura first, so she could improve upon the designs.

“How would you find my brother?” Laura asked.

“It’s all wonderful to find his mate, but Derek is missing and I’m not even sure if he is still alive,”

“First, “Arthur explained, “We will use all of our considerable resources to aid your search party and secondly, once we find Stiles, we can use his bond to discover Derek’s location.”

Laura hoped Arthur was more competent than Agent Smith.

“What do you need from me?” She asked the Agent.

Congress is having a meeting on the omega problem. I would like you to speak as a witness about how much your brother has suffered because Paraguay is coaxing omegas to escape, and fomenting rebellion.

“So,” Laura asked, “You want me to help stir up sentiment for another war?”

Arthur looked at her. And Laura became uneasy for a second. The look in his eyes…. It was as if Laura was nothing more than a dead fish on a table. Like he had summed her up and thought of all the ways he could use and take advantage of her. Like he was a robot instead of a breathing human. It scared her more than Agent Smith ever had.

The moment passed.

“Yes,” Arthur answered simply.
Laura had always prided herself on never allowing herself to be used by anyone. She believed in an inner compass of morality, no matter how small. In the next few weeks, Laura would cross her personal lines many times.

She will make a speech to the American Congress, drumming up War sentiment on false pretenses. She will fake tears in front of the camera, when she talks about how irresponsible it is of the Paraguayan government to encourage omegas to leave their alphas. She will cry real tears when she talks about how much Derek has suffered. She will appear on radios, talk shows, and hundreds of television shows explaining her brother’s predicament. Laura will be the face that runs a thousand ships. The grieving sister, who just wants her brother back. It is the part she was asked to play and she will play it personally.

She will ask the OCS to capture Stiles’s father, the Sheriff and she will leave threatening voice mail messages to him every night.

*I have your father. I will leave him in jail to rot like a barrel of 3 day old fish. You better come back.*

Laura will stop eating or sleeping, the lines will become severe in her face, like valleys carved into the Grand Canyon.

At the end, She will have to contend with the wreckage she has made of herself. She will wonder if she was ever a good person or ever could be, again.

But Laura doesn’t know that now.

She doesn’t know.

“Set your plan in motion,” Laura tells Arthur today, “I will do as you ask,”

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**An Unnamed Omega**

All the love everyone has, just reminds me of what I can no longer have. I am a broken, destroyed, tainted thing.

The OCS ruined my childhood. I was only eight when they took me from myself. I was told I no longer belonged to myself but some strange shadowy alpha. That I had no hopes but to serve him. That everything I could be or ever would be had to be broken and die.

Goodbye my dreams of being a pilot. Goodbye my dreams of being a police officer or a magician.

Goodbye to all of my dreams.

I was beaten every day. Whipped if I didn’t look down, or show the proper deference to an alpha. In school we learned how to be a proper omega, how to smile or sit when the alpha asked us to, how to cook foods the alpha might like, how to cater at a party. Later, at 16, we then learned how to present for our alpha. Arch your back up, your head down. Your alpha doesn’t want to see your face. He doesn’t want to hear you speak. He definitively doesn’t want to hear you cry.

Be a wet, willing hole for him. Be an empty vessel like a can upon a shelf.
We didn’t even learn how to read.

Every week.

Every Monday came the shots. No one ever told us what was in it. But after a shot, it was always harder to focus. It made us sick. We’d throw up on Mondays, never able to keep food down. We tried to call our parents, ask what was happening with them.

We weren’t allowed to speak to them. It was for the best. Talking with our parents would make it hard for us to concentrate, to focus on living lives to pleasure our alphas.

We weren’t allowed to be people. Not even to ourselves.

I see this now.

At 17, I was finally chosen by an alpha at one of the matching ceremonies. You know, the ones in which eligible alphas come to an OCS building and try to scent out their perfect matches.

They made the buildings beautiful, rolled out the red carpet. Only the best for the alphas. Not the dingy, horrible, dark place we had been kept our whole lives. The small windows, barred with steel through which only slats of light could glide through.

Suddenly there was food (we never had enough), there was feasting, there was laughter. And all for them. I and the other omegas, gaped at the food on the trays. Lobster! Fresh meat! Milk that wasn’t nearly spoiled! So many sweet things!

I have little to say about the alpha that picked me. He claimed me as his bonded. But I felt nothing. No ping of recognition. No joy. Later that night, he was inside of me. I lay on my side, hoping for it to be done. He told me we were having sex and I felt something shift in my brain, like a force. I opened my mouth to say no and found that the words had been stuck somewhere in this treacle mass inside me.

I found that something had gone wrong more over the coming days.

I couldn’t disobey an alpha’s command. And he had so many commands. He had written down a sheet of how he felt he wanted me to act, to wake him up, the breakfast he asked for on Mondays. I was never his mate or partner. I was a servant. I was an accessory to fit in with his life and cook food for his friends.

I can’t say he hit me but that did not mean he did not hurt me. I sat in the kitchen some afternoons, with the knife balanced on the tip of my finger.

*If I was to kill myself right here, blood spilling all over the tiled floor…..would he even notice? Would he even care?*

It was at one of the alpha’s stupid gathering’s that I met a man who promised me a future. Freedom. A route to Paraguay.

I hoarded the money I was supposed to be using for groceries. Skipped a meal here and there for weeks to afford to pay the smuggler.
I closed my eyes and thought of freedom when my alpha drove into me over and over and over again.

He didn’t even know I was planning anything and I didn’t leave any notice when I left.

I left just as I appeared. Like nothing, remembered by no one, seen by no one.

The smuggler took all my money and placed me on one of the routes to Paraguay, hidden in the truck that reached as high as 140 degrees F in the hot sun and froze to nearly 40F in the night. I’m not sure how I made it, two weeks in a tin can, with all the other omegas.

All of the singing hopes and dreams like me.

When I get to Paraguay, I will do this…

I will do that…

Life is a joke, often a cruel one. I was trapped here as much as I ever was in America. No one will hire me because I can’t read. I live in Lowe Asuncion refugee housing and listen to the rats gnawing the walls at night. What does freedom mean when you can’t find a job? Or food? Or chase your dreams…what am I to do with this freedom?

And lately, not that I have broken by bond, I’ve started hearing voices in my head.

**Bad Omega, they say. How dare you break your bond?**

*Where are you now, Omega?* They whispered through my heat, when I was sweat slick and dripping and horribly, achingly alone.

I hated them. All these beautiful couples. All this love around me. I felt like I lived behind a glass window and everyone was so happy outside the window but I could never see or touch it, and I never would.

So when I was working his second job, cleaning the shit streaks around a toilet in some upscale restaurant frequented by people who would never look like or understand me, and a man pulled him aside and asked him if he wanted revenge…..I knew what to do.

I flipped open the black phone.

“it’s time,” said the voice on the other line.

Arthur, my handler, had helped with sending all the packages he needed. The steel and the metal and the alkali metals. He had coaxed me through it. Every single step was planned.

For too long decisions have been made for me. I looked at all the shiny happy people below me.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow none of this will matter.

Tomorrow it was time to bring the war to them.

Chapter End Notes
Ok, guys things are winding to their conclusion soon. I anticipate a Stiles derek meeting within the next 5-8 chapters and an ending soon after that. I have gotten a comment about short chapters and all I will say is that I barely have time to write as it is, I can't always write huge long chapters. and this fic ( with both parts is around 90K right now. I need some consideration.

Thanks to my readers for sticking with me through all these years.

The endgame has begun.
Stiles was wearing a crisp blue parka and a red turtleneck that day. His hair was slightly messy from the wind blowing through the Fondos, the early gray morning heralded a storm. He stood waiting at the door of the Omega Penitentiary at 8 am, sharp, wondering why he ever agreed to meet Ricardo here.

Stiles checked his watch, 8:02. He gritted his teeth, he hated lateness. At 8:10, he finally saw Ricardo shuffle over, one hand grasping the ornate walking stick he loved so much. Stiles watched the old man, whom he had come to care for, struggle over the cracks in the sidewalks and his heart lurched. Stiles wanted to walk over to Ricardo and offer a hand, but he knew Ricardo was too proud. So Stiles waited in silence until the man made his way to him.

The Omega Penitentiary was set in the Baja Neighborhood of the Fondos, short and low it was the most visually unappealing part of Paraguay. It was here that Stiles had lived when he first entered Paraguay, in one of the Stalinesque rat infested apartments on 232 Esparanza Avenua.

Esparanza, Stiles laughed to himself, how can one find hope out of all that death? All that misery.

The penitentiary was a squat grey building, a hulking cube, no color, no beautiful friezes or designs, just an impenetrable stone fortress.

“Abandon all hope ye who enter here”, the quote from Dante flitted through Stiles’s mind, and it seemed particularly apt at a time like this.

Stiles sighed to himself, and moved towards the huge wrought iron door, when a clawed hand grasped him by the shoulder.

Ricardo….

Ricardo’s face was serious as he fixed his dark eyes upon Stiles, “Stiles, I need to know if you can handle what I am about to show you? I need to know if you are going to be okay.”

“It’s a prison,” Stiles muttered, “I don’t understand what is so special or important about it.”

Ricardo took a deep breath, “This prison holds the key to all the questions you have about omegas. It is the reason I asked you to read all those books, I needed you to have some context for what you are about to see.”

So melodramatic. Stiles muttered under his breath.

But he turned around and opened the door.

Floors were made of a vomit puke yellow. Hospital rooms yellow. Ricardo guided him to a waiting desk, where a bored beta woman was filing her long red nails, she burnished an acrylic tip with loving care, flicking her highlighter yellow hair.

Ricardo looked at her white name badge, “Excuse me, Mrs. Fisher, My name is Ricardo and I have an observer’s pass for scientific research,”

Ricardo found a red strip in the pocket of his billous trenchcoat. He flashed it at the woman.
“And I am bringing a visitor, this is Stiles Stilinski,”

Stiles gave his best friendly smile.

Mrs. Fisher rolled her eyes, “he has to sign in”, even with her mutterings, one could hear the lilt of her Fondos brogue.

Stiles picked up a black pen, and signed the white binder, on the line. 8:15, he noted, looking at his watch.

“Can you direct us to the American Omega unit,” Ricardo asked, “a colleague is meeting me there”.

The woman’s mouth quirked, annoyed at having to move off her comfortable seat. Her plastic green heels clacked loudly in the linoleum floor. She straightened her uniform of brown shirt and pants as she guided them through the mazelike hallways, down a flight of stairs, into a nearly pitch dark floor.

“Have fun,” she stated flippantly, as she walked away.

The corridors were dark, the rooms were even darker. Stiles didn’t understand why everything was barely illuminated. The few windows set in walls were covered by metal bars.

Ricardo guided him towards the first room.

In it, a young omega woman sat, staring at the blank white walls, talking quickly.

_Shut up Alpha. You don’t own me. Get away. Leave me alone! You are a useless shit! Fuck you! I hate you!_

The woman stood up, her billowing pink skirt gathered around her, like a jellyfish. It was a sight Stiles could never forget. The woman ran to the wall, where her imaginary Alpha stood, and screamed, beating at the wall with her fists, over and over again until blood ran down the lily white skin.

Stiles glanced at Ricardo, confused.

Ricardo’s grave face gave nothing away.

Another room:

In this one a blonde man lay strapped to his bed, wrists, ankles, knees, only his head was allowed to move. As Stiles and Ricardo walked by, the man turned his head, fixing unseeing blue eyes on his new visitors, he growled at Stiles, drawing his lips back in a fierce snarl, teeth poking his lips and drawing blood.

“Whoa, boy” Stiles muttered. Didn’t want to get to close.

In another, a little girl, who couldn’t have been older than four, was sitting in a corner of the room. She had one of the only windows in the prison, and slats of light illuminated her blue slip dress. Ricardo approached her, picking up a discarded doll from the floor.

“Marla, don’t you want to play?”

The girl turned and fixed her eyes upon Ricardo, those innocent brown eyes.

“No, because Alpha hates playing. He says megas aren’t good for anything but spreading their legs.”
The girl turned around and butter her head against the wall again and again.

“Alpha” in that thready unearthly voice.

Stiles backed out of the room.

Marty was awake when Ricardo and Stiles reached the room.

His was room 28B, the last room near the stairs.

“Hi, Marty,” Ricardo began, “How are you doing today?”

“Fine,” the short, gruff omega man huffed, looking warily at Stiles.

Ricardo continued introductions, “I brought a friend, Stiles Stilinski, he’s an omega too”.

Stiles smiled apprehensively, “I’m Stiles”, he reached out his hand.

The man made no move to shake Stiles’s hands. Stiles fingers dangled in air.

“Another omega,” the man growled.

“Excuse me?” Ricardo asked.

“When are you going to stop bring this parade of omega after omega and admit that you belong to me?” the man growled.

“We’ve discussed this before,” Ricardo said calmly, “I am not your mate.”

“I hated my mate. He was a good for nothing Alpha who threw me away when he got bored of me. But come on, I can do more for you than this shrimp ever could.”

Marty stood up and walked over to Ricardo, placing a finger on Ricardo’s lips to silence any protestations.

“What you say,” Marty pressed his lips against Ricardo’s cheek, “what you say to getting rid of the whore and busting out this joint together.”

Marty turned to a frozen, horrified Stiles.

“Get the fuck out you useless bitch or I will cut your cunt into pieces!”

“It’s bad to threaten my friend,” Ricardo said in a calming voice.

“I’m sorry but he was looking at you with fuck-me-eyes, I can’t help it, you’re mine” Marty whined.

“Bad omegas threaten others. Bad omegas say they will rip people to shreds. Do you want to be a bad omega?”

“no,” Marty was sniffling now, tears choking his voice.

“Apologize to Stiles,” Ricardo said firmly.

“I’m sowwy Stiles. Sowwy for being bad,” Marty’s voice rose tremulously like a child.

Marty pressed his face even further into Ricardo’s shirt.
“I’m innocent,” Marty muttered, “you promised, Alpha,” his voice became plaintive, “you promised you were gonna help me. I didn’t do those things they said I did. I don’t remember them. I don’t.”

Ricardo soothed the omega, petting the middle aged man’s brown hair, “I want to help you Marty, I really do.”

Ricardo carefully walked to the bed, “Can you sit down for me?” Ricardo asked in that soother voice only alphas could use.

“Lie down and sleep, that’s my good omega” Ricardo continued as Marty curled into a ball and turned to the wall, breath deepening in slumber.

Ricardo walked to the doorway, where Stiles had retreated, fearing the violent omega’s retaliations.

Ricardo assessed Stiles calmly.

“Marty worked as a gardener for a wealthy Alpha family who lived in one of the little tributary islands of El Zorro. One night, while the alpha was travelling away on business, Marty entered the master bedroom and stabbed the Omega wife 13 times as she lay sleeping. She never expected the attack and couldn’t defend herself. He then killed her daughter and son. She had a newborn babe who was sleeping in his crib, Marty squeezes the baby by the neck until it turned blue. When the alpha returned from his trip that night, he found Marty covered in blood. Marty claimed he did so he and the alpha could be together, he was convinced the wife had stolen his mate.”

Stiles shuddered.

“Why did you bring me here?” Stiles asked.

Ricardo simply shook his head, without replying.

They entered another room.

A darkness pervaded these white walls, a deep darkness that Stiles could not escape from. A darkness as pitiless as the primordial depths of the ocean and as endless as the emptiness within his soul.

Stiles saw: omegas crying, weeping, men, women, and children.

He saw feel omegas crying for their lost children. Male omegas sobbing for those they had lost on the perilous journey to Paraguay.

And another, omega after omega, each crying out to voices Stiles could not see or hear. Each wrapped in their own darkness, from which they could never escape.

His ears rang with the cries of “alpha Alpha Alpha. Alpha save me. Alpha hurt me.” The voices whispered and whispered and it drove Stiles mad.

He watched the tiny heaves of her chest. She was an elderly woman, about 62, whose ribs Stiles could count on sight. The bones of her clavicle a thin line, her scapula, clearly visible. No one should be like this, Stile thought, so little flesh and yet so much bone. The woman was barely alive, she was a scrap of nothing holding itself together against the pitiless wind.

“She doesn’t have long to live,” Ricardo whispered.
He walked over to her, “Good night, Mrs. Robinson” he whispered, fluffing her graying hair. Stiles could tell that the hair had been full once.

The woman opened her rheumy eyes, and fixed them on Ricardo.

“Ahh, Ricardo,” her voice was the sting of a kettle smoke, the machines she was connected to beeped, “so kind of you. Don’t miss me, you’ll join me soon.”

Finally, after the stench of madness had pervaded Stiles’s shirt and clothes, they turned a corner and ascended a square to the first floor, blinking into the light. Stiles had never been so happy to see a linoleum floor.

“So you asked why I brought you here Stiles,” Ricardo began.

“I brought you here because 85% of American omegas who immigrate to Paraguay end up either dead, in an insane asylum, or here within five years.”
The Jealous Lover's Curse

Stiles

Stiles’s eyes widened.

“Lies! How can that be true?”

Ricardo quirked his head to the left.

“I met my first American omega four years ago. Mrs. Robinson was our housekeeper, she had just emigrated from America and she was a kind woman. I can’t imagine how our house would have run without her. Rosa and I came to care about her, and through her we learned about the horrible conditions in which American omegas were kept. We had four good years together until we noticed Mrs. Robinson seemed to be forgetting things, she was always a mild mannered person but she began to act more erratically. And always she would mutter “Alpha, alpha, I’m so sorry alpha, I miss you alpha”. One day I found her, standing in the kitchen with this……look on her face,” Ricardo paused her, looking for words.

“There was a pile of broken glass at her feet that she didn’t even seem to notice, she was somewhere, and blood was everywhere. I called the ambulance, she was admitted to the psychiatric section of the Omega penitentiary and she hasn’t left since. That was eleven years ago,” Ricardo finished.

“When I went to visit Mrs. Robinson, I realized that more and more omegas were admitted each day, in fact the number of omegas admitted to the ward became so numerous, they had to wall off an entire floor just for omega admits. I initially assumed post-traumatic stress was to blame for the large number of omega psychiatric illness but when I looked at the numbers, I realized PTSD could not explain the sheer number of sufferers. It wasn’t until I met Dr. Gonzalez that I was able to make the connection. He will be meeting us in the mess hall,” Ricardo explained.

Stiles followed Ricardo to the mess hall. Squat white tables filled the room, like a high school cafeteria. It wasn’t lunchtime yet and the benches were empty. Stiles sat in an empty bench in the middle of the hall and smoothed his jacket, hugging his arms to himself and trying to make sense of what he had witnessed. He hummed to himself, filling his head with a buzzing sound as he tried to block out the pictures in his brain. It seemed like only a second later when a kindly faced man, with gray hairs and black square eyeglasses approached Stiles. The man had a sharp nose and a square face. His eyes seemed like they could penetrate into Stiles soul and discover it’s depths. Stiles shook his hand, the grasp was cold and firm.

“My name is Joaquin Gonzalez. I am the head neuropathologist at the Omega hospital next door,” the man said by way of introduction.

“pleasure to meet you,” Stiles nodded.

“Joaquin, I want you to show Stiles what we discovered about omega brains,” Ricardo soke quietly.

“We need to keep this quiet, until I can finish the paper,” Joaquin whispered, “I need to run and rerun all my statistical analyses. This explosive finding could make or break my entire career. It needs to be airtight. I’ll need Stiles to sign a non-disclosure agreement,” he finished.

Stiles was wary. “What am I going to see? Why will I need to sign this agreement?”

Ricardo glanced around the room, his eyes watching for potential cameras and listening ears.
Not here. Follow us.”

Stiles followed Ricardo and Joaquin into the blisteringly windy day, the sudden cold seeping into their bones.

Joaquin spoke in a sotto vocce tone.

“After an omega dies, sometimes I am given the brain for autopsy. I slice through brains with my knife and they come apart like butter. Usually all the brains look the same, they are pink, no protein. Or they show hallmarks of a specific disease. Treatment resistant Alzheimer’s or Schizophrenia or Chronic Alcoholism. The brain is as much a part of your body as anything. Garbage in. Garbage out,” Joaquin shrugged as they covered a few more blocks.

“I can remember the first time I saw an American Omega brain, it was two years ago on January 16th, grossly, the brain was shrunken and distorted. There was blood affixed to the outer arachnoid membrane. I sliced through the brain, another hemorrhage had completely devastated the fornix, the frontal cortex (which controls judgement and decision making, had shrunken. The amygdala was nothing more than a pea. The omega’s brain was more damaged than anything I had ever seen,” Joaquin paused for a second and then continued, “so I kept it to study,”

Ricardo jumped in, “Under Paraguayan law, we have much respect for the dead and desecrating the body is desecrating the soul. Technically, after an autopsy, the forensic pathologist must return the body parts to the family or the state. Specimens are not supposed to be used for research without the proper permits. Joaquin could lose his job for this.”

Joaquin nodded, “But I couldn’t resist. I researched into the files of this omega and discovered that he was an American omega escapee. I didn’t think much of it. Maybe his trauma occurred in the prison. But then over the years, I received more and more brains from American Omegas. Each with a similar pattern, shrunken frontal cortexes, hemorrhages in the fornix, shriveled amygdalas and gross distortions. When I looked at these slides under the microscope, I noticed the feathery degeneration of axons in the brain, a sign that these brains were dying. But I thought that perhaps the omegas were not reflective of most American omegas. Perhaps something happened to these omegas after they got to the penitentiary. I bribed a friend to bring me more omega brains from other places. Road accidents. Suicides. Old age. Every single time, I found the same pattern of changes within these brains.”

Stiles swallowed.

“Why do you think this is happening?”

They had reached the hospital now, a stately marble building adorned with a glittering red cross.

El Hospital de la Asuncion de la Virgen.

From the quality of its blue stained glass windows, Stiles could tell this was an old hospital, something created before the war.

“So, now I run a lab, paying American omegas so I can scan their brains. Officially I am doing this as part of a brain mapping project, but really….I”

“You want to see how omega brains become this distorted,” Stiles answered.

“yes,” the man smiled, a teacher once again.

“The results have been very interesting. I first ask an omega about their lives. And of course, I expect
their lives to be filled with trauma and sadness,” the man frowned for a minute.

“However, the only variable that correlates with degeneration of the brain is spending time in OCS custody,” Joaquin explained.

Stiles shook his head in disbelief.

They had come to a large room on the fourteenth floor, a large helmet was connected to a computer by a bunch of incomprehensible wires.

Joaquin took a deep breath.

“No cameras here, Ricardo, we can speak freely now,”

“This is my equipment. When I place it on an omega, and ask them to perform tasks. Counting. Reading. Watching television….I can build a three dimensional model of their brain. Not only can I see what blood flows to each part, I can map out their axon systems, I can trace each neuron and see it fire it’s synapse and even find breaks in the axons, where the wire fails. I can predict what someone will say before they say it. I can see systems of axons light up like thunder when someone pronounces and says their name. I can even choose to turn off some systems, like vision and turn on others, like hearing,” Stiles could hear the joy in the man’s voice as he rhapsodized about the brain.

“It is through this system that I have been tracking omegas for months now. I have them perform basic tasks, and I have been able to paint a step by step model of their degeneration.”

“But it’s missing something, Stiles,” Joaquin continued.

“A cause. Tell me Stiles, what do you know about SPCA2?”

Stiles furrowed his eyebrows, searching through his encyclopedic brain.

“SPCA2? It’s one the omega booster shots every omega gets each year. It helps omegas regulate their moods.”

Joaquin shook his head.

“I heard reports of SPCA2 from the omegas I was studying. I bought a sample of it off some smugglers,” Joaquin’s mouth wrinkled with distaste.

“Anyway, I sent the compound off to be analyzed and have created batches and batches of it.

Joaquin knocked on the back wall three times in his office and Stiles realized Joaquin must have a secret door.

The back wall swiveled, opening up into a dark room, illuminated by one glowing lightbulb from the ceiling. Stiles saw at least six or seven students tending to cages filled with mice.

“We know mice lie and monkeys exaggerate. I would love to do some experiments on humans, but ethics and all,” Joaquin shrugged.

“However, the preliminary results from these tests has been fascinating. On a mouse model of omega, SPCA2 leads to exactly the same findings, shrinking of the frontal cortex, loss of the amygdala, hemorrhages in the fornix. And because the fornix is close to the hypothalamus, which regulates omega cyclesà secondary infertility” Joaquin said grimly.

“Fifty years ago every omegas had at least four kids, then they started having 3 or maybe one, now
one is lucky to find one child in thirty omegas” Ricardo explained, “4/1,000 births. .5 kids for each omega. America’s population is shrinking, heading into a death spiral. Soon there may not be an omegas or alphas at all,”

As the truth built up in Stiles’s mind, he shook, horrified with the gravity of it. Horrified with the reality. He found himself falling to his knees, hands on his head.

“Oh my God.”

“But, why,” Ricardo continued, “why do the alphas do it? Why develop SPCA2 at all? Sure the omegas are docile, but there are other ways to get docility. What does SPCA2 give you that other drugs don’t?”

Stiles found himself crying, fingers pressed against his face.

“They’re killing us,” he whispered.

Ricardo smiled sadly.

“I’ve found descriptions of what I now think is SPCA2 in ancient texts. They call it the Jealous lovers Curse.”

“Why?”

“SPCA2 makes an omega unable to resist an alpha’s commands. Hence the docility, but if given in utero, with the right conditioning, it also forces omegas to orient their entire world around their alphas. So they need their alphas to function and stay stable,”

“So when the omegas run away…” Stiles heard his voice as if from a distance,

“Their brains begin to self-destruct, needing the presence of alpha pheromones, seed, and sweat in order to function normally” Ricardo finished.

Joaquin nodded, fixing Stiles with those piercing eyes, “It’s also called the Jealous Lover’s Curse because it recreates feelings of bonding and love.”

“Think about it,” Ricardo began, “How can any alpha who is bonded to his omega hurt them as American omegas have been hurt? The bond allows alphas and omegas to feel each other’s emotions. There is no way an alpha could beat or rape his omega without feeling the boomerang of those feelings echoing across the bond.”

“Because most American alphas are not really bonded to their omegas, it’s a one way bond. And SPCA2 doesn’t care about compatibility, it will simply make an omega cling to someone, anyone”

“Even more,” Ricardo continued, “SPCA2 blunts the ability of omegas to care for themselves. Most alphas have never felt or smelled omega pheromones, because all the omegas are damaged by SPCA2. Most alphas have never spoken mind to mind with their omega because SPCA2 destroys the empathetic pathways in the amygdala”

“Why would anyone even do this?” Stiles sobbed.

“Because,” Ricardo said, gently and simply, “What if I told you I could give you the most perfect, devoted omega and make sure he would always love you? He would never abandon you, never betray you, but faithfully serve you all his life. What if I could give you love with none fo the heartbeat, none of the pain? Wouldn’t you take it?”
“But it’s not love,” Stiles sobbed, “that’s not love”.
I bring the war to you

Rosa

It was a beautiful day like any other. Sunshine in the Fondos. Rosa’s pomegranate flowers were blooming outside on their tree, a with the vibrancy of a red sunset. Rosa sang to herself, thinking of her son’s laza ceremony. Soon she would be standing there, at his side, her eyes teary as her son found his true love. She hummed, thinking of the dress she would wear, something white covered in red flowers, silk.

Rosa walked outside, with a small knife, to cut some pomegranate blossoms of the tree. They would make a beautiful centerpiece for her table. As she cut them, she nicked herself, “hmm”, Rosa murmured, sucking her thumb to staunch the red blood. She placed the blossoms in the center of the table, imagining the dinner she would cook tonight. It was date night on their calendar and Ricardo should be home from work early. Rosa ran her fingers through her short brown hair, it was getting a bit too long now and perhaps she might have to cut it soon.

Ricardo-Two hours earlier

It had been two days since Ricardo spoke to Stiles. After Stiles had learned of his secret research, he had signed the non-disclosure agreement, white faced and silent.

Ricardo hoped Stiles would speak to him again. Because he meant to go public with this information. Let the world know what the OCS was doing to American omegas. But learning that most American omegas were destined to end up in asylums or dead would only turn public opinion against omega immigration. Ricardo hoped Stiles would speak on behalf of the rest of the omegas, assuring Paraguayans that omegas were not as terrifying as they thought.

Ricardo hoped he had not misjudged Stiles, but he strongly believed that Stiles would finally move from his slumber and contact him soon. Joaquin no longer wanted to sit on his research anymore, it was time to go public.

He prayed that the OCS would not target his wife or his family, whom he loved.

Ricardo sighed, looking down at Rosa’s sleeping form. Even now, twenty years later, he still loved her as much as he did when he first saw her. He pressed a feathery light kiss onto her cheek, tied his tie with shaking hands and leaned on his cane as he filled his thermos from the coffee machine. It was still warm, set by Rosa, just as he liked it.

He remembered that tonight was date night, perhaps he would pick up a loaf of vanilla pound cake from that Bakery she liked in the archipelago. Delicito? It was. He looked outside, and saw the red pomegranate flowers blossoming on the tree, their tissue pink petals illuminated by the sun rise.

He smiled before he reached for his cane.

It’s the little things.

An Unnamed Omega

Death in his pores and death in his lungs. Every breath in and out was a silent celebration of death. He and DEATH were CLOSE friends. Close close close like lovers.
Death was like a snake, it curled around him at night. It whispered lovely messages to him. Whispered beautiful things. Dead heads rolling. Dead eyes glaring. Blood from every orifice in the body. The slashes, the cuts.

In homage to his death, his LORD, the unnamed omega had started making little cuts over his body, he would offer them as libation to his new GOD. His death. Hahaha

It’s the little things.

He dressed in black armor, Arthur had sent the materials and supplies. The fitted arm bands and vest and pants. He had written his letter, to be dropped by 2pm at the local news station. He recalled a few of the words…..

Hello.

You Don’t know me but I am aBout to hurt you and kill you. LeAve your world in So much Pain that you will never dreAm of hoping anymore. I am nothing, just a random omega, one that cleans your toilet, that washes you StreeT on Cold Nights. Yeah,I am an AmErIcan.

I hate you all.

I hate your happy lives and stupid alphas that SHOULD BE MINE. I hate your smiles and your children. I want to kill them all. I want you to KnoW what it is like to be nothing. I wAnt you to know what it is like to be worthless. Powerless.

Look at your TV. 3 pm. I’ll make my death debut. It’s going to be so pretty. So many bombs, explosions and black smoke, oh my. So lovely. So many people are going to die die die.

There was more that the unnamed omega wrote, twenty pages of it, but omega didn’t have time to recall all the words.

He finished dressing, he caressed Pretty, his gun. And Lovely, his M16. His belt pouch was filled with ammunition and well, the baby.

His babies whom he had so lovingly constructed from Arthur’s instructions. Made of plastic, steel and starpowder, which harnessed the energy of a thousand stars….. the explosion would be felt throughout all the islands.

He smiled at the mirror, death would approve of him. He climbed into the hover car that was waiting for him outside. Arthur had ordered it. He had met a friend of Arthur where he was working as a janitor, cleaning the shit stains out of people’s toilets. The man had seemed nice, kind, not ignored omega like all the others.

The man had slipped extra bills and a number in his pocket.

“I know someone who can help you,” the man had said after he left omega dripping wet, when they had sex in the bathroom. Omega had sex with any man who could pay or else he never had enough to make rent that month. Landlord kept raising the rent on him. More more more always more than he could afford.

He called the phone number and heard Arthur speak for the first time.
The harsh hints of that voice. Arthur had to be an alpha, omega was sure of it.

Arthur was good. He helped omega understand that it was not his fault. The sex with useless alphas. The scrubbing. He helped omega realize that there was a system to hurt him. That he had been destroyed by the system. He was worthy. Meaningful and import. Nobody knew. But he was. it was true. Had to be true.

So now the omega was about to make them all know him. Know why he was so angry.

Arthur helped with that too.

The car lifted up, and they began the hour long trip to the Archipelagos. The scenery rushed by, blue skies, and the tiny denizens of the Fondos like specks of dust.

Omega wanted to go to El Zorro or El Aguila or El Capital. Wanted to paint those islands red with sweet blood. Death was asking me to do it. But Arthur said no.

“The security,” Arthur explained.

“Won’t get through, too easy to catch you” Arthur stated.

Omega was angry Arthur didn’t believe in him. Omega was fast. Was strong. No one would ever see the death knife glinting behind omega’s eyes. No one would see sweet innocent omega doing such awful things.

So together, they chose another target. “The National Library” Books and useless things omega couldn’t read. But the image of killing those defenseless stodgy old bookkeepers made omega really really happy. So soon it would happen. So soon.

The man in front didn’t talk. He wore a black suit, white shirt, untraceable and unnoticeable. Omega didn’t care, he muttered to himself. Nothing would matter soon enough.

The man landed on Library Island’s strip, skidding to a stop, a jarring thud as the plane left the air.

“Are you ready?” the man asked unemotionally. The only words he had spoken that day.

The omega said nothing, smiled, and opened the door.

The national library was a beautiful thing. Modelled after the once majestic library of Alexandria, it was held by four marble columns, above which sat a triangular pediment which featured a long haired woman in a Greek gown, sitting under a tree, reading. The library was at least 7 floors high, and each floor was contained a different category of books. On the rooftop stood a glass dome, and a balcony on all sides. Giant, high powered telescopes stood at each corner of the balcony and on clear nights, astronomers would look through the telescopes to the skies, searching for signs of another world, decoding the movements of stars.

Beneath them, under the giant dome, meteorologists would chart the positions of clouds in the sky, forecasting rain and sun and storms.

The names of famous philosophers were carved into a strip above each Ionic column.

A silver lake sat next to the national library, on which swans and geese frolicked side by side. Willow trees dropped into the river, their V shaped trunks, creating natural crannies for book lovers. The Library was also abutted by a somewhat extensive garden, filled with flowers, apple and orange trees.
Leading up to the library were 49 steps, and each step had the name of a famous Head librarian engraved in gold upon the stair.

It was these steps the omega climbed, his heart in his chest as he prepared his mind.

The nice security guard that greeted him at the door could have been anyone. Somebody’s father, somebody’s lover or somebody’s friend. Omega was past caring about all of this now.

“let me in,” the omegas stated.

“Excuse me sir, you do not have a pass,” the man explained. Polite. Noncomittal.

The omega flipped back his jacket and showed him Pretty.

The man’s eyes widened in horror, his mouth dropped in an O. Omega could smell his heart racing, that sweet tang of terror and sweat.

“I can go, right?”

The man’s left hand crept towards his black communication box.

The omega shook his head sadly, “Pretty’s is hungry, I guess you’ll be her first meal.”

In five minutes the man was dead, the gun was equipped with a silencer, so no other sound ripped the air.

And all the security guard man was or ever would be lay in a pool of blood on the marble stars.

Such a shame, the omega tittered to himself. He had hoped there would be more guards to kill.

Killing is easy, the omega realized. Once you take a life, taking another doesn’t matter. He loved it, his body straining with that singular strength of purpose. He sang within himself, reveling in the joy of the recoil, the bullet flying into the next person.

Dead. Dead. Dead.

Daughter omega friend.

Dead dead dead.

Everyone meets their end.

He sighed a bit, it was almost a shame that he planned to go like this. Meet his end here. These idiots were not worthy of his brilliance. Of Death’s hunger. He briefly thought about shooting more people on the second floor but stopped himself.

He and Arthur had discussed this.

If he detonated the bomb on the seventh floor, it would give people on the lower floors a chance to escape. There would be sometime before the building collapses and everyone would have a chance to escape from one of the many stairs in the building. Everyone except those unlucky souls on the seventh floor.

But if he detonated the bomb on the first floor, the building would collapse into the ground, immediately, everyone on the top floors would die as the building tipped over, groaning under its own weight. The library had been covered with flameproof steel, so that it was impermeable to
gunpowder or fire, but not star powder. Arthur and omega had mapped each corner and discovered a weakness in the building’s structural foundation, in the southeast corner of the building, the masoners hadn’t measured the cornerstone properly, and it was misshapen. One blast and the building would crumple like a house of cards.

The omega entered the main hall, marveling at the glass ceiling. Within the hall librarians sat behind desks arguing about book positions, other librarians scuttled around wheeling books in wheelbarrows to one place or another. Digitalizing certain classic texts into cheap hologram flicker books.

The omega walked up to the front desk.

“Can I help you with anything?” the absentminded beta kept one eye on her book. “The history of the universe” the title read.

“yes,” the omega smiled.

“Lovely is hungry”

He could see the woman stare at him with a confused glance. The shot came so fast she barely realized she had been shot until she felt the hole in her chest.

The omega removed the silencer.

The other alphas, betas, omega finally took notice. Books fell from outstretched hands. People screamed.

A few alphas vaulted over to stop the unnamed omega, but the omega pressed a hand to his chest and pulled out a button.

“Anyone touches me and I’ll detonate this bomb”

A teary alpha woman, pulled out her headpiece, and began to speak, probably hoping to call the police. The omega shot her at close range.

“Bring me the head librarian. I want to talk to him,”

A man limped over, with a long wooden cane, carved with a hundred different animals. “I am he,”

The omega snarled, Didn’t these idiots take him seriously? He whipped the man with his black pistol, growling as the man fell onto his thin legs.

“Shut up you senile old man.”

“Where is the real Head Librarian?” the omega asked.

Everyone in the room was frozen in silence, “it’s him. His name is Ricardo”

“Kill me,” the old man begged, “but leave these books alone, leave these people alone.”

The omega glared at the old man, with his glinting black eyes, “I didn’t ask you to talk,” he pressed the barrel of his gun against the old man’s temple.

“Arthur said he wanted me to kill you, but I’m sick of doing things without learning why. What does he want from you?” the omega asked.
Ricardo swallowed, “Who is Arthur? Is he part of the OCS?”

The omega pressed the gun closer, “Say that word again and I will surely kill you.”

Ricardo swallowed, “My research has to do with the OCS. I found out they are killing omegas, murdering them with this chemical. I’ve been trying to find a way to help them, help you feel happy again.”

The omega was nonplussed.

“When you were growing up under the……correction services….. did you ever receive an injection….every week usually? And you felt sick after?”

“Go on,” the omega continued.

“That injection was a poison designed to weaken you, so that you could not live without an alpha. Once you leave your alpha, it could make you hallucinate, hear voices, do things you would not normally do,” Ricardo explained.

“Lies. Lies. Lies,” the omega screamed.

Ricardo raised his hands up and continued calmly, “Are you hearing voices? What do they say?”

“Kill him. Kiiiilll him. He deserves to die,” the omega whispered.

In that moment, Ricardo’s heart beating heart slowed. He knew exactly what to do. This was an omega in distress. An omega who needed him.

Ricardo lifted his hand and stroked the omega’s cheek.

“You don’t have to be scared anymore. Don’t listen to the voices anymore, I’m here. Alpha is here,” Ricardo spoke in that low soothing voice as he gentled the omega.

He could see the omega leaning towards, arms slack, nose open to catch a whiff of those alpha fumes.

Alpha.

But it was that moment when the assistant librarian, Emilio chose to sneak behind the omega, carrying a large chair to drop on the omegas head.

“N-o-o” Ricardo mouthed the words but it was too late.

The omega had turned, his trusting face now became one of scorn. Another bullet buried itself in Emilio’s brain and Ricardo knew, with the same sharp knowledge that he knew anything that day. That this was his last fight. Last book.

He was going to die today.

“Goodbye Rosa. I love you and always loved you. You were the light of my life. Take care of our sons.” Ricardo’s alpha reached through his mind, hoping to touch his mate’s soul, and say goodbye.

Another blast sounded

“I am sick of Alphas manipulating me, all they want is to hurt me, hurt us,”
He hoped Rosa had heard him.

Rosa

Rosa was on patrol when she heard the words.

“Goodbye Rosa. I love and always loved you. You were the light of my life. Take care of our sons,” She frowned.

Why had that random thought entered her head, and in Ricardo’s voice too. Whatever could be the reason?

She cuffed the perp for shoplifting and dropped him off at the police station. 15 minutes before she got a chance to look at the television.

Her heart dropped to her stomach.

“Breaking News” the newscaster stated, “There has been an attack at the National library. An American omega has taken the librarian hostage and is killing everyone inside.”

“No.” Rosa thought, “it was a lie.”

This could not be her life.

“More news is coming in,” the woman’s face was stoic, “an explosion has been heard near the archipelago, people are fleeing in droves. One of our reporters is now at the scene.”

The man stood on the landing strip, the library in the distance, his face was wet with tears.

The national library was burning, flames jetted from the friezes, the glass dome Ricardo loved so much. Crumbling, the building folded in on itself like a giant shaking before he fell.

Nothing but dust and rubble remained of it. She prayed, Rosa was not a Christian, but she prayed that day, prayed that Ricardo would survive. That he had been too late for work today. That he had forgotten his lunch and had to return home. Her eyes filled with tears, the earth sounds whited out, the world moving as slow as molasses in front of her.

The Sheriff shook his head in disbelief, “Everyone, we must stay calm. Our country is under attack. And we are called to serve.”. The cadets, the police, the patrol officers, all picked up their gear and got ready to fly to the Archipelago. They had jobs they had to do.

Rosa could barely hear him through her tears. She went through the motions. She found her flycar. She was lifted into the sky. She placed the car on cruise and it immediately charted a path to the Archipelago.

When they landed on the strip and saw the destruction, the pain brought her to her knees, the fear.

“Are you okay, Rosa?”

“are you sure you can handle this?”

Someone asked her this. Maybe her boss. Maybe her friend.
How? How could you be okay when you world was dying around you.

People were screaming everywhere, those who were not dead yet were being crushed under the buildings weight and they screamed with pain.

Rosa cannot understand how she walked to the rubble of where the library once stood. Radioed for help and called for victims, stabilizing body parts as she lifted burning bodies out of the rubble. As she scanned for living victims in the carnage. Every second the dust. The dust and charcoal of death surrounded her, glass and fire and gasoline within her lungs. Every moment in her lungs, was the hope, she would find Ricardo, he would be in pain, he would be alive. But alive.

He promised her date night. He wouldn’t leave her like this.

In the ruins of the first floor, she dug through ashes unter her hands were cut and bleeding, she didn’t even notice.

“Rosa, Go home,” Someone was shaking her.

“I order you to stand down and go home,”

Who was this man, didn’t he understand that she needed to find him, find her mate?

“Rosa,” the man’s voice broke, “please, look at me,”

Rosa turned dry glass eyes to look at the Sheriff.

“I’m so sorry we haven’t found him.”

In that moment, Rosa understood their pain. American omegas often talked of the pain that breaking with their mates was. the pain of that knowledge, this was slow burning agony. This was fire that engulfed her world, her breath, her eyes, her mind.

How can one even live through this? How can one even live like this?

“NO”, She heard screaming, could that be her, wailing like a woman who has gone crazed with grief? Could that be her sound?

“No, he’s here, you have to find him, Ricardo would be here. You have to look harder. Please you do.”

A needle pricked her and she descended into blackness.
Stiles

In the darkness, they all held candles of white.

It was evening in the Fondos, on the twelfth day and Paraguay was still mourning her dead. 3,000 people had been killed in the National Library Attack, terrorism, it was called.

They lit their candles. Stiles held his cupped in his hands.

All the women wore white or mourning, white of peace. Stiles wore his best white shirt and white pants, pressed and ironed, only the best for Ricardo. Only the best for his friend. Stiles’s heart was heavy on the ground, so tired and weighed down.

The coffins were white granite.

Stiles was sick of funerals.

Not one funeral, but two. Because after her alpha died, Rosa also died, in the hospital a day later.

Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy. The pain of losing her mate had weakened her left ventricle, enlarged her heart, and stunned her body into a heart attack. She died breathing on a respirator.

The men in white, four of them for each coffin, walked besides each other. 8 men carrying coffins side by side.

And everyone began to sing.

\textit{I want my bones to melt your bones}

\textit{For my flesh and yours to be one flesh}

\textit{For my heart is no longer mine alone}

\textit{And our lives have become intermeshed.}

\textit{In the dark, I’ll follow you, my love}

\textit{To the deep dark tunnel where no light is found}

\textit{We’ll be together, oh my love}

\textit{Even if, we can only be underground}

\textit{Who can part the sun from the sky?}

\textit{Who can remove the bird from its flight?}
Who can bring to my darkness light?

Or comfort me when you say goodbye?

I want my bones to melt your bones

For my flesh to mix with your flesh

One heart we share, never to be alone

Together in life and together in death

Stiles sobbed as he sang. His voice mingling with the others, high, low, soft and sweet. Alto and soprano, tenor and base interlocked in a tight harmony.

He remembered everything about Rosa and Ricardo, Hades and Persephone. The love they shared, the way they looked at each other. He grieved that he never called Ricardo that morning, He had meant to call Ricardo later that night. He missed Rosa’s lightness and sweetness. Ricardo’s solidness and warmth. A cold, cold wind had blown into the world and taken them all away from him.

He remembered the way they looked at each other, their eyes alight as they laughed together, the rich warmth in their voices. He remembered Ricardo telling him to never give up on love. The fist of hope in his heart when he watched them together.

He clutched his pomegranate flower, the thin petals, and the pain of the prickly branches against him.

And around him whispers, “American omegas are evil. We cannot let them come here anymore,“

In the wake of the terrorist attacks, American omegas had been stopped at the border, no longer allowed to enter.

The white marble coffins were lowered down into the hole. Nothing could fix the hole in his heart.

Chapter End Notes

10-15 chapters from the end.
Next we will see what Alberto has gotten himself up to.
I would apologize for the sadness but man, sadness is a part of life and I think what makes stories so gritty and real is that sadness. I could write a story that everyone would love where Derek just smiled at Stiles and it all worked out and everyone was happy, but that would be terribly dull.

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