Roamers

Summary

Castiel leads Dean to a small town in Vermont for a routine hunt. It just so happens that Stiles and Derek are already there with their own purposes. Spoiler alert: they don't part ways when the case is over.

Roamers is a story of bromance. Dean has reached a dark point in his life after Sam's retirement from hunting. Worried for him, Castiel helps him cross paths with Derek and Stiles. Together, the four of them take up the Winchester family business: saving people, hunting things. Derek and Dean see a lot of themselves in each other, but Dean knows Derek's hiding something from him. Derek has no plans to tell Dean what he is, but he knows it's only a matter of time before Dean learns the truth.
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**Additional Notes:**
Rated M for gore and disturbing content. This work includes graphic depictions of violence, gore, emotional turmoil, profanity. Nothing worse than what you would see on Teen Wolf/Supernatural. Well, maybe a little worse. *Okay, it gets worse than what either show shows.*

As much as I'd love Destiel and Sterek to become canon, this is a story of bromance. There's a b there. It'll be more than your average friendship, but they're not hooking up with one another in this story.

I began writing this during season 8 of Supernatural and before season 3 of Teen Wolf. I've tried to stay canon compliant, but it's been drifting away from that. I feel comfortable saying that this was canon up until the end of Teen Wolf Season 3A and Supernatural Season 8. It's canon until that point and then it's hit or miss. I'm likely to use aspects of the show that come through, but I'm officially picking and choosing.

I've planned out season two and begun to plan out season three. So this fic really isn't going anywhere any time soon. I will be writing this until I'm driven out of the fandoms I imagine. Regardless of where canon goes, I'm going ot keep this going. I love my babies too much not to hurt them.

**Roamers Timeline:**
In terms of timelines, Roamers begins the summer before Stiles goes to college. It's meant to be just after canon. It's hard to make them line up. I'm going to say it's summer of 2014. In the small amount of time between the present time in the seasons and Roamers, Sam, Cas and Dean sorted out the angel expulsion and put them back in Heaven. Castiel did get his grace back.

**Canon Discrepancies:** (contains series spoilers)
Derek's Camaro was in storage. He was concerned for it when the Alpha Pack came to town. But since then, he's got his car back. Because there's no way he'd be driving around in that soccer mom car. Chris and Derek are not chummy, but at least Chris isn't trying to kill him.
Castiel still has his sex hair and his grace isn't stolen. As I said before, the three of them got the angels back in Heaven. *Future Roamers Season Spoiler: it's something else that's messing with Cas's powers.* Most of season nine hasn't happened. I'll probably draw from it. In this season, it's safe to assume that: Dean never took the Mark of Cain, Garth isn't a werewolf, Charlie never went to OZ, and Kevin never died.

**Guest Stars:** (in order of appearance)
Sheriff Stilinski
Sam Winchester
Scott McCall
Chris Argent
Charlie Bradbury
Isaac Lahey
Melissa McCall
Peter Hale
Allison Argent

**Additional Warnings:**
panic attacks
suicide
torture/gore (arguably some quite extreme)
coercion
low self-worth
death scenes
unwanted seduction (aka, overly flirtatious monsters)

*If any of these things are triggers for you, please contact me on tumblr and I will be happy to discuss the circumstances/level of detail.* If there's anything you want to know (at all), please feel free to contact me.
Dean heard the rushed flutter of Cas's wings as he landed somewhere in the shadows behind. At least that was what Dean decided the noise was. He still had not seen more than a shadow of the feathery appendages. In the past, Dean would turn or say something to acknowledge the angel's presence, but he was tired.

Physically, mentally and emotionally tired.

Dean kicked final vetala off his blade, ignoring Cas entirely. He was covered in blood. It was dripping from his hands, his knife. Half his face was red. It was in his hair and stained his clothes. The release made him chuckle as Dean cracked his neck.

Blood and violence were the only things that made sense these days.

Dean was a mess, in more ways than one. Sam was gone. For good. He was finally enjoying a normal life and Dean wasn't going to ruin it. Not this time. Dean always knew it was a matter of time. Sam never wanted the hunter life. He put up a good show, but it was over.

Cas had offered to excise their memories. Sam took him up on the proposition. He kept his instincts, but he didn't remember what Dean did, who Cas was or anything they did together. He was normal, happy. Free. Dean didn't give in though. He wouldn't trade his past, no matter how horrific, bloody or tormented it was.

Dean had moved on. Or at least he thought he had. A shapeshifter took the form of his brother a couple months back. It held on to Sam's appearance, spewing out memories and pleading for help with Sam's voice. No amount of blood or alcohol could help him after that. But that didn't stop Dean from trying.

Sam's absence wasn't new. It had been four months now. They talked a few times during the first month, but Dean stopped calling and then he stopped answering. He practically cut sleep out all together. It took nearly driving into a ditch or tree, before Dean was willing to shut his eyes. By that point, he was so exhausted that dreams eluded him. And he was thankful for that.

Cas had reached out to him a few times, but Dean wasn't good company. He had used him enough that it wouldn't be fair to ask him for anything. Between the sigils burned into his ribs and the fact that he never stopped moving, Dean managed to keep away from him. He went on living life like he did in Purgatory, but it wasn't the same. He couldn't duplicate the unholy land.

Two weeks ago, Cas finally found him. Dean had stumbled into a nest of vampires and there were more than he expected, more than he could handle. Cas saved his ass and fixed him up, healing the wounds he had stitched himself and the half dozen injuries didn't even know he had.

Since then, Cas didn't let him out of his sight. He wasn't happy with what Dean was turning into, but he didn't know what to do. So, Cas settled for what he could do and that was watch over him.

Cas walked in front of him, his shoulders hunched forward and his eyebrows wrinkled as they often were. He healed Dean, without looking at anything more than his injuries. Dean wasn't sure if that was because Cas couldn't bear to see what Dean had become or because he believed Dean couldn't handle it.
When Cas first showed up, he tried to offer words of comfort, tried to be human, but Dean wouldn't have it. He turned on Cas, cutting him deep enough in the shoulder that he saw bone. Cas didn't retaliate. He simply looked at the wound disappointedly and knocked Dean out with the gentle touch of two fingers to his forehead.

Dean slept for two days, after which he woke up in a pile of hay with a piece of pie and every type of candy bar he'd eaten in the past decade laid out for him. Cas was standing across the barn, his jacket and shirt still sliced and bloody. The wound had healed and the blood was gone from his skin, but he hadn't changed or used his angel mojo on his clothes.

He didn't say a word then and he hadn't said one since. He just stayed with Dean, whether he was sitting in the passenger seat of his Impala or watching him fight the next evil monster. Cas pretended to leave at times, but Dean could always feel his presence. Dean didn't know if he was hiding in the shadows, invisible or watching from above. He was simply there.

Dean headed outside, wiping the dagger on a clean patch of his jeans, and tossed it into his weapon arsenal. He stripped off his shirts and jacket, adding them to the growing collection of blood-drenched clothes, and pulled out his last clean t-shirt. He closed the trunk moved around to the side of the car, while sliding the fresh shirt over his head. Cas was already in the passenger seat, waiting patiently.

Dean got in, shifting into gear and taking off. He didn't know where he was going. There were few hunters left. Some retired, but most were dead. The apocalypse and the leviathans killed off all the fresh blood and left plenty of monsters. He didn't have to look hard for a fight and that was probably the only thing that kept him going.

Cas took the map from his glove box, unfolding it precisely. He looked at it for barely more than a second, before folding it in half and putting it between Dean and the steering wheel. He pointed a blank area outside of Highland, Vermont.

"What's there?"

But Cas didn't answer.

"I'm not driving two days for nothing," Dean said. He knew there was something in Highland (Cas wouldn't have demanded they go there otherwise), but that didn't mean it was worth rushing to.

Cas raised a pair of fingers. His threat was obvious: either Dean drove himself or Cas would take him there. Dean let out a sharp breath, tossing the map in the backseat and turning onto the interstate. Dean watched Cas settle into his usual rigid position out of the corner of his eye, but neither of them took their focus off the dark road in front of them.

Night came and Dean knew he had to sleep. He wouldn't risk crashing with Cas in the car, regardless of the fact that he could heal. He turned off, parking behind a billboard and shutting off the engine. He settled in, prepared to sleep sitting up, when Cas pulled him down, offering his lap as a pillow. Dean considered fighting him on it, but he was comfortable and knew the soft hand Cas had on his head would turn rough if Dean refused the gesture.

Dean twisted slightly, tucking his feet up on the bench, and shut his eyes.

It was still dark when Dean woke up, but every muscle that had grown sore from lack of sleep was relaxed. He had gotten a few hours and that was enough. He felt Cas's fingers slip from his head as
if he was permitting Dean to wake up, but Dean wasn't ready to move. The angel pulled his jacket from Dean's body. He had draped his long coat over Dean at some point during his rest, which couldn't have been an easy feat. Every noise and movement woke him up these days, but somehow Cas had managed it.

He sat up, spotting his jacket sitting on the dashboard without a drop of blood. Dean reached for it, sliding his arms into the sleeves, before bringing his Impala to life. He got back on the highway and continued East.

After six more hours of silence, Dean pulled into Highland and instantly knew what he was up against:

Arachnes.

Vermont Stateline

A speeding truck woke Derek as it barreled past and shook his parked Camaro. He ran a hand down his face, taking a few deep breaths. The sun was just peaking over the horizon, but it was still bright, stinging his eyes, but Derek's aviators weren't far. He slid them on and turned the key he had left in the ignition, his car purring to life. He looked back down the highway and, seeing it was clear, pulled onto the main road.

Derek glanced up at his rearview mirror. Stiles was passed out on the back seat. He had been for about seven hours now. The kid didn't snore, but Derek could hear his breathing and relaxed heartbeat. He needed to sleep. Stiles acted like every other teenager, believing that he didn't need rest, but it eventually caught up with him.

He tried to keep up with Derek, but three hours of sleep after forty-eight hours awake wasn't enough for him. It didn't help that he was human. Derek slept to recharge his mind, but Stiles' entire body needed a chance to regroup. Derek had offered to stop at a motel for a night, but Stiles refused to be a burden.

As much as Derek hated him at times, Stiles was a good kid.

It wasn't until Derek took a tight wind of the road too fast that Stiles woke up. He woke up in a pile of limbs pressed against the far door. It took Stiles a bit to right himself, before climbing back into the front seat. He stretched his arms as best he could and yawned, sleep still lingering behind his eyes.

"Did you sleep?" Stiles asked.

"A couple hours, yeah."

"I could drive if you want a few more."

"I told you before we left, you're not driving."

"You let Scott drive your car."

"I was desperate. Neither of you know how to handle a car like this."

"So teach me."
Derek scoffed.

"I'll let you drive my Jeep."

"Like I have any interest in that."

"Right. You just want to be seen riding around in it."

"I'd rather spill blood in your car and people ignore that hunk of junk."

"Do not insult my Jeep. You'd be dead without my Jeep."

"How long are you going to keep bringing that up?"

"Considering I'm winning in the who-saved-who competition, probably a lot."

"You are n--"

"Thirteen to nine, sourwolf," Stiles said, looking over at Derek with a smug smile. "I can go through them all if you want."

Derek felt his jaw tighten, mentally taking back any remotely positive thing he had said or thought about him. Stiles shifted his weight, wriggling against his seat. Derek tried to ignore him, but Stiles never stopped moving. It wasn't a new trait, but it drove him nuts and Derek had certainly not had enough sleep to tolerate it.

"Would you quit squirming?" Derek snapped after a minute.

"It's not my fault. Your car takes getting used to," Stiles responded, shifting his shoulders against the leather for the nth time.

"What is there to get used to? The fact that it doesn't smell like gym socks and curly fries?"

"This seat hugs me. It's not natural."

"When you spend enough money on a car, it is."

"It feels like I'm getting groped."

"Then you should be enjoying yourself."

Stiles' jaw dropped, reading the implied insult with ease. He propped his elbow up on the door, leaning his head against his hand and looking forward. He tried desperately to stay still, but his ass moved a few times, his face scrunching up. Derek knew he wasn't uncomfortable. No one could be uncomfortable in his Camaro. It was just different and designed for people that could sit still, which seemed completely impossible for Stiles.

Stopping at a hotel overnight was being a burden, but apparently forcing Derek to stop at every greasy restaurant and pathetic excuse for an attraction wasn't. And, he still couldn't sit still in the car. Between the wriggling and leg bouncing, it was utterly amazing Derek hadn't thrown him in the trunk. He couldn't stay quiet for more than ten minutes unless he was asleep or there was something in his mouth.

"How much further?" Stiles asked.

"About three hours."
"And when we get there? What's the plan?"

Derek glanced over at him, but didn't answer.

"You don't have a plan?"

He didn't. Derek had given up on plans. He wasn't good at them. They hindered his instincts and constricted his primal side.

"Great. So we'll walk up to the guy and say, 'Hey. You wound up with an axe that's good at killing weird things. We want it and we're not leaving without it.'"

"Less words would be better."

Stiles faked a laugh lazily.

They had been on the road for a week now. Peter had gotten word of a rare tribal axe that would do them some good and sent him and Stiles to pick up. At this point, it was beginning to feel like a sick joke instead of some sort of helpful mission. There was no rushing a drive literally across the country. They wanted to fly, but it was too risky to bring an oversized weapon on a plane. There was no talking your way out of that after 9-11.

"You can't just beat the guy until he gives it to us."

"We could steal it."

"You realize the thing's probably locked in some kind of super safe that werewolves won't be able to open."

"We'll deal with it when we get there."

"Fine."

Stiles settled in again, wriggling and squirming for about five minutes before managing to sit still for a full thirty-seven seconds. Derek sighed. It had been a long trip and they still had to get back to Beacon Hills.

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Highland, Vermont

Derek pulled up to a metal gate with a very clear 'no trespassing' sign and Stiles looked at the property. Stiles knew he was making a face, but he couldn't help himself. The land was overrun by weeds and, at the end of the muddy driveway, there was a farmhouse. And honestly, the Hale House in it's current burnt down state looked better than this place.

"Well?" Derek implied.

"What?" Stiles looked over at him.

Derek nodded at the gate.

"Seriously? You're going to treat me like a sidekick too?"

"You're not my sidekick."
"Right. The big bad alpha likes to work alone." Stiles shoved the car door open and got out, landing in what he sincerely hoped was mud. "You realize every superhero that thinks or says that eats his words, right."

Derek motioned the gate, that Hale sass showing in his corked eyebrows. Stiles muttered out a few places he could shove his werewolf attitude and trudged over to the gate, unwinding the chain that held it closed. He gave a gentle push to the frame, but it went little more than a foot, before getting stuck on a patch of weeds. Stiles groaned, lifting the metal off the ground and carrying it through its swing.

Derek's wheels spun a couple times, before regaining traction, and he sped through the entrance, leaving Stiles behind. Stiles failed at swearing a couple times, before chasing after him as fast he could on the decrepit terrain.

This wasn't new. Derek never had a problem getting rough with people to get what he wanted. He usually didn't care if the people close to him saw his violent side, just whether or not they would get in the way. He and Stiles weren't close; Derek wasn't close with anyone. Stiles knew he had tried before, but after being used by his own uncle and the girl he loved as a disposable pawn, Stiles couldn't blame him.

He reached the house, out of breath from his sprint in the thick mud, but pushed on up to the creaky steps and across the narrow porch. The door was still open, although Stiles wasn't sure it was ever closed. He stepped inside to see Derek standing in the middle of the main room. Derek's hand shot out, telling him to stay back with a quick flash of his red eyes.

Stiles stopped dead in his tracks. When Derek glared at him with those eyes, something was seriously wrong. Stiles gulped, looking around. He couldn't see anything out of the ordinary, except for the fact that the owner of this house was someone who clearly didn't leave his property often and he was nowhere to be seen.

"What is it?" Stiles asked in a whisper.

But Derek only shot him a second glare. He only used his human eyes; it was his way of telling Stiles to shut up. After two years, Stiles had become fluent in Silent Derek. He could see the subtle differences in Derek's glares and knew the various reasons why his jaw tightened into that sour wolf expression that no one else could duplicate.

"Get back in the car," Derek ordered after a few more minutes of silence.

"Not unless you tell me why."

Derek glared at him again, his jawline tight and hard. Stiles considered fighting him, but this was the 'Do as I say, or I'll make you' glare. He took a final look around, spotting a thick blade poking out from under a stack of paper. Stiles shot towards it, before Derek had the chance to snap at him.

He pulled the weapon free and a grin formed on his face. It was like pulling Excalibur from the stone. He was valiant and triumphant, until he felt the weight of the axe. Stiles fell backwards, hitting the ground hard. He groaned, trying to get free, but it was too heavy. Derek rolled his eyes, lifting the axe off Stiles' chest with an easy ripple of muscle, before yanking Stiles upright by his arm.

"Out," he ordered, shoving Stiles towards the door by his head.

"Okay! Take it easy."
Stiles moved outside, but remained on the porch. He squinted as the wind picked up, shoving his hands deep in his pockets. It was cold, considering it was summer. Even Canada got hot in the summer months. He couldn't see his breath or anything extreme, but that didn't make Stiles feel any better about this situation.

He spotted a thick cobweb blowing in the wind. It looked like one of those corny Halloween decorations, but this wasn't the type of place that decorated for any holiday. Stiles pulled it free, needing to use more effort than he expected. It wasn't cotton or whatever fake cobwebs were made of; it was sticky and stuck to his fingers.

There was a loud pair of crashes from inside and Stiles bolted for the door. He heard glass break and, in the four seconds it took him to get through the door, Derek was gone. It didn't take long to find the broken window and Stiles ran for it. He peered outside, expecting to see Derek in some sort of fight, but there was nothing but some broken glass on the earth.

This couldn't be good.

Stiles took out his cell and called Derek's phone, but he just heard the harsh vibrations of it on the floor behind him. Stiles turned, finding the cellphone under a newly-destroyed chair along with a tear of leather. Black leather. As in the same black leather that made Derek's jacket. Stiles rubbed his jaw, working hard to keep calm, but his heart was racing the moment he saw the axe lying on the floor.

There wasn't any blood, which hopefully meant Derek was still in one piece, but the problem was he was missing and Derek didn't do jokes. He was far too uptight for that. Stiles went back outside, taking a better look at the land, but there was no trail he could follow. He called out Derek's name a few times, but his voice didn't travel well over the rippling grass and shaking trees.

Panic was definitely settling in. Stiles' hand flew through his hair as he tried shouting Derek's name a final time, but it yielded the same empty response. He heard a whoosh behind him. Stiles spun around, when something grabbed his arm and threw him. He was airborne for a few seconds, before rolling through the enormous corn field.

Stiles scrambled to get his feet beneath him and spun a few times once he was standing, but all he could see were the plants that were taller than he was. The wind picked up again, but Stiles hear something else moving. It was faster than a human. Of course, the fifty-foot flight he took already told him he was up against something supernatural. Stiles took off at a run. He wasn't sure which way he was going with the overgrown foliage.

Something took hold of one of his ankle, dragging him through the field at a too-fast speed. Stiles tried to grab hold of the greenery, but anything he could get his fingers around came loose. He kicked his free leg, making contact with something, but it did no good. Stiles fought to turn over, to see what had taken him, but he couldn't fight the momentum.

Finally, he was thrown again, bouncing once before rolling out of the corn field and onto the country road. His feet slid on the dirt road as he clambered backwards, his body working against him as he tried to get up.

The corn parted as someone neared the road. Stiles could feel his heart racing as he reached the other side. A man emerged. His head craned to the side and his eyes were strange. Stiles turned over, forcing his body over his feet. When he looked back, the man was less than an inch from him.

Stiles' body flailed, but he remained standing. His eyes were such a light blue they almost looked
white and he had a second pupil. His face looked like it had suffered a gruesome burn, like it had peeled away and never healed. Then, Stiles saw the same thick webbing dripping from his hands.

"Spiderman, huh? I got your theme song on my phone," Stiles said with a forced smile.

The man laughed, seemingly completely coherent.

"You wanna be my Mary-Jane?"

"I'm more of a Gwen Stacy."

He smiled darkly, showing off his teeth. They looked normal, but there was an extra dribble of liquid in his mouth. Venom.

"What are you?" Stiles asked, hoping to delay the end of his life as long as he could.

"Dunno, but it's fun."

There was a flash of movement and Stiles instantly raised his arms to protect himself, but the sound of screeching tires spared him. An old car careened past, running over the creature. Stiles checked his body for injury, only finding a couple bruises from his rough landings. He laughed, looking down to see the mangled body on the road.

"I'm alive!" he cheered.

But then he saw the man stand up as if he had just been pushed to the ground.

"Oh, sh--"

But the monster didn't get a chance to attack again. Blood splattered Stiles' face, before he watched a head fall to his feet. He watched the poor excuse for a sphere roll past him, shock setting in.

Stiles looked up to see his savior: a man, early thirties and fully human. Well, for the moment. He was on the pretty side. In Stiles' experience, male models that weren't trapped on the pages of magazines led to trouble. Stiles moved towards him, spotting a second man by the passenger door that looked like a hung-over tax accountant. The first one, the one that actually saved him, had blood on his jeans, some from whatever he just killed, but a lot of it was dried and there was a lot.

"He bite you?" the first asked, turning his attention back to Stiles.

"What was it?"

"Did he bite you?" he was closer to shouting that time.

Stiles looked down at the machete resting in his hand, his fingers twitching on the grip. He was desperate to get more blood that blade.

"No. Now what was it?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

He scoffed, moving for his car ignoring Stiles completely. Stiles opened his mouth to protest, but the guy's boyfriend intercepted him first, cutting off his escape.
"Why'd you bring me here?" the taller one snapped.

The tax account looked to Stiles.

"I'm sick of the silent treatment, Cas. Start talking."

"I thought you would benefit from saving a life," the second answered, dropping his bright blue eyes to the road. "You need to be reminded of the good on this earth."

"I'm done with the chick flick moments. He's alive. Which means we're done." Dean threw open the driver's door, dropping into his seat.

"There's a second one," Stiles blurted out.

"Two, actually," Cas clarified. "His companion is quite strong."

"Did you see him?" Stiles asked.

But Cas wasn't focused him.

"Hey! If you know where Derek is--"

"Two of them?" the other asked, looking up at Cas, but his partner didn't meet his eyes.

"Yes."

The driver smiled. He closed his door and stuck his key in the ignition, revving his engine. Stiles ran around to the other side, getting in next to, well, Stiles still didn't know who. Cas got in the backseat without a fuss, but the driver stared at Stiles with a raised eyebrow.

"Go on then," Stiles encouraged.

"You're not coming."

"I've seen stuff. I'll be fine."

"Cas, send him home," he ordered gruffly, glancing in his rearview mirror.

Stiles looked over the bench, expecting to deal with some sort of crazy secret ninja attack, but the man remained in place.

"He's a kid," Dean stated.

"I can handle myself," Stiles insisted.

"I'm not taking responsibility for you." He reached over Stiles, shoving open the door. "Get out."

"Dean," Cas said as if his name was an entire speech.

Dean groaned, turning forward. Stiles closed the door and they took off.

"So... I'm Stiles."

"Don't care. Just stay out of my way."

"Look. I've been surrounded by plenty of macho tough guys. You don't scare me. If you want to keep acting like a dick, fine. Just don't let the act cost me my ride home."
"Some friend you are."

"Never said he was my friend. He's just more use to me alive than dead."

Dean looked at him, his glare fading as he studied him. Stiles ignored his silent investigation, watching the road. He'd already done his own. He saw the blood on his jeans displaying the sheer need for violence that filled his veins. Dean reminded him of Derek. He'd lost people, a lot of them, and he carried more guilt than he ought to.

Cas was a harder read. He looked lost, like someone that couldn't figure out where he belonged. Right now, he looked hurt, both by the past and present. There wasn't a thing wrong with him, Stiles had seen him move, so it had to be emotional. The car was oozing with silent man pain. Derek would have fit right in.

"He's still alive, right? These things don't kill right away."

"Sometimes. Depends how hungry they are."

"So what is it?" Stiles asked, looking over at Dean.

"They're called arachnes."

"So it is spider-related."

"Yeah and they're freaking lethal. So don't expect your friend to be alive."

"One, he's not my friend. Two, he's alive. If you waste a second getting to wherever this thing is, I will... Okay, so, I don't know what exactly. But you'll regret it."

Dean sneered.

"Kid, there is nothing you could do to hurt me." He flashed a quick look at Stiles, making it clear he'd been through a lot, physically as well as emotionally. A smirk splayed over his lips as he turned to face the road again.

Dean pulled up to an old warehouse. The town was small enough that it took all of twenty minutes to drive every street. There was only one abandoned building and there were enough cobwebs to make it absolutely obvious that this was their nest.

"Stay in the car," Dean said, shutting off his engine.

"I get that I'm not, well, huge. But I am not useless and I am not going to cower in your car. So get over yourself, tough guy."

Stiles opened his door, but Dean caught his wrist before he could get out, handcuffing him to the steering wheel.

"Really?"

"I've been doing this a long time, kid. You'll just get in the way." Dean got out before Stiles had a chance to respond. "Honk if something comes after you," he called, resting the large blade on his shoulder.
"You've got a key, right?" Stiles asked, looking back at Cas.

"I don't believe you need a key. Dean stole those from a cop."

Cas got out, settling in at Dean's side.

"How do you find people like this?" Dean asked, glancing back at Stiles.

"It wasn't easy."

Stiles watched them head inside, before digging through the glove compartment. There were six cellphones, multiple levels of police badges. He resisted the temptation to go through them all and stuffed a few phones and badges into his pockets. Stiles continued his search for something useful. He found a paperclip and set to work on the lock. Stiles had plenty of experience with police issued handcuffs. He'd been playing with his dad's since he was in diapers.

It didn't take long to get free and Stiles climbed out, hurrying to the door, but it was locked, jammed or blocked. He went to the window next, but there was so much grime he couldn't see a thing. Stiles heard a click and Cas was standing in the now-open doorway. Stiles shot past him without hesitation.

He followed the long corridor to the main room of the warehouse. It was sunk into the ground, giving Stiles a near aerial view. There were eight cocoons, each big enough to hold human. A man came in, carrying an unconscious Derek over his shoulder.

At least, Stiles hoped he was unconscious.

He dumped Derek's body on a table and webbed his appendages in place. He looked around for Dean and spotted him stalking between the broken machinery. He wasn't concerned about being stealthy. He had a single goal and he didn't care if they spotted him. He passed a cocoon without even checking it, setting himself up behind the arachne, when a second appeared behind him.

"Look out!" Stiles shouted.

Dean barely dodged the blow. The two arachnes turned on him with near-perfect synchronization. Dean made good use of the industrial landscape, keeping them occupied as he tried to regain the advantage. Stiles ran for the staircase down to the main level, when one of the arachnes appeared in front of him. Stiles yanked off his jacket and tackled the beast, sticking the fabric to each of his hands and ensuring that it covered his head. It flailed, trying to tear the material, but there was enough give that he was trapped.

For the moment anyways.

"Derek! Wake your ass up!" Stiles shouted.

Stiles bolted for Derek, skidding to his side and yanking at the webbing, but it wouldn't break. Dean went flying across the room, his machete landing in the table next to Derek, nearly taking off both their heads. Stiles took it, making quick work of the cobwebs, before smashing Derek's head hard against the table, drawing Derek back to the consciousness.

"Get up!"

He hit him with the flat of the blade and finally Derek began to focus. The arachne he had trapped jumped up on the table, snarling and glaring at them both.
"Sick 'em," Stiles ordered.

Derek pulled one of his show off moves, kicking the monster's legs out from beneath him and rolling to his feet. He tackled the beast and they went rolling in a grapple of growls and aggression. Stiles looked for Dean, when the second creature seized the sharp edge of the machete. Stiles twisted the handle, but it only resulted in the blade breaking.

He hurried back a few steps, raising what remained of the weapon. The arachne dropped the other half of the metal. Stiles took a swing, stabbing the creature in the chest, but it remained standing and completely unfazed. Even Derek would have gone down from that blow. He pulled the broken from his body, breaking the blade at the handle and throwing the two pieces away.

Stiles laughed nervously, before his flight instinct took over. He ran for the maze of machinery, but the arachne easily got in front of him. He turned down another row and spotted Dean, who was struggling to get up after his harsh landing. Stiles grabbed hold of the slab of metal, turning himself quickly in hope to keep the creature away from Dean. But, when he looked back, he was alone.

Stiles ran for Dean, seeing him pinned down. Dean's teeth were grit, every muscle in his body fighting to stay alive, but he wasn't strong enough. Stiles charged the beast, throwing his entire weight into the hard body. He managed to knock the monster off, only to get whipped into the rusty machine nearby by the second arachne. His forearm was sliced open, blood spilling free.

He looked up, seeing the large gash on the creature's neck. Derek had taken off a few of its fingers and a good chunk out of his neck with his claws. That hadn't killed it either. It was about to attack, when it spun suddenly, crying out loudly. Stiles followed its gaze to see the arachne he had stabbed was now decapitated. Dean got to his feet, a little wobbly, but still smiling.

He was enjoying this.

Stiles gulped as he tried to get up, but he couldn't. His leg was jacked up, not broken or sprained, just a too-hard hit to the muscle. Dean made quick work of the final monster, dodging its first attack with ease, before taking off its head. Dean looked over the body, before wiping some of the blood from his face to the sleeve of his coat. Dean offered him a hand and Stiles took it, letting Dean pull him to his feet.

Derek wasn't far away. He looked over the corpses, before taking Stiles away from Dean, putting Stiles behind him. Derek didn't trust Dean. It wasn't a surprise. Derek didn't trust anyone.

"I'll drop you at the hospital," Dean offered.

"You could use one yourself," Stiles said.

Dean's arm was dislocated and he had taken a hard hit to the head. A bruise was already forming over his temple. Derek was untouched, or, more likely, he had already healed.

"We'll be fine," Derek growled.

"He could at least drive us back to your car."

"You left my car out there?" Derek glared at him.

"No. I walked back to it, hotwired it and drove it here. Of course, I left it."

Cas strolled into view, not interested in the carnage.
"Where were you?" Stiles snapped.

"I only interfere when absolutely necessary," Cas answered.

He approached Derek, looking him over. Stiles caught the little glint that formed in his eye and the near twitch of a smile. He was impressed. Derek was apprehensive. His level of distrust skyrocketing.

"Can I have your shirt?" Stiles asked Derek.

Derek glared at him. This was the 'You did not just ask that' glare.

"I'm bleeding. You like showing off your body. This is a win-win situation."

Cas took out a proper roll of gauze from within his overcoat and he put it in Dean's hands, before snapping his shoulder back in its socket. Dean withheld his glare, pressing his tongue against his teeth. Derek blocked Stiles half-heartedly, but Dean didn't care about the over-inflation of his muscles. He took out a flask and unscrewed the top, pouring the liquid over the wound.

Stiles cried out, saying 'ow' more times than he could count, but Dean held his arm steady. He wrapped up Stiles' the wound, before taking hold of his jaw. Stiles whimpered again as Dean's thumb found a tender spot. Derek threw Dean backwards and Stiles touched his jaw, using his touch to figure out how big the bruise was.

"I'll be outside if you want a ride," Dean announced, heading for the exit without another word.

Stiles moved to follow him, but Derek caught the collar of his shirt, holding him back.

"He's a hunter," Derek growled, keeping his voice so low Stiles could barely hear him.

"Nothing gets past you, sourwolf."

"Keep your voice down."

"He's not an Argent. He doesn't know who you are. We're going to get a ride back to your car and go home."

"I'll get the car myself."

Stiles scoffed, ignoring Derek's concern. He went Dean, when he came across one of the cocoons. The webbing was thick, but he was close enough now to make out an entire body beneath the white substance.

"They're dead, kid," Dean called, marching up the stairs without a second's hesitation.

Stiles forced a pair of fingers to the man's neck, checking for a pulse just in case, but the body was still and cold. He got up, chasing after Dean. He got outside to see Cas sitting in the front seat and Dean at the trunk.

"You're just going to leave them there?" Stiles demanded.

"I don't do clean ups anymore. People might as well know what's out there."

"Those are people in there."

"Carcasses," Dean corrected. "They're dead. Nothing's going to change that."
Stiles felt his cheeks go red with anger.

"Look." Dean let the trunk fall shut, moving towards Stiles. "I've done this job long enough to know you can't save everyone."

"And you're just itching to join everyone you failed to save. I saw you in there. You're reckless. If I didn't come in, you'd be dead. Derek too."

"You just lost your ride back, kid."

Dean moved for the driver's door, but it was locked. His jaw tightened as he lowered his head to Cas's seated height.

"Open the door."

But Cas turned away.

"Damn it, Cas! Open the door!" Dean barked, slamming his hand down on the roof of his car.

Stiles looked up to see Derek emerge. He nodded at the street, wanting to just walk back to the Camaro.

"I'll meet you there," Stiles answered.

Derek was glaring again. He wasn't leaving Stiles behind.

"I did the most lifesaving today. I think I can handle myself," Stiles reacted.

But Derek held his ground. Stiles rolled his eyes. His protective nature wasn't entirely his to control. Wolves were possessive and territorial by nature. He didn't have to like Stiles to want to keep him alive. Whether they liked it or not, they were part of the same pack. They fought the same enemies and lived in the same town. They were a package deal.

"Thank you," Stiles finally said.

"Just go," Dean ordered.

Stiles backed off, his eyes drifting over at Cas. He was staring at Stiles and looked like an absolute puppy. He wasn't pouting and his face hadn't changed, but every drop of blue in his eyes was begging him to stay. Stiles bit his lips together, taking a couple steps towards Dean, who was two seconds away from breaking a window to get back in his car.

"Ever heard of a kanima?" Stiles asked.

"Stiles!" Derek snapped.

"He's a hunter. He may come up against one," Stiles said as he moved next to Dean, leaning against his car. "You can't kill it. Well, maybe you can, but we couldn't. We were actually able to save the jerk."

Dean looked over at him.

"Love saved him. He was so lost in his lack of identity that he needed help remembering that he was human."

Dean laughed.
"You are a child. That Disney crap is useless."

"Call it whatever you want. I saw it happen. So did he." Stiles nodded at Derek. "This was a creature can paralyze anything with just scratch and they tried everything to kill it. Nothing worked."

"There's a way to kill everything."

"Yeah, well, not everything has to die. Just because you turn into something else doesn't mean you lose your soul."

"You need to stop acting like you know me."

"I don't know you, but I don’t have to be your family to know you're not all right."

Dean drew his fist to punch him, but Derek caught his arm. Dean jerked free, trying hard to regain control of his rage. Derek didn't give him a chance. He took hold of Stiles' collar, hauling him down the street.

Once Derek was satisfied there was enough distance, he released Stiles.

"Next time you listen to me," Derek grumbled.

"Maybe if you actually talked to me, I would. You could have told me there was something else in the house."

"I didn't know," Derek muttered.

"You? Mister Big Bad Alpha didn't know?"

Derek shot him a glare and Stiles rolled his eyes. Already, he was back to communicating through glares.

"Let's just get the axe and get home," Stiles said.

"Hospital first."

"I'm fine."

"I saw the wound. You need stitches. I'll leave you with a doctor and grab the car."

One Hour Later

Dean pulled up to the medical clinic. It was the closest thing to a hospital in town. He'd made it a mile out of town before realizing that he was missing half the stuff from his glove compartment and there was only one possible culprit. He threw his car in park and reached for his door, but it was locked, again.

"If you hurt the boy, you will regret it," Cas said, still looking through the front windshield.

"And if you set me up on another playdate, you'll regret it."

"I didn't bring you here to play."
"No. You brought me here to make friends. Do you really think I'm interested in that?"

"I think I'm not enough for you."

Cas looked at him for the first time in too long. His door unlocked and Cas turned forward once more. Dean got out. He paused a final time to look at Cas, but the angel's blue eyes remained downcast. He shoved open the door to the clinic, passing the vacant front desk. A doctor emerged from one of the rooms, her head buried in her clipboard.

Dean stepped through the door before it had a chance to swing closed. Stiles was failing to unroll his long sleeve without flinching. Fresh stitches, numbing agent or not, hurt worse than the cut, but they might spare his light skin from a scar. Stiles gave up on his second shirt, carefully taking it off, when he spotted Dean in one of the mirrors and scoffed.

"Do these really work?" Stiles asked, showing off Dean's fake FBI badge.

"Don't hand them over very often."

"I can see why." Stiles tossed the leather fold at him. "So con artist turned hunter or hunter turned con artist?"

"Don't exactly get to tell people what I do."

"Yeah. My dad doesn't even know about half the stuff that went on in my town."

"Why do you?"

"Already got a family of hunters living nearby. Don't need another."

"People dying?"

"Not right now."

Stiles turned, letting Dean see the Batman t-shirt he was wearing. Dean couldn't help but smile. It was the original Batman logo. A reference lost on most.

"What? You got a problem with the caped crusader too?"

"No. Just don't meet a lot of nerds that can hold their own against a monster."

"Not a nerd." Stiles scooped up his jacket, stepping towards Dean. "But I probably am smarter than you."

"Just give me back my stuff."

Stiles grip tightened on his coat, making it clear where Dean's missing cellphones and official IDs were.

"Kid, you don't want anything to do with me. So give back what you stole and we'll go our separate ways."

Stiles' grip didn't loosen.

"I will take what's mine. So do yourself and your bones a favour." Dean stretched out his hand, hoping to make his point more effectively.
"One of the phones rang."

"And you answered it?"

"Guy said there was a croatoan outbreak."

"Really thought I was done with that." Dean tried to rip the jacket from Stiles, but he held on. "I got this."

"What's a croatoan?"

"Just go home, kid."

"I could help."

"Yeah? How would your boyfriend feel about that?"

"He doesn't get a say."

"That so?"

"Considering he's not my boyfriend, yeah."

"You're not going." Dean turned to see Derek by the door, arms folded like a high-class male model.

"Yes, I am."

"We got a five-day drive home. Do you want to spend it in the trunk?"

Stiles face twisted. He didn't enjoy getting treated like a piece of meat. Dean folded his arms, settling in to watch the lovers' spat.

"I'm going. Neither of you are gonna do what it'd take to stop me."

"We're going home."

"There is no reason for us to rush back. There are people dying in Kentucky and he's more interested in killing things than saving people. So I'm going."

Dean looked to Derek, waiting to hear an actual argument, but his jaw simply remained tight, eyes fixed into a solid glare. He took a couple steps towards Stiles, trying to be intimidating, but Dean was older and had faced things scarier than a pissed-off male model and Stiles wasn't flinching.

Dean tried hard not to smile, but a part of him, a big part of him, was impressed. Dean just refused to be responsible for bringing anyone into this life. He remembered how eager Ben was to follow him into the field. Stiles wasn't much older than Ben. They weren't alike at all. Ben would never wouldn't stand up to Dean. Not really.

"I'm not asking you to come with me," Stiles reminded Derek.

"How's it going to look when I come home without you?"

"Derek, I'm going." His tone got softer, but it wasn't because he was weakening.

Dean rubbed his jaw, holding back every word that wanted to spill out of his mouth. Stiles wasn't
going to give up. If it was a haunting, he would have taken Stiles. It would have been easy to protect him from a ghost, but the croatoan virus was tricky. He had yet to face the virus without losing someone from his makeshift team.

"I'll be a few days behind you."

"I'll make sure of it," Dean gave in.

"Really?" Stiles was grinning ear to ear, looking like he could barely contain a full on happy-dance.

If there was anything that would make the kid want to go home, it was this. Fighting the virus was a full on bloodbath. Few had the stomach for killing men, even if the infection took away their humanity.

"It's better if you come with me than go on your own."

"Sweet!" He spazzed out a bit, but quickly regained his composure, never losing his dopey smile.

"But you do what I say, when I say it."

"Yeah. Sure. Done."

Dean didn't believe him for a second. He was going to regret this, but Cas wanted this.

"You're not going," Derek repeated.

"He's a hunter."

"Yeah and it was an Argent that dumped you on your doorstep beaten to a pulp. Something happens to you and he'll turn on you."

"Nothing is going to happen to him," Dean assured. "Right, Cas?"

He knew the angel was in earshot. Of course, he didn't have to be on earth to hear Dean. Cas stepped through the doorway, giving a nod.

"Nothing safer than two hunters."

Derek seemed to be verging on an animalistic rage. A hunter had to have screwed him over, badly, because not even Jo showed him this much hostility.

"Where in Kentucky?" Derek asked.

"I already said you don't have to go."

"We'll go to Kentucky, but then we're going home."

"Derek--"

"I'm not leaving you with hunters. Definitely not an unstable one."

Dean held his tongue. He wasn't stable. Of course, Dean wasn't sure he ever was. He always managed, always found a way to do what needed to be done.

"Keeping one person alive is doable. Two is a lot harder."
"Then keep him alive. I'll handle myself."

Dean considered fighting with him, but Derek had taken on an arachne and walked away without a scratch. He wanted to believe it was adrenaline and beginner's luck, but Derek was intense, more intense than a male model should be.

"Let's get this show on the road then," Dean said, throwing Derek a final glance before walking out.

Cas beat him outside. He was waiting by the car, his focus on something Dean couldn't see. Stiles moved for the black Camaro that had pulled up behind him, getting into the front seat. Dean cocked his head, admiring the car. Derek smirked a little, sliding into the driver's seat. Dean looked at his Impala. It had seen better days. Even it was a weapon to Dean these days.

He really was messed up.

"You keep them safe. I want them walking away alive."

"I would not rely on me to undo demonic infections."

"Why not?"

"I no longer have the strength to undo demonic infections."

"I am... limited."

"Limited how?"

Cas looked over at Derek. As best Dean could tell, he was ignoring them both. He was looking at something on Stiles' phone, but Cas clearly knew otherwise.

"You should avoid serious injury and you should certainly avoid death," Cas said, opening his door.

"Is that your way of telling me to be careful?"

"I wasn't sure you understood the meaning of that word. You have reckless tendencies."

Dean smiled, climbing in along with Cas. He started the engine and followed them out of town.
"Why are we stopping?" Stiles asked, rushing out of Derek's car.

"Because the worst thing we can do is show up in a Croatoan hot zone without enough sleep," Dean explained, glancing over as Stiles approached his window.

He went through his credit card collection, picking out his most recent one. Michael Meyers. He couldn't believe they believed that name. Dean shoved the door open, knocking Stiles lightly.

"Wait here," Dean ordered.

"No."

Dean clenched his jaw, turning around to face the kid. "This is the last time you ignore a command."

"Sure." Stiles didn't even bother putting any effort into his lie.

Dean rolled his eyes. "Get us a couple rooms."

Dean put the credit card in Stiles' hands and pushed him towards the motel office. Stiles went willingly; he was probably happy to be in charge of something. Dean looked back over at Derek as he emerged from his Camaro. He leant against the side of his car.

The male model was still on edge. The guy didn't have a stick up his ass, no; he had an entire tree rammed up there. His hands were shoved deep in the pockets of his tailored leather jacket and his eyes seemed stuck in a permanent glare. When they stopped for gas a few towns back, he had the exact same expression.

He shifted his attention to Cas, who remained in his seat.

Cas was far from powerless, but his angel mojo was at half capacity at best. His healing abilities ended with the physical, although, his bone repair skills were shoddy. He'd apparently tested his limitations on a deer and Bambi didn't make it, neither did his mother. He didn't seem to have a problem healing himself, which gave Dean some relief, but he'd only dealt with the injuries Dean had inflicted. Cas could still exorcise most demons, but killing even an average demon was apparently draining. He was, as best Dean could tell, as strong and fast as he always was.

His wings were clipped. He couldn't fly much more than a thousand miles at a time, less if he was taking people with him. Time travel was out of the question, not that Dean really had a problem with that. The biggest issue was the distance between heaven and earth. Cas hadn't been able to return home and he didn't dare ask for assistance. After everything, there wasn't a single other angel alive that was in favour of whatever he and Dean shared.

"Done. Room twelve," Stiles announced, a key dangling from his fingers.

"And us?" Dean asked.

"Same room. No way you're ditching us in the middle of the night."
Dean hadn't considered that an option. Stiles had the town name; he would just find another way there. Even if Cas did dump his ass back home, he'd still find away and his guard dog would be right behind him.

"Dibs on a bed," Stiles said, jogging towards their room.

Dean opened up the trunk, trying to find some clean clothes, but he was completely out. Derek was grabbing a couple bags out of his car. Cas waited until Derek and Stiles were inside and for Dean to blink, before appearing at the back of the Impala.

"You need clean clothes. The infected can smell blood a mile away."

"I know." Dean dug through his bags, looking for any fabric that wasn't stained red.

"Bring everything inside. I will clean them while you sleep."

"How domestic of you."

Dean stuffed a few sets of clothes into a sack. He glanced around quickly, before opening the weapons' compartment. He picked out a couple guns along with some ammo and added them to his bag. They were a few hours out of the hot zone and Dean wasn't going to let anyone walk in unarmed. He didn't have time to prepare them properly, but he could hopefully do enough.

"What gun do you want?" Dean asked.

"I intend to leave the killing to you."

"Pretty sure there'll be enough croats to go around."

Cas picked up one of his father's hunting knives and tucked it into his coat.

"Pick a gun," Dean clarified.

"I do intend to allow you as much bloodshed as you desire."

Dean closed the trunk and went inside with Cas. Stiles was sprawled out on a vibrating bed, snickering as he enjoyed the magic fingers. Derek was leaning against the wall beside him, arms crossed, head dipped forward. His eyes instantly trained on Dean, still stuck in his glare. Dean dropped his bag on the table and stripped off his jacket.

"Am I going to have to sleep with one eye open?" Dean asked, dropping his jacket next to his bag.

"You can't do that," Cas reminded.

"It's--" Dean held his tongue, turning his attention back to Derek. "Let's have it."

"H-he-e d-does-snn't-t l-l-lik-ke a-nny-yonnaaadd," Stiles answered, his voice horribly distorted by the bed. Stiles laughed at his voice, before kicking the off button, nailing the strike on his first attempt. For a spastic kid, he was surprisingly coordinated. "Don't take it personally."

"This is more than brooding."

"Dean does have extensive knowledge of brooding," Cas added.

"I don't brood," Dean snapped, looking over to see Cas absentmindedly looking through the
"To brood is to think deeply about something that makes one unhappy." Cas closed the final cupboard door and turned to Dean. "You most certainly brood."

"And him?" Dean pointed to Derek, keeping his eyes on Cas.

"He broods too." Cas flattened a peeling corner of the wallpaper back to the wall, but it didn't stick. "And he doesn't like you."

"I figured that out."

"It is okay for people not to like you," Cas assured, still trying to fix the wallpaper.

"I know."

"Because a lot of people don't like you." Cas's face puckered slightly, getting annoyed by the defiant piece of paper. "Monsters like you even less."

"I got the point, Cas."

Cas gave up on the wall, moving towards Dean.

"Does knowing why a person doesn't like you make things better?"

"I just want to know if the guy's going to kill me in my sleep."

"Oh." Cas turned to Derek. "No." His eyes returned to Dean's. "You can rest safely tonight."

Dean's gaze shifted over to Derek, who merely smirked a little. He wanted to be considered a threat. Dean was tempted to put Derek in his place, but this wasn't the time. There were more important things for them to focus on.

"Either of you ever shoot someone?" Dean asked, unzipping his bag.

"Not in real life," Stiles answered, getting up.

Dean looked over at Derek. He shook his head.

"Great."

Dean pulled out the shotgun, throwing it gently at Stiles. The kid caught it, barely, it bounced between his hands a couple times, before he could get a solid grip.

"Do your video games tell you how to use that?"

"It's trench, right? Pump action shot gun. Burst shots, designed for close ranged-kills. Needs to be cocked between shots and reloaded every six," Stiles answered, smiling proudly.

Dean met his smile with one of his own, tossing him one of the large bullets. Stiles caught it better than the gun, managing to catch it in his free hand. Dean looked at him expectantly and Stiles tried to insert the ammo, but couldn't find the right spot. Dean stepped beside him, guiding his fingers.

"Got it?"

"Yeah." Stiles nodded.
"Good." Dean slipped a few more bullets into Stiles' hand. "Practice."

"You can't be expecting him to kill," Derek snapped.

"I could do it," Stiles insisted, shoving a shell in behind the one Dean had loaded.

"Doesn't mean you should."

"If you're not willing to kill, go home now. A croat's only objective is to spread the virus. They can look and act human, but they're not. So, shoot first. You won't feel guilty if you get infected."

"What about a cur--"

"There isn't one," Dean said, hoping to keep that idea from settling his mind. "Those infected need to be put down otherwise the virus keeps spreading."

"Either you're bad at your job or the virus can't be stopped," Derek remarked; he was sassy son of a bitch when he wanted to be.

"As the guy that's been killing monsters since you were in diapers, I can tell you it's impossible to kill everything. All you can do is take out as many sons of bitches as you can and move on."

Derek's muscles tightened and it confused Dean. He certainly didn't look like the type to sympathize with anyone let alone the things Dean killed on a regular basis. Dean shook it off, pulling out the semi-automatic pistol. He ensured the safety was on, before tossing it to Derek. His hand shot out, catching it with ease. He disarmed the weapon, releasing the clip and continuing to take the gun apart with expert precision and letting every piece fall to the bed.

"I don't do guns," Derek stated.

"The virus is spread by blood-to-blood contact. You need to keep your distance from these things."

"I'm better off with my hands." He forced a smile. He was serious, and cocky.

"I wouldn't let Chuck Norris go into a hotzone unarmed so there's no way I'm letting you."

"Do they have guns?" Derek questioned, his arms crossing once more.

"Probably."

"I figured they'd be like zombies," Stiles said, picking up the clip from the bed and looking it over.

"Zombies aren't like they are in the video games. They're not brainless. Luckily for you, croats are easier to kill. They're not much stronger, faster or smarter than they were before they were infected. The difference is every part of them works together to infect you. So you're taking a gun."

"You should take a gun," Stiles seconded, his back turned to Dean as he clearly gave Derek a look laced with extra communication.

Derek reluctantly put the gun back together. He clicked off the safety and cocked the gun, proving that he knew how to handle it. Dean gave him a nod of approval and Derek flicked the safety back on and slid the clip out, making it impossible to go off on its own.

Stiles finished loading his trench and cocked it single-handedly like a bad ass. He smiled dorkily at his success. Dean took the gun from him, unloading and putting it back in the bag. He raised a hand and Derek tossed over the two halves of the gun one at a time.
"I'm assuming you can aim," Dean said, tucking both weapons beneath his clothes.

"Well enough," Derek replied.

"Food," Stiles cut in, regaining everyone's attention. "Are you hungry? I'm hungry. Demon warriors need to eat. And that's what we are."

Dean glanced at Derek, waiting to see a single muscle unclench, but he remained tense.

"There's a diner up the street," Stiles continued.

"Croats aren't demons." Dean zipped the bag closed and picked up his car keys. "Demons are demons. They're a whole different circus."

Derek moved past Dean, shoving the door open roughly. "I'm driving," Derek snapped.

Dean scoffed. He was a pretty boy, but he certainly had fight. "He always have that stick up his ass?" he asked Stiles.

"Oh yeah," Stiles answered without even a moment's hesitation. "Don't take it personally," Stiles patted his arm on his way to the door, "he doesn't like anyone."

"Okay, I get why you picked the kid, what's with the male model?" Dean asked once he and Cas were alone.

"He's not a male model."

Dean rolled his eyes. "Then what? What would you like me to call him?"

"His name is Derek."

Dean ran a hand down his face, frustration building.

"You don't want to say their names," Cas interpreted, his head tilting to the side. "Dean--"

"Save it. We're going to take them to see some croats and then they're going home. Nothing's changed."

"It could."

"You know how dangerous it is to be with me. You really want to put them through that?"

"I think they deserve to decide which path they follow."

"Would you two hurry up!" Stiles shouted from outside. "I'm starving!"

"I would like to assure you that there is no tree appendage residing in Derek's posterior."

"You checked?"

"No. But he shows no signs of physical discomfort, apart from his pants being too tight."

Dean decided to cut his losses and headed outside. Stiles was waiting with the room key. They were at an old enough motel that the doors didn't lock automatically. Dean waited for Cas to follow, but he remained in the room.

"I will stay here," Cas announced.
"Come on. We won't bite," Stiles coaxed, nodding to the car.

"I am aware of that, but Dean's clothes need to be cleaned."

Dean's head fell back as he groaned.

"And you wonder why people think we're together."

"We are together."

"Okay. Yeah. You can stay here." Dean plucked the keys out of Stiles' hand and tossed them to the angel. "Keep away from my underwear."

"Everyone needs clean underwear, Dean."

Dean tried to form a sentence, but he couldn't think of a response that wouldn't leave him worse off. He climbed into the Camaro, claiming the front seat. Derek was smug. Dean could feel it the moment he sat down.

"Not a word," Dean snapped.

Derek complied. But his full blown smirk did all the talking for him.

**Twelve Hours Later**

A soft flitter woke Derek. He shot upright to see Castiel crossing the room in a few silent strides. Derek looked over at the clock. It was a little before six; the last time Derek look at the time, it was just after midnight and he was wide awake, waiting for the hunter to fall asleep. He remembered watching the minutes pass, waiting to hear Dean's heartbeat and breathing slow, but it hadn't come, which meant he should not have been asleep.

Castiel took out a bottle of superglue and fastened the peeling strip of wallpaper back in place. A quick flash of triumph crossed his face, before the paper curled away from the wall. Derek looked over at Dean. He was on the couch, asleep, with his fingers curled around a hunting knife. He wasn't even hiding the weapon. It was unsheathed on his chest, waiting to be used.

"It's much harder for Dean to keep you safe if you don't trust him," Castiel said in a hushed tone, still fixated on the wallpaper.

Derek rolled his eyes.

"But you don't even trust your companion." Castiel peeled the piece from the wall, managing to not make a single sound. He turned to Derek and slowly crossed the room. "I can understand why you would not trust us, but the boy deserves your faith."

"Stay out of it."

"He has proved his loyalty. Do you not see it?"

Derek could feel his wolf begging to come out. Castiel was too close now. He had passed the base of his bed and there was less than a foot between them now. He'd felt like a caged animal since they left Beacon Hills. He'd spent too long trapped in his car, breathing the air that pumped through his engine and unable to truly use the muscles he had worked hard to obtain. Now he was in a room with two hunters. He knew where he stood with Dean; the man was a cliché. But Castiel
was like an axe murderer that could live next-door and no one would know.

"Cas? What are you doing?" Dean asked.

Castiel backed off instantly, taking a step back as he turned to face Dean. "Conversing with our new friend."

"We're not friends."

Derek swung of the bed and was over Stiles' bed and into the bathroom within two strides. He turned on the shower, thankful for how loud the old pipes were. His instincts were begging to take over. He still didn't dare let his guard down around Chris and he knew what Derek was. Derek stripped and settled in under the cold water. He was in control, but that didn't mean he didn't want to punch a hole through the wall.

He focused on anger and it soothed him, but he was desperate for physical activity. And he couldn't shake this feeling that Castiel knew exactly what he was. What bothered Derek more was that he wasn't the least bit intimidated.

The door opened and Derek could feel his heart rate skyrocket. It wasn't Stiles; it was Dean. He could smell the remnants of the whiskey he drank like water once the sun went down and drops of blood still on his combat boots.

"Get out," Derek growled.

"Relax. It's not like I'm planning on joining you."

The sound of an electric razor vibrating filled his ears and it put him even more on edge.

"Do you always shower twice a day?" Dean asked.

"No. Just not used to staying in cheap motels."

It took everything not to vomit when he first walked into the motel room. Derek could handle things smelling old and decrepit, he slept in a burnt down house after all, but the stench of hundreds of sexual romps mixed with industrial bleach made his stomach churn.

"Scratch male model. You're a full blown diva."

The razor switched off and Derek heard the toilet seat creak as it was lifted. He wouldn't dare-- he did. Dean flushed the toilet, zipping his pants back up, and the water turned scalding. Derek rushed to turn off the facet and a towel flew over the top of the shower curtain.

"Get a move on, Zoolander. There are croats to kill."

"That's the last time you call me that!" Derek barked.

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**Patience, Kentucky**

It was like a scene out of a zombie apocalypse movie. Everything looked and felt dead. They'd walked through half the town and hadn't come across anyone. Dean and Derek's cars were parked a couple miles out of town and it turned out to be a good thing. Cars had been stopped mid-street
with doors flung open, windows smashed and batteries drained.

Stiles heard a clatter and spun around only to find out he had the slowest reflexes. Cas didn't react, he continued walking forwards, holding his shotgun by the barrel. It was like his mind was elsewhere, but Dean didn't cuff him in the back of the head like he did Derek when his hand left his gun holstered to his thigh. Dean had two guns at the ready. A handgun was strapped to his leg like Derek and a small scoped machine gun was slung over his shoulder. Stiles managed to claim their supply duffel, which had more ammo than anyone else was carrying, and some food, water and other random stuff Dean deemed necessary.

Dean had taken lead, but Derek was less than a stride behind him. Cas left a gap between himself and Stiles had considered walking closer to him, but Derek insisted he stay close. No one seemed interested in talking anyways so Stiles focused on keeping his mouth shut and sparing Derek from worrying about him.

Dean stopped suddenly and his arm shot out, clotheslining Stiles into stopping and knocking his gun into his chest. Stiles let out a pained cry and opened his mouth to complain, but Dean cut him off with a sharp 'sh'. Stiles watched Dean's eyes darted around, clearly trying to spot a noise Stiles hadn't even heard. Derek pointed to a row of trash cans and Dean cocked his hand gun, leaving the three to inspect the scene.

There was a screeching cry so loud and so sudden that Stiles couldn't help but jump. It didn't last long. Dean cut it off with two quick shots from his pistol. The shots echoed throughout the streets. Dean gave Derek a small approving nod, before signaling for them to continue on. Stiles followed, but made the mistake of looking at Dean's victim. It was a young boy; he couldn't be more than seven.

"How can you tell if someone's infected?" Stiles asked.

"Open wounds. If they're injured, assume they're infected."

"That's not enough."

"You don't have time to look for other symptoms. I've dealt with croats a dozen times now and I can still be fooled so shoot first."

"And if you get cut?" Derek asked, shooting Dean a quick glance.

"Use your eyes. If they bleed on me, save yourselves."

"Dean," Cas objected.

"Infected people die," Dean snapped.

"Dean."

"No exceptions."

"Dean!"

"What?"

Dean spun around and so did Stiles. A dozen people had gathered a block behind them. Derek scanned the area and took hold of Stiles' shoulder, pushing Stiles behind him and Dean. Stiles ignored the gesture though, moving to Cas's side. Derek joined them, determined to put himself at
least partly between Stiles and the croats.

There wasn't a doubt in Stiles' mind that these people were infected. There was dried blood on half their jaws. A few had makeshift weapons and four had guns. One of the croats raised their guns, but Derek shot him down before he had the chance to aim. A couple of them laughed as the body slumped to the ground.

The others charged and the difference in skill came out. Derek was nowhere near as good as Dean with moving targets. He took out three croats, before needing to reload. Stiles didn't bother wasting his ammo. If his gun was anything like the Stakeout in Call of Duty, he was better off waiting for them to get close. Dean had picked off about half of them.

This wasn't so bad. They were winning. Most of the people were staying down after they were shot. A couple didn't receive kill shots, but Derek made certain to rectify that. For two people that hated each other, they were doing a remarkable job at working together. Derek reloaded again, eyes darting around the area.

"They're surrounding us," Derek announced.

Stiles did a couple spins. More were gathering. Had this actually been a video game, Stiles would have been laughing. He could pick out the right spots to do circles and never let him touch them, but they weren't mindless. They wouldn't simply chase after him and there would be no glowing 'max ammo' waiting for him when he ran out of bullets.

After being essentially motionless for so long, Cas moved suddenly, catching Derek's shoulder and jerking him back a step. Derek lashed out in instinct, his eyes nearly changing colour, but he contained himself when a bullet whistled by his ear. It would have gone straight through his head if Cas hadn't intervened. Derek let out a breath, giving a small nod of thanks, and resumed firing.

Stiles' heart was racing. Derek had survived a lot of things, but a bullet to the brain mixed with the fact that Stiles was not strong enough to drag him to safety while he healed wasn't something he wanted to try. Not to mention, Dean probably wouldn't be any help and there were now more croats than Stiles could count.

A croat tried to flank them, but Stiles was ready. He fired, the bullet fragmenting in its chest. Dean patted him on the back blindly, clearly trying to distract Stiles' nerves from taking over, but Stiles was fine. He believed Dean when he said these people couldn't be saved and they didn't even act human anymore.

"We need to move," Derek ordered as the croats began making it closer and closer to them.

"This way!" Stiles ordered, spotting the town's police station.

He made a move for the building, traveling at a steady jog. He went two feet, before looking back to make sure they were coming. Derek and Cas were close, trailing him with easy long strides. Dean fired off a couple more kill shots, before following him in reluctantly.

Derek darted in front of him, ensuring he was the first one into building. He checked the main room first, before letting Stiles come in more than a step. Stiles rolled his eyes as he went to check the rest of the station. This was going to get old fast. Dean hauled the door shut behind them and turned every lock.

One of the windows broke and a hand stretched through, taking hold of Cas's sleeve. Cas ripped his arm free. He let out disapproving sigh, looking over the damage. He wasn't bleeding, but he was
missing a button off the cuff of his coat. Cas finally changed his grip on the gun and shot the croat. The hand slid out the window and his button fell to the ground.

"Note to self. Don't mess with the guy's coat," Stiles muttered.

Cas picked up the button, tucking it into his pocket, when a series of gunshots sounded from the hallway. Stiles bolted towards the noise with Dean hot on his tail.

"Derek?" Stiles called out. "Derek!"

"We got survivors," Derek shouted back calmly.

Stiles rounded a corner, seeing Derek crouched against the wall. A couple more shots fired, breaking the wood of the closed door between them. Dean pushed past Stiles, settling in by the door. He twisted the handle and shoved the panel into the room. Another half dozen bullets came whizzing out of the room.

"Take it easy!" Dean barked. "We're not infected."

"Don't fall for it," a woman's voice snapped.

Dean rolled his eyes. This was a stalemate. Stiles reached for Dean's gun and threw it into the room along with his shotgun.

"We're here to help," Stiles assured.

Stiles could hear them whispering, but he couldn't make out what they were saying. He looked to Derek, making it clear that he expected an answer. Derek shook his head. Whatever they were saying wasn't good.

"Okay. Plan B." Stiles stepped through the doorway, hands raised.

"Kid!" Dean snapped. "What are you..."

A couple more guns cocked and Stiles could feel them aiming at him. The room was dark enough that he couldn't see. The window was boarded up, which meant all the light was coming from the hallway behind him.

"We're here--"

Stiles didn't get to finish his sentence before his ankles got ripped out from beneath him. He was yanked out of the room and pinned to the floor with a strong hand to his neck. Stiles was about to fight, when he felt a sharp claw test the strength of his skin.

"You're making me regret this more and more," Derek chided.

"We came to help people," Stiles spoke into the floor.

"You can't help someone that doesn't want help."

"You would know."

Derek removed his grip and Stiles waited a couple seconds, taking what little control he could over the situation. Dean was glaring at him. Apparently, being reckless was reserved for macho cavemen.
"You still alive, kid?" a second voice, a man this time, called from the room.

"Yeah. Yeah!" Stiles scrambled for the door, but Derek stopped him.

"Truce?" the second voice asked.

"Definitely," Stiles answered.

"Drop your guns," Derek ordered.

There were a few clatters as their guns landed on the ones Stiles had thrown down earlier. Stiles smiled proudly. Neither Derek nor Dean could have achieved this.

Derek stood, permitting Stiles to as well, but he still kept Stiles back. This was definitely getting old. A couple deputies emerged. They were covered in blood, but as best Stiles could tell, it wasn't theirs. They were shaken up.

**Two Hours Later**

Dean rolled his eyes. Stiles had been listening to everyone's survival story. Dean had drowned out most of it. They weren't telling him anything he didn't already know. Dean knew everything he needed to know the moment he saw them. He'd dealt with the virus six times now, including his little adventure to the end of the world. He knew the ticks and the shifty eyes that gave a croat away. They weren't infected. That's all that mattered to him.

He settled in across the room, going through the new collection of weapons and shifting ammo around so that each clip was full.

Dean heard Cas land in the other room and snatched up his gun, heading for the sheriff's office. Cas pushed himself off the desk, trying to deny that he was drained, but Dean could see it.

"I got the others out of town," Cas notified. "Everyone outside this building is..."

Cas sunk backwards, barely remaining on his feet as he swayed. Dean moved quickly, steadying the angel with a strong hand to his shoulder.

"What do you need?"

"Time."

"Whoa. Is he okay?"

Dean looked over his shoulder to see Stiles standing in the doorway.

"He doesn't look okay. He should be okay. Why is he not okay?"

Dean moved Cas to the couch. He didn't, maybe even couldn't even put up a fight as Dean sat him down.

"He's fine," Dean assured. "Just worn out."

Cas gave a small nod and Dean straightened up, turning to see the concern in Stiles' eyes. Dean caught his neck, forcing him from the room and closing the door behind them.
"What?" Dean asked, releasing Stiles.

"Derek thinks one of them is infected."

"I vetted them, they're fine."

"Yeah, well, Derek's kind of got a sixth sense at times. And he's probably two seconds away from dealing with the situation himself so you need to come and check her again."

"Her? He didn't pick the massive bear?"

"No. Besides, Eli is about as dangerous as a butterfly. You know, as long as the guy doesn't fall on top of you."

"So which one?"

"Meredith."

"I don't know them by name, kid."

"The grandmother."

Dean laughed. A demon wouldn't even wear her as a meat suit. The woman looked like she was two hundred years old and a snail could probably beat her in a race. She was a worthy suspect; the fact that she was still breathing seemed impossible without the virus, but the others had done a good job keeping her safe.

"So can you please make sure the old lady isn't going to murder us all?"

"Sure, kid." Dean knocked his head to the side, starting down the hallway.

"It's Stiles."

Dean threw a thumbs up back at Stiles and returned to the main room. Derek's eyes shifted to him the moment he walked through the door, before settling back on the old woman. Dean looked at her as well, trying to spot any signs of the virus he could have missed, but he didn't see a single symptom. He moved next to Derek, ignoring his body's shift as he stood at his side.

"She's clean," Dean whispered, bending his head towards Derek.

"No." Derek turned his head, meeting Dean's eyes. "She's not." He truly believed that.

Derek turned his attention back to her and Dean took a third look at her, but no croat was this good an actress. Her plump, gray-haired son returned to her side, handing her a mug. She smiled gratefully, stroking his cheek and blowing on the steaming liquid.

"She..." Derek wet his lips, taking a moment to pick out the words he wanted to use, "smells like the things out there."

"Smells?" Dean could feel his face scrunching up. He had definitely never thought of smelling a croat.

"I have a good sense of smell," Derek defended, rolling his shoulders uncomfortably.

"What does she smell like?"
"Sulfur."

Dean crossed his arms, weighing his options. If Derek had picked out either of the two gargantuans huddled near their little sister, he would have assumed Derek was insecure; that he didn't believe he could take them in a fight. But his sights were set on a woman whose neck could probably be cracked by an infant.

But claiming to smell sulfur was specific. Dean remembered from the first time he had dealt with the virus that there was sulfur in the blood. It made sense. Demons left sulfur residue and this was a demonic curse.

The cup fell from her frail hands and no one could stop it from hitting the ground. It shattered by her feet and her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. Her son forced a smile, picking up the pieces when he let out a sharp gasp. Blood pooled on the pad of his finger and he quickly sucked it into his mouth.

"Let me, dearie," she cooed, reaching for his hand.

"Hands off," Dean snapped, drawing his gun.

She cried out in panic, scrambling to shield her son. Dean hesitated for a second and it was too long. There was no clear shot and his cut was lost between them.

"Please! Don't shoot him!" she shouted.

A few others stood and the little girl screamed. They were outnumbered and shedding her blood only to deal with a fistfight was far from a good idea.

Derek put his hand on Dean's gun and gave a quick shake of his head. Dean looked to him for a reason and Derek nodded at Stiles, who was standing between the two deputies. They hadn't given up their guns and there was no way Dean could get off enough shots to keep the kid in one piece.

"What is wrong with you? My mother is not infected!" her son snapped. "Now put that gun down before you give her a heart attack."

"We're in a police station. Let's put them in a cell," Stiles suggested.

Stiles tried to take a step away from the cops, but their hands moved to their weapons. He held his ground, reading the situation just as well as Dean and Derek. The room was one wrong move away from getting painted red.

"It's a fair compromise," Stiles insisted.

"Who's to say you lot aren't infected!" the son hollered.

"We're the cavalry."

"Enough!" Dean barked. "Either you get behind some bars or I put bullets in both your heads."

"Saul," the son begged, looking to the officers. "Marty?"

They each hung their heads in turn. Stiles let out the breath he had been holding and put some distance between himself and the strangers' weapons.

"Up," Dean ordered, using his weapon to emphasize his order. "Keys to the cell. Where are they?"
"Sheriff's office," the cop answered. "There's a lock box. Code--"

His explanation was cut off as Stiles dangled a ring of keys from his hand. Stiles smiled a little and it took a lot for Dean to keep his face hard. The kid was useful. His attention snapped back to the mother and son. They were standing now, moving towards the second hallway. Dean let them lead, following them to the cells.

Stiles opened the first door and the man helped his mother to the hard cot. She sat down, still sobbing. Dean directed her son into one of the other ones, making sure they couldn't reach one another. Stiles locked them in and tucked the keys away. He looked at Dean, doubt forming in his eyes. Dean put his hand to the back of Stiles' neck and forced him away from the cells, making sure they were out of earshot before letting him speak.

"What proof do you have?"

"There's a reason she's still alive."

"Then why is she locked up?"

"Because I'm not sure."

"Not sur--" Stiles scrubbed a hand down his face. "That's just great. You're supposed to be a professional. We trusted you."

"I'll get you out of here alive. That was the promise I made you."

"I came to help people. Not lock up old ladies."

"You're a freaking tourist. You came here to see croats, shed some blood and then you're going to go home, because you're not a hunter."

"No. I'm not. I take that extra half a second to decide whether what I'm looking at is someone or something, because there is a difference."

One Hour Later

"I'm sorry, Dean. I can't tell," Castiel stated.

Derek wasn't in the room with them, but that didn't stop him from listening. Stiles was mingling, trying to keep everyone calm. It made no difference. Derek could smell the panic and hear the fear-quickened heart rates.

Dean returned, stepping up next to Derek. He didn't even have to open his mouth to tell Derek what he was feeling. Dean was a hunter and, like every other hunter, he had a code. He could kill a monster without a moment's hesitation, but killing a human gave him pause.

"I'll handle it," Derek offered.

"She's not getting out of that cell. Just leave it."

Derek breathed a small laugh. This was pathetic. There wasn't a doubt in his mind that the old woman was infected. She had the heartbeat of someone half her age, none of her emotions were real and Derek wasn't lying about the sulfur. It was a faint scent. He would have missed it entirely if he wasn't searching for it.
"Some hunter you are."

Derek pushed off the wall, starting towards the cellblock. He could hear Dean on his tail, but Derek ignored him. This woman was a threat and she needed to be put down and, because he waited, now her son had to be too. Stiles had done his own research off his phone during the drive and Derek had seen enough to know that croats had no humanity. They were one the rabid creatures that gave half-human species a bad name.

"If you're not going to help, create a distraction," Derek ordered.

Dean hung back at the doorway with a tense jaw and stiff muscles, while Derek approached the prison cells. Derek threw a final glance at the hunter. He was still trying to decide whether or not to stop Derek. Well, try to stop. The wolf in Derek knew the consequences of leaving them alive and he wasn't going to stand by and let someone else get infected on his watch.

He raised an eyebrow at Dean. Things would go easier if he had the hunter on his side, but Derek could count how many times he and a hunter agreed on a single hand. Dean finally shook his head. Derek scoffed; Dean wasn't going to side with him. He wasn't surprised. There was no reason for them to trust one another. Ergo, they didn't. Derek couldn't fault him for that. He didn't trust Dean at all and that wasn't about to change.

Derek moved his hand for the gun Dean had quipped him with, when he heard a pair of hurried footsteps down the hall. Dean turned his head slightly, looking over his shoulder, and Stiles quickly appeared at his side. Derek let his hand fall slack, but it was too late. Stiles expression changed; he knew why they were here.

"No," Stiles said simply.

"Yes."

"No!"

Stiles wasn't going to change his mind. Derek took out his gun and offed the son with a single bullet to his head. The old woman screamed and Derek turned to end her, but Stiles rushed to block his shot.

"Stiles, move," Derek ordered.

"Not a chance."

People flooded down the hallway. Dean kept himself between the cellblock and the rest of the people, but the old woman kept on screaming. Derek moved to shove Stiles out of the way, but he only stepped backwards, getting closer to the old woman's cell. Derek held his ground, a low growl escaping his lips.

"He's infected!" the woman finally screeched. "He killed my son!"

She continued screaming for help and one of the deputies pulled out his gun. Dean twisted it out of his hands without much effort, taking aim at the second officer before he could draw his weapon.

"Help me! Please!" She was putting on the show of her life; Derek would have fallen for it if he was human. "He's already lashed out at the boy. You can see the blood."

A stitch must have ripped, because a few drops of blood had seeped through his shirt. He looked up at Derek, a flash of panic settling in his eyes.
"Keep away from her," Dean ordered.

One of the cops used Dean's moment of distraction and tackled him. Dean fought him off, rushing to his feet with the officer's gun still in hand. Someone else fired a shot into the ceiling, demanding silence. A younger woman stepped into view and the still-armed deputy remained at her side. They were married; the matching rings had told Derek that long before Stiles asked.

"This is how things are going to work. Either you start playing by my rules or you can leave. We were doing just fine before you got here."

"We're trying to--" Stiles ended his sentence as she cocked her gun again, preparing a second shot.

"Okay! Just calm down," Dean snapped.

"Good. Now put your weapons down."

"We're not--"

"Put down your weapons!"

Stiles jolted at the rapid escalation of her voice. She wasn't stable and Stiles couldn't afford to take another step back. Derek tossed his gun into one of the empty cells, forcing Dean to give in as well and Dean wasn't happy about that.

"You." She turned to Derek. "Get in the cell."

"No," Derek scoffed.

"He's not infected," Stiles argued.

"He killed someone. Infected or not. He's dangerous. So either you get in there or you all get out."

"He's claustrophobic," Stiles hurried to lie. "You can't--"

"You wanna get in there with him?"

"We're not the enemy!" Stiles snapped. "So we're all going back to the waiting room. No one else is going to die."

He took a step forward, refusing to stand down, and the gun shifted to aim at his head. Stiles' bravery was commendable, but he rarely knew when to back down. He was more angry than scared. Right now, that was a good thing. When Stiles felt backed into a corner, he went on the defensive and never shut up. It worked at times, but not when he was cornered by someone that need to prove their dominance or were nervous.

Nervous people were always dangerous.

"Listen to her," Dean ordered.

"We're not locking him up," Stiles fought. He looked at Derek, his nerves starting to surface. "We can't."

"Last chance." She tightened her finger on the trigger.

Derek gave in, stepping into the empty cell next to his gun. He gave Stiles a small nod, trying to reassure him. Stiles let out a frustrated noise, baring his teeth.
"Now, him," her husband instructed.

"Oh, come on!" Dean fussed.

"Go!" the wife screamed.

"Fine." Dean gave up easily, stepping in next to Derek.

"Now, lock them in," she ordered, turning back to Stiles.

"No."

"Stiles, do it," Derek snapped.

"We don't deserve this."

"Doesn't matter," Derek ordered, pushing the door shut. "Get over here and lock the door."

Stiles hesitated a moment longer, before moving. He took the keys from his pocket, fumbling a little. Derek could smell the rage festering inside him. He considered only pretending to lock the door, but Derek covered his hand, twisting the key until he heard the lock click.

"Stay with Cas," Dean instructed, leaning against the bars near them. "Don't leave his side."

Stiles looked to Derek. He nodded and Stiles backed away. One of the deputies took the keys from him. Dean claimed the bench, leaning forward with his elbows rested on his knees. Stiles stormed out of the room in a huff, shoving past the other civilians. People took their time before following him. The woman waited for everyone to file out, before collecting up Dean and Derek's guns and leaving.

"Got a second gun on you?" Derek asked, his eyes settling on the old woman again.

"No. Besides, killing her while we're locked up isn't a good idea."

"Then what?" Derek spun around, watching Dean stretch out on the bench and lean against the wall.

"Once she's asleep. I'll pick the lock."

"Do it now."

"Then she'll scream and they'll make it a lot harder for us to get out of here."

Derek groaned, his head falling back. Dean ignored him though, crossing his arms and ankles. Derek began pacing, fitting every cliché of a caged animal. He could probably get out if he wanted, but not without Dean noticing. Dean shut his eyes. Derek thought little of it, until he noticed Dean's heartbeat slowing. He was calm, relaxed and on his way to sleep.

"Really? You're going to sleep?"

"You're clearly on watch," Dean answered, never opening his eyes. "Besides, I'm not the one you want to kill most in this room."

"Should have killed her when I had the chance."

"No. I should have had your back coming in here."
"You see it now?"

"Her emotions switched off completely since they left the room. Those tears are really good, but they're not real." Dean opened his eyes, his head rolling so he could look at Derek. "You've been screwed over by someone that can act, haven't you?"

"Yeah, a hunter," Derek snapped before he could help himself.

Dean laughed. "Most of us are dicks. What happened? Someone use you as bait?"

"I just--" Derek stopped himself for a moment. "I got used and a lot of people died. Innocent people."

Derek waited for Dean to start making excuses, claim that Kate was following the hunter code, but he didn't. The smile that came with his laugh faded. He had to know a few hunters that didn't follow the rules. It couldn't be that strange. Dean probably killed a few innocents in his life. It was probably common for hunters.

Dean shifted his position, sliding his legs off the bench and sitting up. Derek turned back to the croat, pretending not to notice. It was a peace gesture, but that didn't change things. He was already too close for comfort. Derek could smell a werewolf from across a room and always felt like hunters should be able to do the same.

Six Hours Later

A shuffle drew Dean from his half-sleep. Dean opened a single eye, working hard to keep the Derek calm, but he had noticed the movement too. His pacing had stopped and his eyes were glued across the cellblock. The old woman, the croat, had finally returned to the bench. Her back was to them and her soft sobs had started up again.

Cas pushed the door open and Stiles came in with him. Stiles glanced at the croat, before moving for their cell. He flicked through the keys, easily finding the one he needed. Cas remained in the middle of the room, watching the door in case anyone came in. The croat stood in her cell, a dark smile splaying across her lips. Something was going her way, but Dean didn't have a clue what.

She shrieked suddenly and Stiles body jerked instinctually, the keys flying out of his grasp. Cas caught the keys and was about to return them, when a meat hook flung out, catching his shoulder and hauling him backwards before he could blink.

"Cas!" Dean cried.

Cas didn't scream at the audible tear of his flesh. He was more confused than anything else. Cas hit the ground hard, his head almost cracking against the floor, as he was dragged backwards by the chain attached to the hook. His focus went to prying the weapon from his shoulder, which was precisely the woman's plan. She reached through the bars and Stiles reacted quickly, throwing himself after the keys, but she was faster.

"Oh shi..." Stiles cut himself off as he scrambled to his feet, pulling Cas up along with him.

"Get out!" Derek ordered.

But Stiles hesitated.
"Go!" Derek shouted.

Cas pushed Stiles from the room, shutting the door between them. Stiles fought against the panel, but Cas kept him out. The croat emerged from her cell, the chained meat hook hanging from her hand. Cas pressed a hand to his wound and Dean hoped he was healing the injury. He'd much rather explain he was traveling with an angel than risk exposing Cas to the virus when he wasn't in full form.

Stiles shot away from the door, but he wasn't giving up. He was looking for another way. Cas stepped forward, straightening his shoulders. He let the hunting knife fall from his sleeve as if it was his angelic blade, catching it at the handle. The croat laughed and Dean caught a flash of blood across her teeth or perhaps her dentures. She spit at Cas, but he sidestepped the red gob.

"Cas, don't hold back," Dean said.

Derek looked at him, confused, but Dean didn't care and Derek didn't push matters. There wasn't much benefit in keeping Cas's secret. She spun her weapon in the air, testing the distance and watching Cas react to it. She swung for his throat and Cas ducked, still hooked on human speed. She charged him and Cas lashed out, but she caught his wrist, turning the blade back on him. He fought with her and Dean could see it in his eyes that she was stronger than she should have been.

Stiles returned, throwing himself against the door, but the croat pinned Cas against it and used their combined weight and strength to seal him out. Stiles had a handgun this time though. He aimed it at the glass and fired, but it barely cracked the glass. Stiles shot off a few more rounds, but it was necessary by that point.

Cas was thrown across the room, bouncing off a jail cell before falling to the floor. He spit out a mop of blood, trying to get his arms beneath him, but he was weak, weaker than he should be. Even Cas was even surprised at his limitations. Stiles threw open the door, firing instantly, but he missed, finishing off his clip. He hurried to reload, while the woman settled above Cas, taking his knife and drawing another cut across his chest.

"Think about what you're doing, dearie." She looked up at Stiles, still smiling. "Wouldn't want me bleeding on the poor man."

She stroked his hair. Cas tried to push her off and the croat punished him for it, stabbing the blade down. It pinned his shoulder to the floor, which Dean heard crack under the blow. Her fingers settled around her hook, letting the sharp tip rest against her cheek. Cas tried to pull the blade out, but she pushed away his hand easily.

"Shoot her," Cas instructed, keeping every trace of pain from his voice.

But Dean could see he wouldn't, couldn't. His knuckles were white and he couldn't take his eyes off the croat. Cas lashed out with everything he had left, knocking the croat's head back against the metal bars hard enough draw blood. He kept her pinned, desperate to keep away from the blood. Stiles moved fast after that, getting her away.

Cas pulled the knife out, dropping it on the ground. Stiles returned to Cas's side, trying to help him, but Cas turned away, forcing himself to sit up. He reached for the keys and put them in Stiles hands, but the kid wouldn't back off. He threw the keys at them and Derek caught the ring, setting to work on the lock.

"Kid, give him space," Dean said, trying hard not to panic, but Cas should have been back on his feet by now.
"I'm just trying to help."

The croat stirred. She wasn't dead.

"That door open yet?" Dean asked.

"Working on it," Derek snapped. His focus left the lock as he noticed the croat as well. "Stiles."

He was about to respond, when he saw the croat. Stiles moved for his gun, pulling the trigger, but the clip just fell to the floor. The monster quickly processed the situation and Cas tried to push Stiles backwards, but the kid shot to his feet. He tried to shove the clip back in, but he was nervous now and Dean hadn't taught him how to handle this weapon.

"Kid, give me the gun," Dean ordered.

Stiles complied, throwing the gun at Dean, but the woman knocked it out of the air and sent it flying out the window. Cas tried to grab her legs, but he wasn't moving fast enough. She spit at him and Cas barely rolled out of the way of the bloody projectile, not trusting his own immune system. She picked up her hook and turned her sights on Stiles. He went with it, bolting for the door.

Derek panicked, stepping back and kicking the lock with all his strength, but it did no good. The bars were thick enough to hold back a vampire so a male model didn't stand a chance. Dean shoved him to the side and went on to the next key, rushing to find the right one.

"It's the one marked cell block!" Stiles shouted, hurrying through the door with the croat right on his tail.

Dean brought the keys into the cell, seeing that each of them were labeled. He let out a soft 'oh' before flicking to the right key. He got the door open and Derek shot after Stiles. Dean swung down to Cas's side, pushing him upright.

"I'll be all right, Dean. Help them."

"Fine. Just heal. We'll find a way to explain it later."

Dean got up, taking the hunting knife with him. He ran back to the main room in search of a gun. All the guns were out in the open and the civilians were still asleep. Cas had to have knocked them all out. Dean found the weapons pile and grabbed the first couple he could get his hands around. He checked the ammo, listening for Stiles' location.

He wouldn't bring the croat to a pile of sleeping victims and the police station was large given the size of the town. Dean stepped to the meeting place of most of the hallways and heard a series of clumsy footsteps and Stiles shouting 'Demon granny!'. Dean took off, finding Stiles easily. He shot, but the croat was too fast. She threw Stiles into one of the interrogation rooms, stepping in after him and shutting the door behind her.

Derek threw his full weight into the door, but she held the door shut with a single arm. She had to have been infected for days to get this strong. Derek tried a couple more times, managing to shake the door a little, but it didn't give. She reached for one of the chairs, wedging it in place under the handle.

The croat turned its attention back to Stiles as he hurried to right himself. Dean stepped into the observation room, shooting the glass, but it didn't break. Desperate, Dean grabbed the metal chair near him and threw it into the window. Nothing happened.
"I hate police stations," Dean complained.

Had the chair been wood instead of metal, Derek could have probably gotten through, but the room was designed not to break. Stiles found his feet, his eyes locked on the hook dangling from her hand as she begun to swing it. He was trying to find a way to the door, but the croat knew it and she was not only armed, but she could strike from a distance.

She swung her hook, working up some momentum. Stiles gulped as they both decided which way to the hook would go. She released the curved blade and Stiles leapt to the side, barely saving his ass.

Literally.

Stiles scrambled to his feet again as the hook dragged across the floor. Dean tried again to break the window, when he heard Cas land awkwardly behind him, making a huge racket as he took out the table of recording equipment beside Dean.

"Cover your ears," Cas ordered, looking like he could barely breathe.

"What?"

Cas's true voice filled the room and Dean's hands clapped over his ears. The window creaked and began to crack. Cas sagged against the wall, before slamming his fist hard enough that the glass crumbled in its frame.

"Now shoot," Cas instructed calmly.

Dean hurried to obey, shooting down the croat with more lead than necessary. Cas's cries had distracted her, leaving her hunched over and still. Stiles stood, panting and confused, but that was the last thing Dean cared about. He dropped to Cas's side, watching blood spew out of the angel's mouth. He helped Cas twist and bend, freeing him to spit the blood on the floor.

"I'll get the med kit," Stiles offered. He hurtled through the window, barely letting Derek check him for injury, before speeding out of sight.

Dean could feel Derek's eyes on them. He knew there was no way for Cas to slip by him. He just had the decency not to question the reason Stiles was still alive. He went after the kid, leaving Dean to look over the angel.

"Use your angel mojo on yourself," Dean hissed.

He shook his head.

"Cas--"

"Dean, I can't."

"What do you mean can't?"

"My DeLorean, as you put it, doesn't have enough gas."

"Then what? Do you need to touch a soul?"

"My gas will replenish itself. It merely needs time."

Dean heard Stiles' rushed steps as he returned, but Derek stopped him from going further and,
surprisingly enough Stiles cooperated. Dean turned seeing a very clear sign that things were about to get worse.

"I imagine more than one window broke," Cas explained.
"Get them up," Dean ordered. "Get them-- I don't know where. Just get them up."

"Is he--"

"Now!"

Stiles tossed the med pack at Dean's feet and they both left without another question.

"You got enough juice to get out of town?" Dean asked, moving Cas's jacket to ensure the wounds had in fact healed.

"Dean--"

"Don't 'Dean' me. I am telling you to leave."

Cas turned his head away, keeping his defiance silent.

"I am not losing you to a pack of croats. So you take whatever time you need then you get out of town, you hear?"

Cas frowned, still avoiding Dean's eyes.

"I'm not asking. Either you fly out of town or I'll throw your feathery ass as far from here as I can."

Gunfire erupted in the lobby, drawing Dean's attention.

"Kid?" Dean shouted.

But there was no response. Dean growled, his mind already weighing the options.

"Go," Cas said.

"No."

"My wounds are closed. I am not at risk."

Dean opened his mouth to protest, but Cas threw him off with more strength than Dean expected him to have. He slid into the hallway, back hitting the wall. Cas spit out a second mop of blood as he reached over to slide the forgotten gun at Dean. A spark of too-bright blue flashing through his eyes, before the door slammed shut between them.

Dean gave in, picking his firearm and getting to his feet. He went back to the lobby to see the two windows had be blown out. There were a couple dead croats in each window and more were coming. Derek was right by one window, knife in hand to deal with every croat that took a swing at him, and shot any creature that came through the other. Stiles was waking people up and they were quick to panic.

"What's the plan?" Stiles asked, waking up the second gargantuan.

"Get everyone into the sheriff's office," Dean ordered the deputies. "Move!"
They were far more obedient than anyone he walked into town with. They helped wake the last couple people, ushering them to the central room.

"We gotta hold out until morning," Dean said once the civilians were out. "Croats have the advantage in the dark."

"So we're a diversion?"

"You up for that, kid?"

Stiles nodded. Dean looked to Derek, expecting an argument, but he remained focused on keeping the croats out.

"Good."

Dean picked up one of the supply bags. It was stuffed with enough food and water for them to last a couple days. He headed down the hallway, watching the deputies guide in the final civilians into the office.

"You lock and barricade the door. Don't let anyone in and don't come out until you absolutely have to."

"And when we're out of food?" the same woman that had given them trouble earlier snapped.

"You hightail it out of town."

"What about everyone else?" the deputy questioned.

"Anyone not infected we got out. You guys are all that's left. So focus on you."

Dean tossed the bag into the room and pulled shut the door. He waited for the sound of furniture moving, before heading back to check on Cas. He was standing, straightening out his coat which was more red than beige at this point.

"I told you to get out of here," Dean grit.

"Your focus need not be on me." Cas fixed his tie, ignoring Dean completely.

"Damn it, Cas."

"Don't 'Cas' me," Cas roared.

Dean stared at him. It was rare for Cas to raise his voice. Then again, nothing was normal these days. Cas gave a final tug to his tie and passed Dean without another word. He wasn't leaving or wouldn't leave; Dean wasn't sure. Dean could make him. He had the Enochian sigils memorized and had done it to Cas plenty of times before, but he wasn't ready for Cas to not come back.

Dean put his game face back on, heading back to the lobby. Cas and Stiles had taken over the second window, but the croats had stopped coming.

"How smart are they?" Stiles asked, trying to see into the darkness, but the croats had taken out the streetlights.

"Varies. Theory is they're as smart as they were when they got infected."

"Get down!" Derek shouted suddenly.
Cas reacted instantly, forcing Stiles to the floor and covering both their heads with his arms. Derek squeezed into the corner, bracing himself. Something flew through the window and Dean barely made it behind the reception desk before the flash bomb went off. His ears were ringing so loudly it felt like they were bleeding and his eyes still stung when he opened them and smoke began rushing from the canister.

"Out! Out now!" Dean shouted, rushing to his feet.

They retreated to the secondary hallway. Dean struggled to grab the weapons' bag and a blanket, making sure the three of them were out of the lobby before following. He pulled the door shut behind them, cramming the blanket under the door to keep whatever gas it was out.

"Shoot!" Stiles ordered, throwing himself against the wall.

Derek was ready and fired, taking out the croat in the hallway. A croat came out from the side, wielding a knife wildly. Derek avoided the slashes and Dean shot a bullet through its skull. Cas spun suddenly, slamming Dean into the wall and driving a knife into the heart of a croat that had come up behind them.

"We need a better location," Derek announced, firing a few rounds into one of the rooms.

"I was working on that before the croats showed up," Stiles defended. "Give me a gun."

Dean pulled the trench gun out of the bag and tossed it to Stiles. Cas pulled his shotgun free from the bag, for no other reason than to put Dean's mind at ease. Dean slung the bag over his shoulder and followed the kid deeper into the police station.

A group of croats cut them off. Stiles got off a shot, before the rest of them charged. Derek managed to jerk Stiles back before any of them made contact with him and began firing. Dean kicked open the door closest to them.

"This way," Dean ordered, taking out as many in the head as he could.

Derek pushed Stiles into the room and Cas did the same to Dean. Cas pushed the door shut and kept it place with a single hand. Dean dropped the bag and looked around to make a better barricade. He rushed to the bulky desk and Stiles helped him drive it against the door. The door shook in its frame so Stiles began piling everything with weight he could find on top.

Dean spotted a croat at the window behind Derek and raised his gun. Derek's eyes went wide, pure fear swallowing the colour in his pupils and face. It was like he honestly believed Dean was aiming at him. It threw Dean, distracting him, when he saw the croat prepare to strike. Dean adjusted his aim, pegging the croat in the shoulder and shattering the window behind Derek. Dean moved to the new hole, shoving Derek aside, and fired a second round into the croat's skull.

He turned to Derek, watching him force the fear from his body. It was gone as fast as it came, his face hardening once more.

"We need to conserve ammo if we want to survive the night," Derek said, trading out the empty clip in his gun for a full one.

"Doesn't matter how smart we are with bullets. Even if we kill a monster every shot, we still don't have enough ammo," Stiles calculated, looking through their small arsenal. "We need a plan besides shooting everything."

"This spread was not unleashed by Pestilence or Lucifer. It will end," Cas said.
"Unleashed? What do you mean unleashed?" Stiles asked, his eyes darting between Dean and Cas.

"Someone high up releases the virus. Sometimes, it dies off," Dean answered.

"As in those people will go back to what they were?"

Dean looked over at Stiles. He was two seconds away from being overwhelmed by guilt.

"Croats are croats. There's no turning back."

"So what? They just die?" Derek questioned.

"Don't know."

"How do you not know?"

Dean's eyes narrowed, his lip nearly curling with anger, taking a step towards Derek. "I hunt a lot of things. Knowing how to kill things is more important than why they do what they do." Dean shoved Derek backwards, knocking him against a cabinet. "Just because you dealt with a piss-ass hunter, doesn't mean I'm one."

"Hunters are all the same," Derek growled. "You're soldiers on a mission. No free will. No free thought."

"I'm going to give you one warning, Zoolander," Dean threatened, forcing himself to back off.

"Only thing that changes is why you start. So who was it? Your dad? Mom? Or maybe God put you on this path. You act like a solider of God."

Dean punched him before anyone could blink. Derek hit the ground, his hand going to his jaw, which Dean wouldn't be surprised if he broke. His knuckles throbbed and his blood boiled, but he forced himself to take a couple steps back. He expected Stiles at Derek's side the moment his ass touched the floor, but he remained crouched by the weapon's bag.

"Yeah. That was me," Dean admitted, a laugh leaving his throat before he could stop it. "But that's not me anymore, right Cas?"

Dean looked over at the angel, hoping to see him agree, but Cas simply dropped his gaze. He couldn't deny it, because it's exactly what Dean was right now. He'd done everything possible to shut off every part of his brain that didn't help him kill. Dean rubbed his jaw, feeling his lips arranged into a useless smile. He laughed again, feeling a part of him break.

"Okay. Get-get them out of here," Dean said.

But Cas didn't move. Dean could feel the smile he always put on for Sammy when he needed his brother to believe things were okay take over his face. This was not okay.

"They need to go. Now."

"Sunrise isn't for another two hours," Stiles remarked. "There's nowhere to go."

Dean jostled Cas, forcing him to raise his eyes.

"I know you want to make things better, but you can't. It's not your job. Not anymore."

"I haven't considered you my obligation for a very long time," Cas answered.
And the angel's concerned eyes were the last thing Dean saw before everything went black.

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Something flew through the window, knocking out more glass from the frame, before pegging Dean in the side of the head and knocking him out. Cas barely caught him before Dean's body went limp. Stiles was on him in a second, helping Cas lie him out on the floor. Derek moved for the bookcase, pushing it through the shards to block off as much of the window as he could.

"He's still alive," Stiles concluded, his fingers finding the bump beneath Dean's hair. "Are we safe in here?"

"Oh yeah. There's a safe place in this town," Derek replied.

"That's not helping."

"He hit me."

"You had it coming. There's probably worse hunters out there than the Argents and you're calling him one of them."

Derek huffed, his jaw tightening.

"You shouldn't mention his mother, his father or god," Cas remarked, laying Dean's head on the ground gently. "I would avoid those subjects in the future."

The shelf fell away from the window, crashing to the floor in a burst of flames. Stiles ran for the fire extinguisher, when a bullet whistled past his ear. It penetrated the red cylinder and the white substance began rushing out of the canister. Another pair of shots fired and Stiles decided to drop to the floor before his luck ran out.

Derek shoved the flaming piece of furniture upright. Bullets were still whirling through the air, but there was no longer an obvious target.

"If this building catches fire, those people are screwed," Stiles reminded.

"We'll lead them away," Derek decided as he rearmed himself, strapping the thigh holster back in place with his gun and putting a second pistol in the back of his pants, even though Stiles was pretty sure there wasn't room for it. "Take it you can't you carry him." He looked at Cas.

"It would be better if you did."

"Great." He put the trench Stiles had become accustomed to back into his hands and gave him a loaded small machine gun as back up. "Stick close to me."

"Don't worry. I won't let any croats touch you," Stiles teased.

Derek laughed, unimpressed and mentally rolling his eyes as he flung Dean over his shoulder in a fireman carry. He kicked the duffel towards Stiles, who slung it over one shoulder and let the SMG hang from the other. Cas cleared the doorway and was the first to step outside. He checked the hallway, before motioning that it was safe to follow.

Cas got them to the fire escape and Derek pushed out first, going couple steps into the dark. It was nearly pitch black. There was a faint glow of a single streetlight blocks away. He would practically be blind.
A loud set of crashes inside, nearly sent Stiles running. The power in the building went off and everything went dark.

"Stay close," Derek hissed, his voice already beginning to get further away.

Stiles stepped after him, struggling to see any part of Derek, but the quarter moon wasn't enough to light up Derek's black leather jacket. He could almost see Dean's dangling hands, making out their steady swing with Derek's strides. Stiles squinted, determined not to lose the only thing he could see.

Stiles glanced back, looking for Cas, but he couldn't see the other hunter. He paused, looking around for any sign of him. He reached out to stop Derek, hoping he could see Cas in the darkness, but his hand touched nothing but the air.

"Derek?" Stiles whispered as loud as he dared. "Cas?"

His heart was racing. The only thing worse than seeing how many things wanted to kill him was not being able to see any of them. There was a loud clatter close to him and Stiles clapped a hand over his mouth, stopping the noise of panic before it passed his lips. He backed up, making sure he was in a different place than when he spoke. He stepped into a puddle, soaking his jeans from the knee down. His mind got distracted with plans to complain, but that lasted less than a second when he heard more noise.

Stiles body began moving before his brain ever even considered it. He was running, knocking into broken down cars and tripping god only knows what. Stiles managed to keep his footing, finding himself incredibly grateful for hours of grueling lacrosse practice. It was harder in the ruins of the town. He was a good runner on grass or floor, but everything that got between his feet in the ground was a battle, especially when he couldn't see.

His foot caught the edge of the sidewalk and Stiles hit the ground hard, barely bracing himself enough to stop his head from cracking open on the cement. He bit his lips together, resisting the urge to cry out. He felt around for his shotgun only to have someone step on his hand.

Stiles forced himself to remain absolutely silent and still. He felt hot breath on his ear and Stiles' heart managed to beat even faster, challenging the heart rate of a hummingbird. He heard a growl and survival instincts took over again. Stiles gripped the gun tight and rolled onto his back, firing upwards. He saw the croat in the flash of light that came with the shot and blood splattered on his face.

Movement erupted after that as Stiles was charged at from all angles. Stiles scrambled to his feet, full on sprinting through the streets. He ran into a hard body and then his movements were no longer his own.

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Derek whipped around at the sound of gunfire, barely avoiding the croats sprinting towards the noise. He looked for Stiles, but he had been left alone with an unconscious hunter over his shoulder. Derek swore silently. The croats didn't have any form of night vision. He'd figured that much out when he walked between a pair of them. They were going off noise best Derek could tell. Derek had kept his wolf locked away, knowing any glow from eyes would give him away in a heartbeat to the hunters and the croats.

Derek ran for the library, stashing Dean in the book return. He sliced off a piece of Dean's t-shirt, wanting easy access to Dean's scent. There was no way Stiles wouldn't want to find him and the
chances of Dean hiding until they returned were slim. Derek put a gun between Dean's belt and jeans, making sure it wouldn't fall loose when the hunter woke up, and slid a couple clips in his pocket. He buried Dean under a couple layers of books, making sure Dean wouldn't be discovered.

He tucked the piece of fabric into his jeans and vaulted through the large broken window. Derek listened for Stiles, but wherever he was, he keeping silent, which was good or very bad. Screaming meant Stiles was in trouble, but silence meant either he was either safe or dead. Derek found his way back to the police station, barely able to pick out Stiles' scent out from the sulfur.

He followed it, dodging the croats blindly wandering the streets in search of prey and barely missing the puddle more than one person had stomped through, before the scent disappeared entirely. Derek crouched down, looking for blood or a sewer main; something that would give him a hint, but all he saw was the army bag Stiles' had taken with him. It was tore open and empty. The weapons were all gone, including Dean's riffle, which had a night-vision scope.

A shot fired and it was one of his least favourite sounds. Even if he'd succumbed entirely to his wolf, he couldn't dodge a bullet. It was a clear shot through his shoulder, but it still knocked him to the ground. He was already beginning to heal, but he movement caught the attention of the croats nearest him. Derek could see them searching for him, advancing closer. Derek reached for a clip of ammo that had been thrown clear of the bag and whipped it at the mailbox on the other side of the street.

The croats acknowledged the sound, but sniffed the air, obviously picking up on some sort of scent. Derek rolled to his feet and silently moved into the street. The croats closest to him followed, which meant they were tracking the scent of his blood. Derek shrugged out of his jacket and shirt, leaving him in the wifebeater he had underneath, which was still clean. This was going to lead to two lectures. One from Stiles, accusing him of any reason to take his shirt off, and one from Peter for ruining yet another Hale-approved leather jacket with holes and blood.

Derek pitched his clothes on top of a lamp post, hoping to distract them long enough, when a second shot fired. It grazed his jawbone and earlobe, setting off Derek's flight instincts. More shots followed, but Derek kept a head of them, making sure to keep his running patterns erratic and soundless.

He got out of range, ending up in the town's supermarket parking lot. Derek ducked between a pair of totaled cars, ensuring that if the sniper moved he wouldn't be easily spotted, and took a few seconds to focus. None of them had brought their phones. Apparently, croats took out the phone lines first. Stiles had tested the hardline in the police station, but there was no way to communicate with each other or anyone else.

Something clinked across the ground and Derek moved along the car in search of the source. He spotted a metal canister. Derek hurried to shut and shield his eyes, but it was too late. It erupted, filling the parking lot with a blast of white light and an ear-shattering crack. It blinded him, making his eyes sting, and left his ears ringing. Derek forced them open, trying to find somewhere he could go to recover, but he only saw far too many croats that knew his location.

Derek forced himself to run, knowing his only chance at survival was to lose them in the dark. A third bullet ruined his escape, hitting his kneecap from the side and shattering it. Derek cried out in pain, rolling across the pavement. Derek crawled for one of the abandoned cars and rolled underneath it. He focused on his breathing, waiting for his bone to piece itself back together, but he wasn't given enough time.

A croat grabbed his wounded leg, hauling him backwards. Derek managed to kick free, but more croats were on him within seconds. Desperate, Derek shifted. His claws came out and adrenaline
filled his veins. He lashed out, clearing the enemy bodies out from around him, until he had enough room to stand. His injury didn't matter after that. The adrenaline drove him to run, even if his footsteps were sloppier than usual.

Another bullet knocked him back down, this one breaking through the cartilage that formed his second rib. The next one came quickly after, tunneling through his forearm. He rolled away, knowing the danger of staying still, and it was a good thing. The next bullet broke the asphalt where his head was. Derek rushed back to his feet only to get tackled by a pair of croats. He landed on his back and began lashing out again, praying that his wounds healed faster than their blood found his skin. He felt knives on his chest, every part of his body swinging wildly in hopes to protect himself.

The bullets began coming again, but they weren't hitting Derek. One by one, the croats attacking him began to fall. Derek forced his wolf back within him. Stiles didn't know how to handle a sniper and he wouldn't let anyone else see his other side. He pulled off his shirt, which was nearly dripping in blood now, and flung it away from himself. Derek's vision was still blurry, but he could see a few croats going after the stronger scent of blood. He ripped the bloody patch from when they shot out his knee and threw it away too.

Derek limped over to the car nearest him, finding something to wipe the rest of the red from his skin. He tossed it aside as well, finally feeling safe in the darkness. He looked to the rooftop where the shots had to be coming from, spotting a figure running atop the buildings with about eight croats on his tail. It had to be Dean.

Derek felt the last of his skin stitch back together and his bones solidify. He took off at a sprint, making sure he got in front of them, before scaling one of the shorter buildings without much effort. Dean skidded to a stop as he climbed up, drawing his handgun and quickly taking out the croats on the far side. Derek drew his gun as well, beginning to shoot down the ones from the other side, until they were the only two left standing on the rooftop.

"You still in one piece?" Dean asked, reloading his gun.

"Yeah."

Dean clicked open his lighter, holding it between them. Dean probably planned to look Derek over for injuries, but Derek had made that an easy feat. He was shirtless and he'd gotten rid of every trace of blood on him. Dean snapped his lighter shut, without another word, and began walking.

"The croats bled on me," Derek defended.

"So you decided to distract them with a strip show?"

"They could smell it."

"They smell uninfected blood." Dean stepped closer, his eyes knowing where Derek's should be even if they were lost in the dark. "Did they cut you?"

"Tried to." He looked down to see Dean's finger on the trigger of his pistol. "Would I saved you if they turned me?"

"Might have just wanted my sweet ass for yourself."

Dean raised his gun, believing he was invisible in the dark. Derek stepped to the side, letting his breathing fall silent and repositioning the pistol in his hand so he could knock Dean out if he had to.
"Stiles is missing," Derek said. "Same with your guy."

"If Cas is --"

"I saw him against the old lady. He's covered in so much of his own blood there's no way the croats aren't following his every move and he's one drop away from turning into one of them."

Dean tucked his gun into the back of his pants and shrugged off his jacket. His top shirt came next and he held out the plaid fabric to Derek.

"I'm fine."

"Dude, just take the shirt." Dean threw the fabric at him and pulled his coat back on. "You're going to freeze your nipples off without it so take something so you're not half naked."

Derek gave in, maneuvering his arms into the shirt and buttoning it up.

Dean held out the sniper rifle to Derek. "Climb up there and see if you can find them."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I'll stand watch."

Dean wasn't lying, but like everyone else, he wasn't telling Derek everything. Derek took the large gun and maneuvered his way on top of the roof entrance. He lied down, putting his eye to the scope as he lay out the heavy weapon. He put out the pistol near his hand, his ears listening for signs of Dean turning on him, but he heard Dean's heartbeat move further away.

Derek looked over his shoulder, watching Dean. He could almost hear Dean whispering, but he kept his voice down low enough that Derek couldn't make out the words. Derek focused harder, trying to make out what he saying, but his body language said enough. Dean's hands were held out to his sides, palms up, and his head was tilted to the sky.

He was praying.

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"If you're not with that kid, show your feathery ass." Dean paused. He must have been waiting for Castiel, but he didn't show. "Fine. Just keep the kid safe."

Castiel looked over at Stiles. The boy was at the window, trying to see into the dark, but his human eyes would not allow it. Castiel considered calling him by his given name. He couldn't understand why one would refer to himself as an arrangement of steps that allows people but not animals to climb over a fence or wall. Then, Castiel learned the name his parents had given him. The grandparent he was named after was a large man, very skilled and socially respected, but not even he could wear the name well.

Stiles was nervous, not for himself, but for Derek. Logic stated that Derek should not need the protection of a teenager. Even without the added benefits of being a werewolf, Derek was stronger than most humans. Unlike most werewolves, Derek had earned his strength. He was a true warrior, but was young minded. He had been buried with so much guilt, violence and pain that good alluded him.

He relied on being needed. The only trust he had in others was when he knew they needed him alive. It was a battle. From what Castiel had seen, Stiles refused to treat Derek that way. Stiles had
no interest in being protected, even though it was Derek's natural instinct to protect those that remained near to him, and he had every intention of being self-reliant.

For a small human, Stiles was quite impressive, more impressive than most gave him credit for. His body or brain often worked faster than the other half was ready for. As much as Dean scolded him for it, Castiel could not help but delve a little into Stiles' mind. It was refreshingly busy. He had so many thoughts racing through it that it was difficult to focus on one.

Guilt neither of them should have been carrying, nor deserved to carry, buried both Stiles and Derek. Stiles was still young enough to enjoy life fairly regularly. He could enjoy himself with friends and his father. Derek tried, but did not consider anyone his friend or family. He had not taken the time to properly grieve, though he had not been given much of an opportunity to truly relax. Like Dean, Derek had made a lot of enemies, many of which he did not deserve.

"We're gonna head for the pharmacy. Meet us there."

Castiel stood, moving to join Stiles at the window. He saw the same darkness Stiles, but he could see where each building stood and every mark of devastation the croatoan virus had caused. They were not far from the pharmacy. There was only one in town, which spared confusion.

"Your angel radio better be working, Cas." Dean said. "I'll hunt your ass down if I don't see you by sunrise."

Castiel felt his vessel smile. He had always heard every one of Dean's prayers and feared the day that stopped. He even heard the ones Dean would never want him to hear.

Dean was not in his right mind when Sam left. He was relieved that Sam got out and would go on to live a long, normal life. But Dean never liked being on his own, even if that was how he often felt.

During the first couple weeks of being alone, Dean would drink until he forgot everything. Castiel could not find him, but that did not stop Dean from praying. The prayers Dean made then were not his usual. He was not asking for help and he wouldn't take it. He still wasn't. Castiel had waited for the prayers to turn spiteful. He knew how to handle Dean's hatred, but Dean wasn't angry.

And that was worse.

Dean never cared if he was happy. He took pleasure and found ways to enjoy life. At least he once did. Unlike Sam, he never thought of settling down. He understood the job and planned to go on hunting until it killed him. Dean had always been reckless. He had been taught from an early age that his life was secondary to everyone else's, specifically his brother's, and, the few times he was selfish, he was reprimanded or punished.

Except with women.

They only complained if they found out about one another. Of course, he wasn't truly selfish with them. Dean was quite generous with his lovers once. Especially after they lost their clothes.

Stiles smacked Castiel's arm, his eyes fixed on Castiel's. Castiel frowned for a moment, before understanding he must have been ignoring the boy.

"I can't sit here any more. We have to find them."

"As you wish."
"Really?"

"Did you wish to remain here?"

"No. People just don't usually listen to me the first time."

"Are you not usually right?"

Stiles smiled. It seemed that was not something he was used to hearing.

"Any clue where they'd be?"

"Dean mentioned a pharmacy. It's not far from here."

"Great. Lead the way."

"Very well, but stay close."

"If you can show me Derek's alive, we can skip together through the streets holding hands."

"I don't skip."

"I-- well." Stiles tilted his head, a couple crinkles forming around his facial features. "Okay. No skipping."

Stiles pushed off the wall, heading to the door, which he held it open for Castiel. True to his word, Stiles remained close. He ran into Castiel a couple times, not wanting to get separated again, but Castiel never let more than a foot come between them. He guided Stiles away from the infected people in the streets and ensured they avoided anything that would make Stiles trip.

They crossed the store front window and Castiel looked inside to see Dean and Derek shifting the ammo to fully fill their clips with blind skill. Stiles stepped on a piece of broken glass and the noise alerted the werewolf. He looked up, meeting Castiel's eyes within a second. Castiel offered him a small nod to assure Derek that Stiles was unharmed, but Derek was more concerned that their eyes had met in pitch black.

Derek suspected that Castiel wasn't human, but hadn't mentioned it aloud. Castiel had caught the werewolf trying to examine his scent. It gave him no answers. His vessel smelt human, but that did not comfort Derek. Derek knew of beasts that buried themselves so deep inside humans that there was no trace of them until they wanted to be seen.

Castiel pulled open the door and Dean's hand shot to his gun, but Derek stopped him before he could aim.

"Hello, Dean."

Dean breathed a sigh of relief, getting to his feet. He patted Derek's shoulder. It was a sign of approval though Derek saw it as a dismissal. Dean reached for a gaslight they had picked up, turning it up just enough that the humans could see one another. Dean had tucked away the signs of panic that surfaced earlier. He was back to survival mode.

Dean's chin jutted out at Stiles, noiselessly asking if he was infected.

"He's unharmed," Castiel answered.

"What's with the wardrobe change?" Stiles remarked with a smug grin. "Did someone get frisky?"
Dean laughed, but Castiel could tell it wasn't genuine, though he tried. Dean was retreating into himself. Castiel could see the part of Dean that wanted to reach out, but he buried it.

"You okay, man?" Dean asked, maintaining his practiced smile.

Castiel flexed the muscles in his face, eliminating any semblance of a frown, before answering with a simple, "Yes."

Though, Castiel wasn't certain he was.

Four Hours Later

Every trace of sulfur suddenly left the air. Derek could still smell the blood and death, but the heinous smell that used to sit on top was gone. The soft thunder of hearts beating in the streets had fallen silent.

Castiel was at the window as he had been for the past three hours, standing as still as a statue. There was so much blood on his coat and shirt it looked like he was wearing a red poncho. But he stood and moved without any sign of injury. The blood had long since dried, but it never seemed to draw the croats attention.

"It's ended," Castiel announced.

Stiles hurried to his feet, rushing to the window. "How do you know they're not hiding?"

Derek pushed the door open, stepping outside. Every scent belonged to the four of them. A small group of croats had passed them an hour back and the only trace of them was part of a bloody footprint.

Stiles came to his side, his finger resting near the trigger.

"Any idea where they went?" Stiles whispered.

"No. They're gone."

Derek moved for the dumpster where more of them had gathered. Visually, Derek could see the signs of their little camp. The fire that had burnt out was still warm and smoking, a couple guns lay discarded on the ground and there were footprints towards the area, but none leaving. There wasn't a single clue as to where they went. They vanished.

"Have you ever seen the same croat twice?" Stiles asked.

"No." Dean smashed a car window, startling Derek. He unlocked the door and climbed in, setting to work on hotwiring the machine. "Grab the civilians," Dean ordered, leaving the car running.

"Thought you said it was safe."

"Normal people avoid the place where everyone they loved died."

"Not everyone runs," Derek responded, pulling the gun from his thigh holster and tossing it at Dean's feet. "I'll get the others."

He started off towards the police station, but Stiles wasn't following. Derek looked back to see him following Dean to a second car. Of course he'd want to know how to hotwire a car.
Leaving Stiles alone with nothing to do was a bad idea. He understood the concept of waiting and being patient, but he'd skipped the lesson on how to do that without finding something else to occupy his mind with. He tried chewing on the drawstring of his hoodie, but that had become boring. He moved onto balancing a pen on his nose, but gave up after it fell for the umpteenth time.

Derek had gone for a 'run'. Stiles wasn't sure how necessary those quotations were. He was running, probably long gone, but it was more than exercise he was after. Derek was off in search of release. Apparently, his fist didn't do as good a job as Stiles'. Derek left Stiles with his car keys, but the glare told Stiles he was a dead man if he stuck them in the ignition without a legitimate reason and his grumbling stomach wasn't a good enough reason.

There was room in the back of the final pick-up truck for Derek and Stiles to cram in. Derek would have probably chewed off his arm to get away from the hunters and Dean was only too happy to get rid of them. Stiles didn't understand the switch. He knew there was a time Dean was happy they were there. Cas certainly seemed to enjoy their presence. It wasn't obvious. Cas was very subtle, but not everyone was as honest about their feelings as Scott.

He heard a rustle and pushed off the Camaro to lecture Derek about what 'I won't be long.' meant to the rest of the world, but Cas and Dean emerged from the woods instead. He recognized the look. These were two grown men that didn't know how to say a word to one another. They had probably walked the eight miles out of Patience in absolute silence.

Stiles held his ground.

They had said their goodbyes. There were no hugs. Stiles barely managed the word goodbye before Dean threw him a half-hearted wave. Derek hopped into the truck without a single word or gesture and Cas had his back turned to both of them as they rode off.

"Where's Zoolander?" Dean asked, opening his trunk.

"Went for a run," Stiles admitted.

Stiles glanced over at Cas. He was keeping his distance and there was no trace of blood on his coat. Stiles's head tilted a bit. It was the same jacket, the same outfit. But it was exactly as wrinkled and askew as it was when they first met. Dean was still dirty and disheveled. He had plenty of Cas's blood on him, but didn't seem to care. Dean tossed the guns he refused to let Stiles carry out for them into the trunk.

Stiles took a step closer to Dean, seeing the fake bottom of the trunk propped up with an old shotgun. Dean had to have at least a hundred different weapons piled into his car. Stiles reached for one of the more interesting knives, but Dean knocked the shotgun free, letting the arsenal snap shut so fast Stiles nearly lost his fingers.

"See ya," Dean said, moving for the driver's seat.

Stiles gave Dean the same wave he had received, faking a smile. Dean dropped into his seat and Cas followed suit, sliding in next to Dean. The Impala rumbled as it came to life and Dean rolled back, moving for the road.

"Wait!" Stiles shouted, jogging the couple steps to Dean's window.
He hesitated, but gave in, rolling down the glass and flicking his green eyes up at Stiles. "What?"

"Can I get a ride into town? I'm starving."

Dean let out an exasperated breath, reaching over his seat to give Stiles access to the backseat. Stiles got in before Dean could change his mind, pulling the door shut behind him. Dean shot off, throwing Stiles backwards. He settled into the middle, resting his chin on the front bench between Cas and Dean.


"I would enjoy a burger."

Dean's head snapped to the side, eyeing Cas like he had started muttering Latin.

"Cas?"

"We have time for lunch, don't we?" He looked at Dean with an almost smile.

Warwick, Kentucky

"We just sold our last piece," the waitress said, offering Dean a sympathetic smile.

Dean sighed. The milkshake had the perfect balance of ice-cream and milk, the fries were exactly the right amount crispy and the burger had Dean's mouth watering before he even sunk his teeth into the meat. It only seemed fitting that the pie would be just as good, but it seemed that Dean and pie was becoming the love story that seemed like it would never be.

This had to be punishment for something.

Not that Dean hadn't done plenty worth punishment.

"There's another one in the oven, but it'll be at least half an hour." Her smile shifted, hoping he would stick around, but Dean wasn't in the mood for women. They didn't fill the void like pie. Of course, that was because Dean did the filling.

Dean forced a smile and headed back to the table. Stiles was talking a mile a minute and Cas was utterly enthralled. The kid hadn't said much during the meal, which was looking like a miracle.

"Dean, why have we not seen the Avengers?" Cas asked, looking up at him. "It sounds most enjoyable."

"We weren't exactly in the country when it came out and we've been kinda busy since."

"If we have time for cartoons, we have time for movies."

Dean slid into the booth next to Cas. "Sometimes, I think I'm a bad influence on you."

"Most would agree." Cas reached for his glass. "I should eat more often."

"Have you been hungry more often?"

Cas shook his head, finishing off his Oreo milkshake with a slurp. Unlike a couple other less than honest moves on his part, this wasn't one of them. He seemed back to whatever normal was these
days. He wasn't hungry, but plenty of people ate regardless of hunger.

"So what's the scariest thing you've faced?" Stiles asked, reloading his second plate of fries with ketchup.

"I grew up hearing about monsters and how to kill them. They don't scare me."

"Then what does?"

"Nothing."

Cas shot him a quick glance, but didn't correct him. Dean picked up his Coke, setting the straw between his lips and sipping.

"I used mountain ash once. Is it really effective on everything?"

"Never heard of it."

"Really? You should try it." Stiles shoveled a few more french-fries in his mouth, glancing over at Dean. "No clue where you find the stuff, but it's useful."

"What'd you use it against?" Dean questioned as Cas stole his Coke, chugging down the rest of it.

"The kanima and it's master."

"Master?"

"Kanimas are furies. They act on the rage of others," Cas explained, before a look fell over his face.

Dean was about to question him, when Cas belched, loudly. Cas took a napkin to his lips, while Stiles burst out laughing. There was a flash of embarrassment over Cas's face, but it wasn't long until he was smiling. It was a real smile. Not like the hints of one Dean was used to deciphering or the one Cas flashed solely in attempt to draw the same expression from Dean.

Only problem was, this kid wasn't here to stay.

"We should go," Dean said, bracing himself on the booth to stand.

"I ordered dessert."

"Not in the mood for cake."

"Me neither." Stiles perked up a little, waving at the waitress and nodding.

Dean relaxed again, watching Cas stack their finished plates. The waitress came over, balancing three plates expertly and Dean prepared himself for whatever over-sugared treat the kid had picked out, when the scent of pie crust hit him.

"Here you go, boys." She laid out three pieces of pie, setting one in front of each of them. "Enjoy."

Stiles held out a clean fork to Dean with a smile. "Cas said you like pie."

"Cas would be right." Dean took the utensil, beginning before anything got between him and his pie.
"You said you liked pie," Stiles said after a moment, his mouth full of pristine crust and sugared fruit.

Dean looked over to see Cas hadn't touched his piece.

"I was going to offer it to Dean. It has been a while since he has had pie."

"Don't know if you figured this out, but he's a keeper," Stiles remarked. "Don't let him go."

"Go ahead, Cas. I'm good with one piece."

"So are vampires real?" Stiles asked, eager and curious.

"Yeah. But they don't sparkle and they got more than two fangs."

"What about Bigfoot?"

"A hoax, but there's plenty out in the woods."

"The original Bigfoot sighting was a wendigo," Cas answered, already halfway through his slice of pie.

"Man. Those things give me the creeps. Definitely thought they weren't real."

"Really? You believed in vampires before lost hikers going mad?"

"Didn't always believe in any of it."

"What made you? Take it the kanima wasn't your first rodeo."

"No. It wasn't."

Dean looked up to see Derek. Stiles moved over, but Derek didn't budge.

"Just finish up. We'll pay on the way out."

"But he's telling me about demons."

"We hadn't even gotten to the demons."

"So they are their own thing."

That eager excitement filled Stiles' eyes again. He wanted to hear about the monsters and everything that went bump in the night. Most kids thought they did, but they either didn't believe or had nightmares for the rest of their lives about it. Stiles was different though. Dean followed his dad into the hunting world. He helped with research and listened to his dad's grumblings as he read. Dean never saw any other option. He ate, slept and dreamt monsters.

And Sammy.

Always Sammy.

Dean pushed his plate forward, leaving the last few bites of pie and getting up without a word. He sidestepped Derek and went straight for his Impala. He was on autopilot, turning off every part of his brain he didn't need Dean didn't wait for Cas. He didn't even look back to see if the angel was following him. He just stuck his key in the ignition and tore off down the road.
If Cas was smart, he'd stay with them. Dean was clearly on the path to become the hollow shell he once was and that bothered him, now, but in time it wouldn't. Cas was better off without him. Most people were.

Dean was on the interstate before he realized it and reached into the glove box in search of a new case. He pulled out a cellphone, flicking it open and scrolling through the messages. He wanted a gig that was close and didn't require talking to as few people as possible. There were signs of a wendigo in Oklahoma.

It was almost too perfect to be true. He left a message for Garth saying he had it covered and to turn any other hunters going after it in the other direction. A ten hour drive and a couple days in the woods with a monster was just what Dean was after.

"Quit sulking," Derek ordered, passing another logging truck.

"We shouldn't have left him," Stiles answered. It was the same response Stiles had given every other time Derek had commented on Stiles' demeanor since they left the diner.

"He told us to go and this clearly wasn't the first time one of them stormed off. So drop it."

"Unlike you, I actually liked them."

Derek rolled his eyes.

"Neither of them did a thing to you. Not all hunters are bad."

"There is no happy ending with werewolves and hunters."

"Dean's not Kate."

"All hunters are. Some are just in denial and some decide there's something bigger to kill first. At the end of the day, they don't trust us and we don't trust them. And that's never going to change."

Stiles crossed his arms, remaining pissed. Derek tried to set his focus on the road, but Stiles emotions were all consuming. Derek pulled over sharply, making Stiles' arms flail as his hands scrambled for something to hold on to. He threw the car in park and shut off the engine.

"Talk. Get it all out now. I'm not dealing with you moping the entire ride back."

"Cas listened to me, something that doesn't happen until everything goes wrong and there's no option except going out on a limb and trusting someone that's more often right than wrong. And Dean? He's... cool."

Derek laughed. Only humans would find hunters cool. Humans got distracted by the guns and the blood. Hunters were saviors in the eyes of humans and death in the eyes of everything else.

"Dean's not perfect. I'm not saying he's cool that because he's exactly who I want to be, but he could teach me a lot. Unlike you and everyone else in town, he taught me something that meant I could protect myself. And you guys worked well together. You can't deny that."

"It had nothing to do with him or me. When there's multiple targets, people who know what they're doing fall into a rhythm."
"You and Scott have never been able to fight together like that. Even the Argents don't fit that seamlessly together."

"You're imagining things. There was a line of targets and we each started at one end. It's not that difficult. Besides, distance killing takes far less skill. It's only about who shoots first."

"Okay. I'm dropping this, because it doesn't matter. They don't want anything to do with us and you don't want anything to do with them."

"Good. Focus on that."

Derek turned his key, waking his Camaro, and took off again. Stiles was fidgety again, his finger tapping against his cellphone. Derek ignored him. He wasn't going to turn around to help an emotionally screwed up pair of hunters. That couldn't end well. Derek recognized people that had lost too many people and they weren't smart people to be around.

"I don't think I said I was sorry," Stiles remarked suddenly.

"For what?"

"Most recently, making you trust hunters. Well, make you trust them as much as you trust anyone."

"You're young. You're supposed to be thinking of yourself. You saw a chance for something you wanted and took it."

"Yeah. I'm still sorry, though."

Derek could feel Stiles looking at him, but he kept his focus on the road.

"Next time, I want to do something that stupid, you're allowed to ditch me."

"I'm not leaving you halfway across the country."

"My dad made sure I left with my emergency credit card and made sure I knew it was okay to ditch you at any point and fly back."

"Then why haven't you?" Derek looked over at Stiles to make sure he could get a clear read on his honesty.

"It's a long drive. I wouldn't want to do it alone." He was telling the truth. "Even if your car is frisky."

Derek didn't bother holding back the small laugh in his throat. "You're still not driving."

"Oh come on!"

Rural Oklahoma

Night had come and Castiel still hadn't heard from Dean. His phone had no messages and Dean had uttered no prayers. Castiel had called Garth. Dean wasn't close with the small man like he was Bobby, but he did take cases from him on occasion. Garth was the only reason Castiel ever found Dean. Castiel had been lucky. Garth knew better than to lie to an angel.

Castiel landed a short distance away from Dean. It was dark, but Castiel could see the Anasazi
symbols etched into the ground. Dean had created a protective circle around himself and the fire he had built for warmth and light. Castiel remained in the shadows, leaving a large gap between them. Dean was armed and on alert.

"C'mon out," Dean called.

Castiel held back. He couldn't tell if Dean was goading the monster or knew of Castiel's arrival.

"I know you're there!" Dean barked, getting to his feet.

That was when Castiel saw it. The red Enochian repelling sigil was drawn on Dean's jeans. Castiel stepped into the ring of light, watching a drop of blood slip from Dean's clenched fist. Dean spotted him immediately. He was near single-minded. He wanted to kill the wendigo and remain alone, separated from everyone and everything that reminded him of what he lost. It wouldn't be long before he left the Impala to rust. His brain was focused on his instincts, ignoring everything else.

A dark smile splayed across Dean's lips, easily deducing why Castiel was holding back. If Dean activated the sigil, it wouldn't expel Castiel. He was too far away, but only just.

"Garth, right?"

Castiel gave a single nod.

"I'm fine, Cas." A lie. They both knew he was far from 'fine'. "Go play guardian angel for someone else."

"Dean..."

"I don't need you!" Dean shouted.

His words were intended to hurt and, had they been true, they would have. Tonight would be a night of lies. Dean moved forward, threatening, but Castiel matched his actions, slinking back into the darkness.

"Hell, I don't even want you here," Dean continued, after reaching back to pick up a burning branch to use as a torch following Castiel into the darkness.

Castiel cloaked his vessel, becoming invisible, remaining ready to flee a short distance before Dean could force him too far. Dean's footsteps quickened and boarded on frantic, yet remained precise and determined.

"Leave!" Dean roared. "There's nothing here for you. Because that's what I am. I'm not worth sticking around for. So get out. Go!"

Castiel watched as Dean past him, willing himself to remain silent.

"Dean."

Castiel turned. That was not him. But it caught Dean's attention.

"Dean," the voice said again, sounding hurt.

"Cas?" The forced anger had left his tone as signs of panic gathered in his eyes and Dean took off towards the false voice. "Cas!" He was desperate for a response.

Castiel landed in front of Dean, bracing himself for Dean to run into him, but Dean skidded to a
stop. Dean was breathing hard, looking far more wounded and broken than he had seen as of late.

"We are not alone out here. I suggest we wait for morning."

Dean retreated to his savage state, eliminating every sign of emotion from his face. He opened his fist, moving to place it over the sigil, but Castiel was quicker. He caught Dean's wrist and took off, putting Dean back to his protective circle. Dean rolled free of his grip and Castiel returned to the dark, before Dean could even blink.

Dean was feral, his blade lashing out at the air, before he had even registered where he was. He shouted out, finding his feet again, when the trees began to shake. He looked up, watching the pair of elongated beasts leap from branch to branch. They circled Dean, but were unable to touch him.

Dean was confused. Wendigos were solitary creatures, but this was a rare case. He drew his flare gun, trying to match their inhuman speed to no avail. They disappeared from his sight and Castiel prepared to intervene before Dean chased after them blindly, but he didn't dare face them alone, not even in this state.

A tree cracked behind Castiel and he turned to see the century-old flora crashing its way through its brethren. Castiel sidestepped it, looking on to make sure Dean dodged it as well. Dean jumped clear, the tree destroying the ancient markings and eliminating the sacred ground. One of the creatures leapt at Dean and Dean barely avoided the strike. He fired, but the wendigo was gone before the bullet left the gun.

"Get us out of here!" Dean shouted.

Castiel was moving before the order came, when he was struck across the chest and flung threw a series of trees. He needed a second to reset his spine, before his vessel could stand. Once again, Castiel went for Dean, but he was thrown into the earth and pinned in place with a once-human hand over his throat.

"Cas?" Dean called.

Castiel tried to respond, but he was weak and his vessel required air.

"Dean!" It was the false voice again, beckoning Dean in the opposite direction.

Dean hesitated, able to tell something was wrong. It cried out, screaming in Castiel's pitch and displaying marks of pain. But Dean knew it was not Castiel. He had never heard Castiel's cries of agony and no common beast could elicit those noises from a warrior of God. Castiel reached for the creature's head, he drew from his grace, intending to kill the beast, but settled for forcing the wendigo's mind to rest. It fell on top of him and Castiel pushed it aside.

Castiel called out Dean's name. His vessel's voice was broken and hoarse, but Dean knew it to be true. He found Castiel in the darkness, reaching for him, when the wendigo by them stirred. Dean's reflexes reacted without hesitation and he fired, engulfing the monster in fire, but that only angered the monster's companion.

It hauled Dean away, racing through the trees. Dean hollered in pain as blood began spilling to the forest's floor. Castiel chased after Dean, but he was drained. He fell behind as Dean's cries grew further apart, until he was left with nothing but a final prayer:

"I'm sorry."
Guilt

Chapter Notes

Chapter Warnings:
This chapter contains dark content, including graphic depictions of torture and a panic attack. Please contact me here if you need more information.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Castiel landed clumsily in Baptist Medical Center of Oklahoma, Dean's wrecked body falling from his blood-soaked arms. He kept listening, searching for a heartbeat, but Dean's body was silent and unmoving. A few people screamed and others rushed towards them. Castiel was dizzy, weak and disoriented. He felt a set of hands on him, but pushed them away, saying Dean's name.

They needed to help Dean.

Dean needed help.

Dean.

Something fine and precise slid through Castiel's skin. Castiel twisted to see a needle being removed from his arm. Drugs hadn't worked on Castiel in a long time, but these were proving to be highly effective. His skin tingled and his muscles fell slack, making his body useless and it wasn't long until his mind was forced to follow. He felt hands on him, pulling him away from Dean.

"Dean..."

Everything went black, numb and empty.

Three Hours Later

The drugs began to wear off and Castiel's mind began to wake. He heard the steady beep of a heart monitor. Castiel forced his eyes open, but couldn't see past the excessive white of the hospital.

"Naughty. Nasty."

Pressure came to his chest, bending his vessel's ribs to their limits.

"Earth is for those that walk."

More pressure and the cartilage began to snap.

"Filthy. Vile."

Fingers tugged on his hair, looking him over. It wasn't human. It was curious, evil and clever. Castiel's head was forced to the side, sharp nails, claws, testing the strength of the skin covering his throat.
"It walks. Why? Why does it walk?"

Castiel began to make out a shape before him, but it was quickly replaced with more white. A pillow. Something that eliminated the flow of oxygen to his vessel. Castiel lifted a hand to push it aside, but his movement was restricted. Cuffs bound his wrists to the railings of the bed.

"Traitor. Liar."

Castiel pulled harder, feeling the chain stretch against his growing strength.

"It cares. It shouldn't care."

The pressure left his body, the pillow lying uselessly over his face. The metal broke and Castiel pushed the pillow from his face. He snapped the second handcuff as easily as a human would thread and stood. He pulled the wires that were taped, pinched and inserted into his flesh.

"Weak. Broken."

Castiel looked for the voice, but he was alone.

"We'll teach it. Punish it. Little angels belong in the clouds."

He felt its presence grow nearer, but no matter which way Castiel turned, he could not find the creature.

"And deserve no pets."

Castiel was forced from the room, flung through the window. People were staring as Castiel got to his feet without pause. He tried to reenter the hospital, but couldn't make it past the emergency room. He looked past the gathering people. Sigils were marked on the building, permitting him from entering and from seeing Dean.

Abilene, Kansas

"You're doing it again," Derek remarked, flexing his grip on the steering wheel.

"What? Oh." Stiles shifted positions, chewing on his lip. Humming had become his most recent distraction and it was driving Derek nuts.

"I should have put you on a plane."

"You would have been bored without me."

"It would have been quiet." Derek shot him a glance. "And I'd be twice as far by now."

"I would have peed in a bottle."

Derek shuddered and Stiles smirked. He had ignored Stiles' pleas to stop in four different towns to use the bathroom, telling Stiles to hold it. But Stiles made Derek eat his words just by giving an empty water bottle the wrong look.

"You can't always tell me you've always used a toilet."

"No, but there's a difference between peeing on a tree and what you were going to do."
"I'll have you know, I have perfect aim."

He heard a noise and felt a shift in the air, but the road was too windy and narrow to look back for the cause. "I doubt it," he answered, continuing the conversation as his head twitching to the side.

Derek spotted Stiles feeling around the backseat.

"You're not peeing in my car."

Stiles scoffed, settling back into his seat with the empty canister. "Thanks."

That 'thanks' wasn't directed at Derek. His eyes flicked up at the rearview mirror to see Castiel sitting in the backseat.

"Hello," he said casually.

Stiles spun around quickly and obviously saw the same thing as Derek's mirror since he was now screaming. Derek barely heard the loud car horn screaming at him for drifting into oncoming traffic. He veered back into his lane, trying to find somewhere to pull over, but they were on a stretch of highway with no shoulders and narrow lanes.

Castiel waited patiently, blinking a couple times as Stiles continued screaming his head off.

Derek knew he couldn't be human. This was proof. There was no proven lore that supported any kind of teleportation. Derek was stealthy. He knew how to make it seem like he appeared in a room or behind a person, but that was just timing and silent footsteps. This was different. Castiel just materialized in a moving vehicle.

Stiles was still screaming. Derek had settled. If Castiel had come to kill them, they would have already been wrapped around a tree or led into an oncoming eighteen-wheeler. Derek raised a hand, clamping it over Stiles' mouth. It lessened the volume, but didn't stop Stiles at all. His mind was still shrieking, though it now sounded like he was wailing or moaning.

Derek opened his mouth, but Castiel cut him off.

"I will answer every question you have, but first you must help me."

"No. No, get out."

Stiles began trying to free his mouth, still screaming, but Derek kept his hand firmly in place.

"We're not interested."

"I only need one of you. I'll return him when we're done."

He put a pair of fingers to Stiles' forehead and they both vanished, before Derek could even consider stopping them. Derek craned his head over his shoulders, looking for any trace Castiel may have left behind, but there was nothing. He tried to find a spot to pull over or at the very least slow down, but the moment his speedometer dropped beneath 20MPH, the BMW behind him honked.

He heard that same faint noise and turned to look at the backseat again, only to see Castiel seated besides him.

"Bring him back," Derek growled.
"I will."
"Now."

"No, but I would like to offer you the chance to join us."

"Where is he?"

"Psychiatrics ward. Somewhere screaming isn't unusual. Many people screamed for hours at the mental hospital I stayed at. It made it difficult to hear the bees at times."

Derek reached over, fisting his hand in Castiel's trench coat and jerking him closer, and gave the hunter one of his worst death glares.

"Bring him back. Right now."

Castiel cocked his head to the side and Derek glanced back at the road to make sure they didn't wind up driving through the surrounding forest. Castiel plucked his fingers free like he wasn't using his werewolf strength to help make him more intimidating. Derek's glare faltered, replaced by confusion.

"Will you come?"

"Do I have a choice?" Derek asked, sparing as much of his attention from the road as he could.

"Of course. Dean taught me that we all have the ability to choose our path. You may come with me and you can help me or you can continue driving and I will return Stiles to you when I am finished with him."

"That's no choice."

"I said you had a choice. Not that you would like your options."

Derek huffed, pulling his hand free and returning it to the steering wheel before his wolf decided to throw logic and Castiel through the door.

"Baptist Medical Center of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City."

Derek opened his mouth to fight, but he was alone.

Hell

There were two types of excruciating pain. The one made a man scream. It didn't matter how strong or how accustomed to torture he had become. The other was infinitely worse. The pain was so severe the human brain couldn't comprehend it.

Dean was experiencing the latter.

It would be easier to forget to breathe all together and die, but that wasn't a possibility. He didn't have control of his body. He couldn't move, but he didn't need to. Dean recognized the pain all too well. No amount of time would ever erase the memories of this.

A tendon was being pulled out of his back. The action was so precisely done that it looked like pealing off duct tape. He felt the tendon stretched right to the edge of breaking as each anchor
holding the muscle in place gave out. He waited for the organ to snap like a rubber band, but that
never happened. The useless body part hung against his back.

Air rushed into his lungs, each breath causing more pain than the last. Dean was shaking. The
chains that kept him in place offered enough lenience that his body believed it was worthwhile to
struggle. He wouldn't get free and he couldn't get away from everything else that was about to
happen.

But that was the point.

Dean forced his breathing to steady and slow. He had just about drowned out the pain, when a
hook snaked between his ribs. Dean felt the scream in his throat, but the noise got lost when the
metal pulled against his flesh, dragging his body to the side.

"Dean, Dean, Dean," a gravely voice drawled against his ear. "You let that heavenly filth undo
everything I taught you."

Alastair stepped into view. He wasn't in a vessel. There wasn't a body for miles or whatever the
distance between hell and earth was. But souls took the form of their bodies and demons looked
however they wished. He appeared as himself, or at least what Dean assumed to be himself. He
wasn't dressed as anyone Dean knew topside and it was Alastair's favourite form to take.

Dean tried to focus, tried to keep his face from showing pain, but Alastair tugged on the hook,
ruining any sign of composure Dean might have mustered.

"No need to put on a tough face," Alastair scolded, smacking Dean's cheek tauntingly. "You're
home."

"This isn't real," Dean said, forcing himself to smile and meet the white eyes with his own.

Alastair laughed. "You never really escaped, Dean. You know that."

A gentle set of fingertips travelled through Dean's hair. It was a tease, trying to make Dean relax,
but he refused. He knew better than to believe Alastair was done. There weren't days and nights in
hell. He never slept and never suffered sleep deprivation. Alastair only stopped when he was bored
or when Dean finally started to adjust to the pain.

"Not all of you. I kept enough of you that you'd end up back here eventually."

Dean kept his mind on the rusty metal lodged inside of him, but his body longed to lose itself in
the soft touch. "You're dead."

"If that were true, we would have met in Purgatory. And I would have made you destroy your own
body. Carve out that tattoo..." Alastair sliced the marked skin from his chest, dangling the flesh in
front of Dean's eyes. "Cut through every," a blade dragged across Dean's third rib with expert
precision "mark that angel left." Alastair lifted the jagged edge, skipping a few inches, before
starting in on its mirror. "Except the ones that help me keep you all to myself."

Dean felt his lips twitch and his teeth grit against one another in sheer determination to keep silent.

"That pesky little angel has undone so much of my work." Alastair ripped the hook from his side,
spilling muscle, blood and whatever else was meant to stay inside him. "Don't worry. I'll fix you."
His hand settled on Dean's jaw, squeezing the bone until it was on the verge of snapping. "I'll
hollow you out and make you whole again."
“You're not real.”

“Then what am I? What else knows how to open you up like this?”

Alastair's attention dropped to Dean's torso again, carving through more of the markings on his ribs. The pain was real. No matter how much Dean wanted to believe this was a lie. It didn't change the truth.

This was real.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Derek pushed through the series of doors that led to the psychiatrics wing. He couldn't see Stiles, but Castiel was seated at one of the tables, playing Jenga.

"Where is he?" Derek snarled, striding over to him.

Castiel ignored him, focusing on removing his next piece. Derek quickly grew impatient, slapping his hand away and making the tower topple. Castiel's opponent started wailing.

"That was uncalled for," Castiel said calmly.

"You took Stiles. You're lucky you still have your arms."

A couple orderlies eyed them. Screaming wasn't strange. Three others were already testing their lungs. Castiel blended in with his rumpled coat and slouched posture, but Derek stuck out like a sore thumb. There were only two other visitors around so he was getting plenty of focus from those on duty.

Castiel picked up the empty Jenga box and turned it over. A new perfect tower formed on the table. His opponent stopped crying and began playing again. Castiel took out a piece of paper, offering it to Derek.

"He's looking for these sigils. They need to be broken."

Derek ignored the paper and moved for the door only to have Castiel cut him off, seemingly appearing out of thin air.

"You choose to come here. So did Stiles. Neither of you are leaving until the sigils are down."

"All you hunters think you can use everyone, pull people into your messes, but you won't do it to us."

There was a shift in Castiel's eyes as a near smile crept over his lips. Derek's human side saw arrogance, but his wolf knew there was more. Castiel wasn't human and he was dangerous, more dangerous than Derek's mind could grasp.

"Dean was hurt and something here is keeping me from him. It's threatened him and our bond is broken." Castiel exhaled and the strength that gathered in his body dissipated. "I do not wish to threaten you, but I am happy to provide you with a reason to--" Castiel ignored the rest of his sentence and turned, looking at the door behind him. Derek followed his eyes to see Stiles pushing into the room.

"You're not finished," Castiel reacted.
"I found six of this one, but none of the other," Stiles answered. "It's not everything, but at least you can get in."

He held the door open and Castiel stepped through it, eyes darting around the hallway.

"What?" Stiles asked.

"Our bond has not reformed."

"That's probably just the other markings, right?" Stiles was at Castiel's side, half running to keep up with the hunter's strides.

"There are other reasons for it to be broken," Castiel answered, checking each room he passed.

"Such as?"

"Death."

Stiles stopped immediately. He glanced back at Derek, before chasing after Castiel again. "But Dean can't be dead."

"It wouldn't be the first time."

"So him dying is normal. You could still save him."

"I've never been able to cure death."

Castiel reached for the next door, when he crumpled to the floor. Stiles was at his side. Derek wasn't far behind, helping Cas back to his feet.

"What is it?" Stiles asked.

"His soul is being tortured."

Hell

Dean stirred when the ligaments in his shoulder finally gave out. The hook holding him upright finally tore through his muscle, leaving him dangling by barbed wire that wound around his opposite arm. It shredded through every layer of flesh, making his blood gush out. Dean moaned, his broken jaw stopping him from forming any actual words.

Dean swung in his bindings, feeling more of his skin get destroyed. Dean looked around for Alastair, but he only saw the lightning and smoke that made up the abyss of Hell. He couldn’t see well. He had a gash near his left eye, swelling the eyelid shut.

He wanted to believe this was a nightmare, a memory of what was, but none of his nightmares ever lasted this long. Two months had passed, maybe more, maybe less. Dean wasn't sure. He had had every piece of his body destroyed and rebuilt in every way imaginable. He'd been left strung up with hooks for the past few hours, each of them pulling against his flesh until it finally gave out. He was down to two final hooks and the barbed wire to keep him suspended.

Every sense Dean had was over stimulated by the torture. He tried desperately to believe this wasn't real. He needed this to be a nightmare, because reality was so much worse. There was no one coming for him. Sam couldn't save him. He didn't even know to save him or how. And Cas
needed an army of angels to reach him the last time. And there was no army coming this time.

If this was real, this was it.

Eternity in hell.

There was no escaping. Alastair used to pretend to make mistakes when he left Dean chained up alone. He'd spend days and sometimes weeks running. He got nowhere and saw no one. Eventually, Alastair would show up with his cold smile, put Dean back on the rack and punish him for running. After the third time, Dean stopped trying. He didn't fight to get free and he didn't run when he fell to the seemingly no existent floor beneath his feet.

Dean pulled at his remaining bindings, trying to find any reprieve from the pain, but the barbed wire snagged on his bone. He shut his eyes, relaxing into the pain. As depressing as it was, Dean understood pain. After the last couple of years on earth, he was relieved that this pain was entirely physical.

Few people truly deserved this damnation. Dean would have taken this place in a heartbeat if it meant sparing his father or Sammy, but there was only one deal to be made in Hell. Suffer or make others suffer. An hour with Alastair would make most crack. Dean was sure of it. But his father held out, was still holding out. People had told him he was a better man than his father, but his father never broke. He escaped.

No matter how satisfying torturing wound up being, Dean wouldn't give in this time. He may have failed the first time, but he would do his father proud this time.

"Dean."

He smiled at the familiar sound of Cas's voice. It rang through his head so clearly. He tried to match it to the thousand times Cas had said his name on earth, but it didn't match a single memory. Dean hadn't appreciated how many ways Cas said his name on earth. Each time was an entire speech. This tone was somber. It must have been a time Dean let his friend down.

He felt a hand on his cheek. The pain forcing his left eye shut dissipated and his jaw was repaired. Confused, Dean let his eyelids part only to see a pair of familiar blue eyes boring into his. It couldn't be real, but Dean wouldn't let himself believe the angel was truly there. Hallucinations were a new thing. Alastair didn't allow for distractions.

Cas's head tilted, eyes actually showing signs of concern, as he reached for one of Dean's mangled wrists. Dean flinched and grit his teeth as Cas broke the barbed wire and began carefully unwrapping it and pulling it from Dean's flesh.

"No." Dean couldn't manage another word. His voice was wrecked from screaming and everything Alastair forced down his throat.

But Cas ignored him, turning his attention to unbind Dean's other arm. He struggled, but Dean was outmatched by his own hallucination. Dean swung his useless arm out only to hear a sickening squish of loose flesh. Cas took his arm, holding it gently as to not cause anymore damage.

"I'm getting you out of here," Cas says, his eyes returning to Dean's.

Dean just stared at him, wondering how Sam handled Lucifer following him around for months. It had been two minutes, tops, and Dean already wanted to give in and believe Cas was really there. Hope was just such a horrible thing to have in Hell. He held onto hope for a over decade waiting for Sam to save him and Alastair used it against him. Cas couldn't be real.
"I'm real." Cas raised Dean's arm, letting him watch as his skin knitted itself back together.

"Cas."

He smiled up at Dean, releasing his grip and setting to work on the remaining hooks and sharpened wires.

"How?"

"Not easily."

Dean laughed, regretting the action instantly as the vibrations spread through his body. Cas took Dean's weight, his fingers working the retched metal from his body. Dean could feel pieces of his body healing. This wasn't the same instant repair he was used to. He caught the flash of weakness across Cas's face as the angel struggled to connect the bones where his foot met his ankle.

"Cas?"

"I'll be fine." His words were sharp.

No matter how much Dean wanted to fight him, to tell Cas to save himself, Dean honestly didn't have the strength. He nodded and Cas continued his work, eliminating the worst of his injuries and ignoring the bruises that would heal soon enough. Cas pushed Dean upright. He swayed at first, but Cas steadied him, eyes remaining on Dean until he was certain Dean could stand on his own.

He didn't remember much from the last time he was saved. Dean was filleting some nameless man on the rack, when a storm came. It was an absolute clash of dark clouds and white lightning. Alastair ignored it all, his smile ever reassuring as he told Dean to continue. So he did, relishing the screams from his victim.

Dean remembered Alastair's hand on his shoulder and the rest was a blur. He saw faces in light and claws from the darkness. Then his body underwent the most vicious tug-of-war. Claws tore through his skin and took hold of his bone, pulling him down. While searing pain found its way inside him without ever touching his flesh or muscle.

Then there was a new hand on his shoulder, it burned so hot and so deep that Dean screamed louder than he ever did at Alastair's hand. After he blacked out, the pain was gone. Everything he had come to know was gone.

"Dean, we need to--"

There was a flash of light and Cas's body fell against him. Dean fell to his knees under the new weight when he saw Alastair standing before him with a blood-covered angelic blade.

"No. No, no, no. Cas."

Dean scrambled to take hold of the angel's head, desperate to see those blue eyes. Cas couldn't focus on him. Dean looked down to see light spilling from Cas's side. Alastair ripped Cas from Dean's arms, throwing him to the floor. Dean reached for him, but a hook snagged between the bones of his shin, tethering him in place.

"I knew he'd come for you." Alastair smiled and gripped Cas's hair, bending his neck back and taking his eyes from Dean. "He's been with you too long. Only Winchesters are this self-sacrificing."
Cas struggled, lashing out at Alastair, but it did nothing. Dean watched the change wash over the angel as he gave up. His body went loose and his eyes found Dean's. Dean had only seen the look before. Sam offered it to him, before jumping in the Pit. His father flashed it at him before he dropped dead.

But Dean couldn't let another person suffer for him.

"Please. Let him go. I'll be good."

"You'll be good anyways."

Dean shouted out the angel's name, but it did nothing. This was it. A flash of absolutely pure white light shot out in every direction, before Alastair sent Cas's body tumbling into the abyss. Dean crumpled, watching until there was nothing left of him. Alastair could make a torture last for all eternity, but he never offered hope. It was the first thing he took and something he never gave back.

"What have I always told you, Dean?"

He didn't answer. He didn't care. Alastair could do whatever he wanted and Dean wouldn't put up a fight. Alastair gripped what was left of his shirt, hauling Dean back to his feet. He was pliant, numb, but that didn't stop the demon. He found new places for hooks, but Dean didn't make a noise, didn't cringe.

He was numb.

Completely numb.

Alastair repeated his question, "What have I always told you?"

"No distractions."

Alastair's human appearance faded. He no longer looked like flesh and bone, but a body of black smoke. Dean could make out the cruel smile and white eyes. His fingers were long and more like claws than anything human. Dean let his head fall forward, trying to find relief in the physical pain, but his mind and body weren't connecting. He could see the hooks through his body, but felt nothing.

Blood dripped past his left eye, before it swelled shut again. Dean remained mute and motionless as Alastair undid each of Cas's repairs. After hours of fresh cuts and broken bones, Alastair grew truly violent. His actions weren't meant to obtain silence; they were meant to make Dean scream, but Dean wasn't cooperating.

Dean shut his eyes, his body unfazed as he relaxed into his bindings. He could feel his skin split apart under Alastair's blade, but it didn't hurt. Alastair's fists came next, smudging bruises across his ribs and making his flesh tear where the hooks pierced him. His bones fractured, splintered and separated. He shut off his mind, getting the closest he ever got to sleep.

That was when he heard it.

"Dean."

It wasn't like the last time. Cas's voice was distant. It was like he was miles away. Something Dean wasn't supposed to hear.
"Wake up."

Dean opened his eyes, prepared to see Alastair's anger, but he was alone. He felt a hand on his shoulder, but there was no one there.

"Wake up." His voice was close, urgent.

His restraints vanished and Dean hit the floor hard. He tried to move, but he slipped in the pool of blood leaking from him. Dean scrambled, trying to make sense of everything, but it all turned dark.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Dean wasn't breathing.

Not on his own anyways.

One of his eyes was hidden under a bandage and there were several tiny nicks on his face that had been cleaned and left to heal on their own. There was a tube down his throat and Stiles could literally see the mechanical lung pushing oxygen into Dean's body. His chest moved in perfect synchronization with the machine, responding to the forced air, but his body didn't take over. There was an IV inserted in his arm and most of his body was hidden with bloodied bandages and thick casts.

He didn't look like Dean. Sure, Stiles always saw signs of the broken man that Dean worked so hard to hide, but his body wasn't broken. He had the face of a male model, along with the muscles. His eating habits were more like Stiles so he didn't have the same defined airbrushed abs as Derek, but they were there.

Cas was at his side, hand on his shoulder as he looked down at the hunter. Stiles looked at Derek, who had barely taken more than a step into the hospital room. Stiles nodded at Cas, insisting Derek talk to him, but Derek shook his head. Of course, he would. Derek didn't talk about feelings. Stiles was an idiot for even asking.

"What happened?" Stiles questioned, trying to distract himself from the constant beeps mapping Dean's heartbeat. It was a sound he grew far too familiar with as a kid and still brought back memories he wanted to keep buried.

"Wendigos," Cas answered. "I was weak and Dean was overwhelmed. I tried to save him, but it's a useless action to try to save someone that doesn't want to be saved."

"You said he was being tortured. This is healing, not torture," Derek pointed out.

"He's worse than when I left," Cas said. "And his soul believes it is in Hell."

"Plenty of people have had the nightmare of being in Hell."

"Yes, but few have been there." Cas turned, approaching Stiles and Derek. "The remaining sigils must be removed."

"I can't find them," Stiles reminded.

"Then you will stay here and watch over Dean. If anything happens, call Derek. Don't try to handle things yourself."
"He got you in. You don't need us."

"I cannot destroy the sigils."

"We're helping," Stiles decided. "You don't owe them everything, but we're not walking away from this."

"Fine. But you call if anything comes in here."

"Yeah, yeah. Play damsel-in-distress. Got it."

Derek gave him a final look, warning Stiles to comply, before leaving with Cas.

Stiles flopped into the chair by Dean's bed, his hands drumming on the armrests. He should have gone with Cas. He could have pointed out everywhere he looked and wouldn't be here. In a hospital room that was the same as every other one. It looked and smelt the same. Hell, it even felt the same. And Stiles had had enough bad memories of hospitals to last a life time.

"Weak. Broken."

Stiles looked over his shoulder. The voice was close. But he only saw the bare wall.

"It's helping the angel. Why does it do that?"

He got up, checking under Dean's bed, the bathroom and anywhere else Stiles could imagine someone hiding, but he and Dean were alone.

"Useless. Helpless."

Stiles pushed open the door to the hallway, but the closest doctor was at the end of the hallway, consoling a crying woman that Stiles could barely hear.

"Bad enough the angel took one pet. Now it wants three."

"Think you got the wrong room," Stiles said, his eyes darting around the room again. "No one here's an angel. We're far from it."

"It talks to us. Such a smelly thing has no right."

"Hey! I do not--" Stiles sniffed under his arm and cut himself off. "Wow. I should to apologize to Derek for that."

"Derek... That's not the angel."

Stiles scoffed. "No. None of us are angels. So why don't you show yourself and we can have a talk."

"Arrogant. Stupid."

"I may stink right now. But I'm not stupid. So come out. Let's talk."

Stiles turned again, trying to follow the voice, but it felt like it came from everywhere. It filled his ears and pressed against his skin from the inside. It wasn't human, couldn't be human. He felt a claw trace his ear and flinched, shooting away from the sensation, but he was still alone.

"It wants to talk to us."
"Face to face," Stiles clarified. "I want to see you."

"See us?" There was a dangerous shift in its voice, making Stiles gulp.

"Yeah. I like knowing what I'm talk--"

His feet were yanked out from underneath him and his head cracked against the base of Dean's bed, before hitting the floor hard. He put a hand to the already forming bump and it was throbbing. Then there was a weight on his back, pressing him into the tile.

"It can't see us." The voice was at his ear and there were claws on his head, giving no warning before throwing Stiles' head against the ground.

"No one sees us."

The weight grew heavier, crushing his torso. He cried out, but his head was only slammed into the floor, disorientating him. His vision blurred and the room spun. His hands scrambled to take hold of anything, but the floor was too smooth and the bed was just out of reach. He kept struggling, until his skull was smashed downwards again. Spots flickered in his vision and his motor skills were failing.

"Its mother died in a room like this."

He tried to fight, but the weight only grew, his ribs bruising and threatening to snap. Stiles whimpered, his lungs too compressed to manage screaming.

"Slowly. Terribly."

Stiles thrashed again, when he heard a clear snap from his torso.

"It laughed with friends, while she grew weak. It made her weak, made her die."

"Stop it," Stile growled.

"It blames itself. Good. Good. It should." The claws settled near his eyes, sharp points applying pressure to the socket. "It knows the truth." It felt like the voice was so close it was coming from Stiles' mind. "It killed her."

"No."

Stiles squeezed his eyes shut, needing to believe that would make a difference, but his mind was drudging up memories. He could see his mother with a sunken face and greyed eyes. Stiles believed the raised corners of her mouth when he was young, but it wasn't long before he figured out the truth. She smiled for his benefit, not her own. When he looked back on his memories, he saw the pained cringes when he crawled into bed with her. He still felt the wounded shudder that shot through her body as she tried to hold him like she did when he was younger.

"It made her suffer."

Stiles managed to cover his ears, doing everything he could to save himself. He could feel the panic attack building. Air stopped going to his lungs. His chest felt tight, tighter than the pressure the creature forced on him. He tried hard to breathe slowly, to count, to do anything the doctors told him to when he felt a panic attack coming.

"Now its father hates it. Blames it. He's smart. He knows who's to blame."
He was shaking, his heart beating so hard it hurt. Stiles squeezed his eyes tighter, trying to think of anything else, but it wasn't working. He could hear the labored breaths his mother took near the end. It sounded more like gasping than breathing.

Stiles tried to claw his way into the floor, desperate to hide. He was irrational. He knew that, but that only worked him up more. He couldn't convince himself that things were going to be okay. His heartbeat turned impossibly fast and Stiles felt like he was going to die. He couldn't breathe. No matter how hard he scrambled for control, he failed, only working himself up more.

He was dizzy from the adrenaline and panic. He barely noticed that the additional pressure was gone until a hand clasped his arm, hauling him up. Stiles tried to find his feet, but nothing made sense. He felt his back against the wall and hands on both his shoulders. He flailed, lashing out, because he had to get away, had to get free.

"Stiles!"

Derek wasn't angry, but he was loud and Stiles couldn't stop. He kept thrashing and hitting Derek until he couldn't anymore. Derek's hands encircled his wrists. There was another blur of conversation and Stiles could make out the sound of Cas's, but his heart was beating so loud he couldn't hear the words. Then, Stiles felt a steady heartbeat beneath his palm.

"Look at me!" He was calm, but still demanding. "I've got you." Derek's voice was close and Stiles followed it to see his eyes.

They weren't red. He expected them to be red. His instincts were telling him he was going to die, but they were wrong. Derek wasn't panicking. He was calm.

"I've got you," he repeated. "You hear me?"

Stiles nodded hurriedly, his eyes dropping to his hand and watching it move with the rise and fall of Derek's chest.

"Good. Listen to my heart."

Stiles swallowed, his fingers tightening on Derek's shirt as he pushed the base of his palm harder against his heartbeat, needing to feel the steady rhythm.

"Now breathe with me."

Derek breathed in deeply, keeping his chest inflated until Stiles did the same. He held it for a moment, before letting it out. Derek repeated the action, until Stiles was breathing normally on his own. Stiles removed his hands from Derek, finding his other hand was fisted in Derek's sleeve. Derek eyed him for a final moment, before rolling to his feet. Stiles ran a hand down his face and it came away wet. He was drenched in a cold sweat and his eyes were wet. He looked around, expecting to see some sort of carcass ripped to shreds by Derek, but there were no traces of blood.

"I can't wake him," Cas announced, drawing Stiles' attention. "I should be able to wake him." He was at Dean's side with a hand laid on the hunter's attention. "You can't wake

"He's in a coma," Derek countered, finally willing to look away from Stiles. "You can't wake
people up from that."

"I can." Cas dropped his hand, turning away from Dean. "Or, I suppose, I could." He looked at Stiles for a moment and his eyebrows knitted together.

Stiles backed up, but Cas didn't stop his advance. Cas touched Stiles' temple and Stiles flinched, letting out a whimper. It hurt. It was obviously one of the places his skull had smashed. Then it was fine. Stiles put a hand to the bump, but there wasn't one.

"How did..." Stiles looked at Cas.

"I'm an angel."

"An angel?" Stiles was trying hard not to judge, but angels couldn't possibly exist in this world.

"Yes. I'm an angel of..." He paused, his eyes emptying, and Stiles saw something inside him break, "no one." The way he began, it sounded like a sentence he had said a million times over. Like a series of words that left his mouth as easily as breathing. "Not anymore."

"By angel, you mean you're his angel. As in, someone that keeps him safe, right?"

"I was part of the garrison that saved him from Hell and it was my hand that put his body back together. But I was not made for Dean."

"Yeah, but there's no such thing as angels." He glanced at Derek, who wasn't sure what to make of the situation. "You're not an angel."

"An angel is a warrior of God. That's what I was. But he left and I rebelled to stop the apocalypse."

"You stopped the apocalypse?"

"I helped, yes."

"You weren't kidding about spending time in a mental institution." Stiles scrubbed a hand down his face, stepping towards Derek, who was practically radiating distrust, and dropped his voice to a whisper, "That bestiary Peter has... is there anything about angels?"

"No." Derek's teeth were grit tight together, eyes never leaving Cas's.

"Okay. What's in there that can teleport?"

Derek's head cocked slightly, mentally going through what he remembered from the hundreds of entries on his uncle's laptop.

Then, the blinds snapped shut, the lights in the ceiling shattered in quick succession and every computer screen looked like it was about to short-circuit. Derek tensed and his hand closed on Stiles shoulder, pushing him behind him. Stiles went willingly as he looked at Cas. His eyes were bright blue, glowing. Even Derek's eyes never shone like that. Lights flickered, even though not a single bulb remained, before the room filled with actual white light. Not the artificial white, but pure white light. Stiles watched as the shadows of wings spread out across the wall behind Cas.

"I am an angel." Cas stepped forward and the shadows grew larger, the absence of light truly acting like a pair of wings.

Derek circled him, his posture looking almost animalistic even though Stiles couldn't see his claws or fangs. He was looking Cas over and Cas didn't react. Stiles did the same. Of course, he didn't
bother trying to look intimidating. Any bad ass image he had built was gone after his panic attack. Honestly, Stiles didn't care. Cas intimidated him as much as Derek. Sure, they could both kill him without much effort, but that didn't mean they would.

Right now, Stiles was impressed. No matter what angle he looked at, the shadows lined up. It was honestly like Cas had wings that only light could see. And not manmade light. The machines may have been working, but whatever lit the room was Cas's doing. There were no tears in the fabric, no place for his wings to emerge.

Everything went black, before the blinds slid open, refilling the room with sunlight. Cas's pose relaxed and his eyes returned to their normal overly blue hue. Derek remained tense, looking Cas over. It took Stiles a moment, before he figured out what he was doing. Derek was searching for weakness, wanting something that would give him an advantage.

A pointed bar of silver slid from Cas's sleeve and he caught it. Stiles looked at it, figuring out it a blade. It was impossibly smooth and deceptively sharp. Cas turned to face Derek and Derek stopped his circling stalk, watching Cas even more closely. Stiles considered stepping in, but Cas changed his grip on the dagger. He took a step towards Derek and it was innocent and unthreatening.

"I'd like you trust me and I know that can't happen before you accept that I trust you." Cas held out the short sword to Derek, raising his eyes to meet his.

"That is the only thing that can kill an angel."

Derek took the blade, inspecting it. "You're asking me to trust you over something I can't test." He handed the knife back. "I don't care if you trust me. When this thing is dead, we're gone and you're going to forget we exist."

"Derek--"

"We have enough to deal with. We don't need more hunters in our lives. Especially those delusional enough to mess with witchcraft or whatever it is you've done."

"I'm no witch."

"I don't care what you are. All I know is angels don't exist. But if you want to watch over people, fine. Keep them safe. Call me if you can't manage that."

Derek raged out without another word in search of whatever it was they were after. Cas moved to the foot of Dean's bed, watching the hunter sleep. Stiles waited for him to do something, but Cas just continued staring.

Stiles sat down in the chair again, pulling the bag of Dean's personal effects into his lap. He began picking through the things. Stiles pulled out set of keys. And by set he meant two. His keychain had two keys and a bullet, a huge bullet. His wallet had nothing but cash and a harsh slash through the worn leather. There was blood on it. Most had rolled off, but the frayed bits had been dyed red. Stiles looked up at Cas again. He hadn't moved.

"You do this a lot, don't you?"

"Yes."

Cas didn't elaborate. Dean probably didn't approve of the nighttime staring routine. Stiles couldn't blame him. It was creepy, but it wasn't meant to be. Cas believed Dean was someone that needed
watching over and took it upon himself to do so.

Stiles reached in, pulling out the lighter. It was a nice one, nicer than most of the stuff Dean seemed to have. It wasn't the cheap use six times and throw out kind. It was refillable and was silver plated. There were a few light scratches on it; it was well used. Stiles turned it over to see the initials S. W. carved into the bottom.

"Did he have a kid?" Stiles asked.

Cas looked over, eyeing the lighter for a moment, before turning his attention back to Dean. "It was his brother's."

"Is his brother a hunter too?"

"Not anymore."

"Oh." Stiles put the lighter down gently and pulled out the last article.

An old journal. Stiles opened it and began flipping through the pages. There were a few photos paperclipped in place. None of them were recent. There were a couple boys, one of which could have been Dean, but anyone over the age of twenty definitely wasn't Dean or Cas. Stiles continued on, skimming over the attached news articles, but focusing more on what was written. It was a bestiary. There were drawings and markings and things Stiles hadn't come across in anything he read back home.

Stiles flipped through quickly. There wasn't any real order to it. Most of it was written by the same person, but there were extra notes and additions in at least two different handwritings. Pages were split into different creatures, but it wasn't alphabetical. Stiles watched for keywords, before finally finding the section on werewolves. He glanced up at Cas, but he still wasn't paying any attention to him. Stiles changed his position, tilting the book so Cas couldn't see what he was reading.

Whatever Dean was calling a werewolf wasn't the same as Derek, Scott and everyone else back home. There were enough notes to suggest that Dean had killed more than a few of these creatures in his life. People infected had no idea and every theory of a cure had been scratched out. They would turn at night during the lunar cycle and become malicious and deadly. They had no control, ate human hearts, and no memory of it when they woke up.

There was a sketch, but it was rough. Allison seemed to be the only hunter with any drawing talent. The creatures had similarities to Derek. Teeth turned into fangs and nails became claws and there was attention drawn to the eyes. Unlike Derek and the rest of the werewolves passing through Beacon Hills, these things didn't get intense sideburns and lose their eyebrows when they shifted.

They could be killed with a silver bullet to the heart, extreme dismemberment and something called vamptonite, but there was a question mark beside that so Dean must not have tested that himself. There was no mention of any pack mentality or sign that someone could be born a werewolf, but any werewolf could turn a human.

Stiles about to start reading the words squeezed in as an afterthought when he heard a voice. He shot to his feet, pressing his back against the wall and hurrying to look for it. Cas looked over at him and pushed open the door, letting Stiles hear it was only a doctor page. Stiles let out the breath he was holding and Cas picked up the journal, putting back the pages that nearly fell out and treating it with the utmost care.

"Is Derek safe on his own?" Stiles asked.
"This creature has shielded itself from me. It's clever and it knows what I am, what I've done."

"And what have you done?"

"Many things." He sighed. "But unlike others, I've made my peace. This monster feeds off guilt and pain. So it's turned to Dean. His father put far too much on his shoulders and, no matter how much he's done, Dean dwells on his failures."

"And Derek is King of Man Pain. He'd be a feast for this thing." Stiles was to the door before he even realized it. "We have to find him."

"Derek hasn't found anything. Either this creature is afraid of him or doesn't know of his title."

"So it's killable."

"Yes. I just don't know how and I've yet to see it."

"It's strong. Damn near smashed my head to pieces and crushed my ribs."

"That's not a difficult feat."

"What-- Sure, it is."

"Perhaps for humans, but many monsters find no struggle in breaking human bones. I could fracture all twenty-six bones in your foot merely by stepping on it."

Stiles shifted his weight, wishing he had something sufficient to cover his feet.

"But I don't wish to break any of your bones."

Stiles smiled. "Good. Because I like my bones without fractures."

The door opened by Stiles, startling him. A nurse stepped in, looking just as surprised as Stiles.

"Do you two know our John Doe?" she asked.

"Yes, very well," Cas answered.

"Thank, god." She picked up the chart hanging off the base of Dean's bed. "We could use some medical background on him."

The machine tracking Dean's heartbeat started freaking out. His heart rate was skyrocketing. The nurse ran for the intercom at the wall, calling in a code. Cas leant over Dean, his hand gripping Dean's shoulder. Stiles watched the desperation fill his eyes as he tried again to wake him.

It wasn't long until more people came in.

"You need to leave," one of the new nurses said, pulling at Cas's arm.

"No," Cas snapped.

"Sir, we are going to do everything we can, but you need to leave."

"I said, 'no'."

Stiles recognized the tone and the glare in Cas's eyes. Angel or not, he wasn't human. He was seeing the side of Cas that was pure instinct. All that mattered to him was staying at Dean's side.
"Cas, we'll find Derek. The doctors will do what they can and so will we." His voice seemed to make it through, because Cas gave him a small nod.

A couple orderlies backed Stiles up, making sure they both left. The door began to shut, when Dean's body seized, arching off the bed. The sling elevating his leg gave way under the weight and Stiles heard the crack as his leg hit the mattress. Red leaked from the bandages as the stitches broke in the involuntary struggle. One of the doctors pulled out a needle and injected Dean and his body fell slack.

"It's a medically induced coma." Stiles realized. "That's why you couldn't wake him."

"Find Derek. I'm going to stay with Dean. If you find the creature, pray to me. I will hear you."

"But you--" Stiles blinked and Cas was gone.

Stiles peered into the room, but saw nothing. He looked to Dean's heart rate monitor, watching his pulse steady. He forced himself to go.

Sioux Falls

Dean was standing by a lake. It was familiar, but his mind was hazy. It wasn't scenic or majestic by any means. If anything, Dean found it depressing. He wandered to the edge of the water. It was calm, utterly undisturbed.

He heard a staggered set of footsteps, which was followed by the sound of metal snapping. Dean looked over his shoulder, seeing Cas dripping red and black. This was the lake that claimed Cas and he was watching it happen all over again. He passed Dean, completely within his reach, but Dean did nothing. He simply watched Cas enter the water, walking deeper.

Himself, Sam and Bobby sprinted through the gate, stopping behind the rocks as Cas slipped the surface. Dean watched the whirlpool that consumed Cas, still frozen in place as he felt his younger self's chest snap and break along with his own, before blackness spread through the water. He ignored the exchange of words, stepping closer to the water and watching Cas's jacket surface and float towards shore.

It wasn't long before his counterpart pulled the drenched and worn jacket from the water, folding it carefully and trying so hard to let go. They left and Dean expected whatever brought out this memory to force him after them, but he remained by the lake. Dean swallowed, turning back to the water.

It wasn't calm. The water rippled and stirred. A hand breached the surface, before its owner was hauled back to the deep. Instinct finally took over. Dean shed his coat and rushed into the water, diving beneath the surface. He forced his eyes open to see Cas pinned to the bottom of the lake, literally getting shredded alive.

Black claws of smoke tore his skin, turning the water red around Cas. Dean swam for him, but got no closer. He was simply left to watch as pieces of Cas were cut from his body, left to float off into the water. Cas thrashed as best he could, desperate to get free, but was trapped. The claws took to his neck and head, ripping away more and more, until Cas's body fell limp. The leviathans continued savaging, waiting until there was little left of Cas's form, before mixing with the water and disappearing.

Dean sunk to the bottom, watching Cas's body slowly piece itself back together. He wanted to
reach out, but he couldn't find the strength.

It felt like hours before there was enough flesh on Castiel's body to draw him to the surface. Dean followed, watching the water push Cas's body to land. Dean sat there with him, waiting for him to wake. He couldn't believe he never even checked to make sure Cas was really gone. Sure, the idiot had made a mistake. But he was family and he didn't deserve this.

It was the next day before Cas opened his eyes, looking lost and confused. He stood, not knowing what else to do, and wandered away and Dean didn't follow.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

"I already told you. Its scent is everywhere. There is no following it," Derek said into his cellphone, walking up yet another hallway without any progress.

"Yeah, well, I don't have an app for finding monsters," Stiles quipped.

"You googled werewolves and considered yourself an expert in a week."

"Difference is I knew what I was looking for. Closest thing I've found on the internet is an alp. It's something out of German folklore, but this seems more dangerous."

"You also believed a silver bullet could kill me. What else does it say?"

"According to Wikipedia--"

"Wikipedia? Are you kidding me?"

"You think there are university professors writing articles on the stuff we know? I can cross reference and make you a freaking pie chart, but I don't think we have time for that."

"Fine. What does it say? What am I looking for?"

"It's a shapeshifter. It lists off a few animals, but I haven't even seen a single service animal."

"So it probably looks human."

"Wasn't a human touching me. It had claws and was smaller. The drawing here looks kinda dwarf devil."

"Why didn't you say so? I just passed one of those."

"Sarcasm is my thing. You don't see me taking off my shirt and glaring at everyone."

"Give me something useful."

"It says it always wears a hat. No matter what form, including invisibility and that it's power comes from the hat."

Derek crossed through a waiting room. Plenty of people were wearing hats.

"It knows the place. It should be someone that works here though, right?" Stiles hypothesized.

"If it can take on any form, it could be changing and if it's invisible we're screwed."
"Then let me be bait."

"No."

"It came after me once. No reason to believe it won't again."

"Stiles--"

"You said you couldn't track it. If I can draw it out then you can kill it."

"It was gone by the time we showed up last time."

"So be faster. It says it can get through the tiniest of holes so I'll seal off the room except for beneath the door so you come in, block that off and then you can kill it."

"I said, 'no'."

"I'd rather not play a damsel-in-distress, but you and I both know who the better one to kill the thing is."

"There's three of us. It doesn't have to be your ass on the line."

"If it was going to attack Cas for being too close to Dean, it would have already. So I'm heading back to Dean's room and telling him to get out. And if he doesn't go, I'm gonna make him. I don't know how much longer Dean's going to last. So we need to kill the thing, so Cas can work his angel magic on Dean."

"He's not an angel."

"Doesn't matter what he is. He got rid of my injuries. He can do the same for Dean. We just need to kill this thing."

"Fine. Wait for me to be close." Derek turned around, starting back to Dean.

"There's a better chance of it coming out if you're not around."

"No, you wait."

"Okay. I'm waiting." Stiles was obviously lying.

"Stiles!"

But Stiles hung up. Derek broke into a run. He was practically at the opposite end of the hospital from Dean. He hit a locked door, one that wasn't locked ten minutes ago. He ripped the handle free, including the lock, but the door still wouldn't open. It was blocked. Derek threw his shoulder against the door hard, but it wouldn't give.

"What has he done?"

Derek turned to see Castiel standing by him. He gave up on the door, pulling out his phone as he racked his brain for a second way through the maze of hallways. Stiles didn't answer.

Either he was ignoring Derek or he was already screwed.
Dean stared at the white picket fence and smiled. The front lawn was lush, green and perfectly trimmed. There weren't any flowers, but there was an enormous tree. It wasn't a big house, but it was brand new. He heard a few children laugh as they ran past. Dean looked around. The entire neighbourhood was beautiful.

And safe.

"Dean!"

There was no doubt in Dean's mind that he was smiling like a complete idiot. He turned around to see Sam jogging down the steps of his porch. Dean ignored the gate, hoping the fence to meet his brother. He pulled Sammy into a hug, squeezing him harder than he had to, but Dean didn't care. Sam laughed at him, giving him a final couple seconds, before freeing himself.

"It's been too long," Sam said, giving Dean's shoulder a final pat. "Come on. I left the stove on."

"You cooked?" Dean asked, following his baby brother up to his house.

"Not well, but yeah. I'm good at salads."

"Well that answers the question of if you're my brother."

"You know a lot of other six foot three guys?"

"Not any that eat salads."

Sam shot him a smile as they entered the kitchen. The steaks he was cooking were two seconds from burning, but Dean would have eaten charcoal. He had already survived the crayon and twinkie sandwich Sammy made when he was three.

"There's beer in the fridge," Sam said, flipping the steaks. "Otherwise, sit."

Dean complied, cracking them open on the edge of the counter. Sam put each steak on a plate and turned for the table. Dean sat with him, sliding one of the bottles across the table.

"If it's total crap, we can order a pizza or something," Sam said, claiming the entire salad.

Dean smiled again. His brother still knew him. He cut through the steak, needing more effort than he should have, and took a bite. It was bad, but Dean didn't care. Sam was staring at him, seeing right through his poker face.

"I've had burgers and diner food for months. This is awesome," Dean justified. "Bitch."

"Jerk."

After all this time, those were the two words that told Dean everything was okay.

"You staying in town for a bit? Because if you are, you could stay here. The couch in the den folds out."

But the doorbell chimed before Dean could answer.
"Sit. Think about it."

Dean took his time chewing his next bite, looking around. He could see into the living room. There were pictures from when they were kids on the mantle along with photos of Mom and Dad. He looked at the counter, seeing a bakery box. Dean wiped his mouth and stood. He read the label: *apple pie*. He opened a cupboard to see boxes of his favourite snacks. They were unopened and a little old, but half the crap Dean ate never went bad. Sam must have bought it for him ages ago.

It would be nice to catch up and a pullout couch was still better than the half the places he'd slept.

A gunshot echoed through the room and Dean's heart stopped. He sprinted for the front door to see Sammy lying on the ground.

"No. Sam!" He dropped to the floor, pulling Sam upright. "You stay with me."

But his eyes were unfocused and hazy. There was no sign he could even hear Dean. He shook his little brother, cradling Sam's head.

"Dean?"

"Yeah. I'm here, Sammy."

"She was--" Sam choked on his blood. "She... you."

Dean wiped the blood from his face. This couldn't be happening.

"You stay here. Don't you dare close your eyes."

"She followed you."

He felt the muscles in Sam's body give out. No more air entered his body and blood no longer pumped from the wound. Gravity made it trickle, but there was no heartbeat.

"No, no, no. Sam. No."

But he was gone.

And it was Dean's fault

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**Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

Stiles was in trouble. Derek could single out the panic in his body as he finally got close to Dean's room. Cas had hit a point where he couldn't continue. Honestly, Derek didn't care. It meant he didn't have to hide his strength. Derek reached the door, ignoring the sigil Stiles had scratched near the handle. He looked in, seeing Stiles on the ground.

Derek threw himself against the door, but it wouldn't give. He heard Stiles' ribs snap and Stiles tried to scream, but didn't have the air. Derek fought harder, when he saw Stiles' shirt slit and turn red. Stiles was thrown against the door and then Derek couldn't see anymore. He could hear the vibrations of the screams that wanted to leave Stiles' body, but he was being crushed.

Desperate, he dragged a claw through the sigil, breaking it. He looked for Castiel, but the hallway was still empty. Then light poured out of the room. Derek shielded his eyes, his wolf disappeared inside of him. He saw Stiles hand reach for the handle, unlocking the door. Derek rushed in,
sinking to Stiles' side. Stiles was clutching his side where the blood was coming. He helped Stiles sit up, looking at the injury.

The monster screeched and Derek looked over to see Cas's hand pushed against the air. A new light came and Derek watched it pour out of the month of the creature, before its carcass hit the ground.

"He really is an angel," Stiles said.

Dean woke with a jolt and Cas was to his side in an instant. Stiles was panting hard. It wasn't a panic attack like the last time. He was hurt, but it was far from fatal.

Dean pulled the pipe from this throat, gagging and nearly hurling from the action. "Phone. Give me a phone," he rasped.

It was Dean's voice. All the blood was gone and he was fine. Cas complied, pulling his cell from his pocket and giving it to Dean. Dean's fingers fumbled, but he got the right numbers in. He was scared, panicking. But when someone answered on the other end, Dean didn't say a word. His heart settled into a steady beat and he relaxed into the bed, hanging up.

Derek helped Stiles up, making the teenager cringe.

"What are they doing here?" Dean asked, realizing their presence.

"Leaving." He walked Stiles to the door. "We'll find a doctor."

Cas crossed the room in the blink of an eye and Stiles was standing on his own a second after that.

"Thanks," Stiles said.

"Come on." Derek pushed open the door, holding it for Stiles, but the kid didn't move. "Stiles, we did our part. Let's go."

"If you need anything..." Stiles offered.

"We don't," Dean cut in.

"That's not entirely true, Dean," Cas corrected.

"It's exactly true."

"Your car is two hundred miles from here and, unless you've developed some abilities I don't know about, we have no way of getting to it."

"You can teleport," Derek countered.

"I've travelled a lot today. I would enjoy a rest."

"Done," Stiles agreed.

"Not done," Derek fought.

"What's a couple extra hours of driving?"

"Kid, we'll find our own way," Dean refused.

"No. We can help." Stiles snuck over to the side table, picking up the journal. "And maybe I could
look at this a bit more in exchange..."

Dean didn't argue so Stiles looked back at Derek.

"There's stuff in here that no one back home knows."

It was a good argument and that was the point.

"Fine."

Stiles smiled.

"It's settled then." Cas was back at Dean's side, now holding a change of clothes. "Here."

"Thought you were tired," Dean remarked, pushing himself out of bed.

"You needed to wear something and Derek's jeans would be tighter than the denim you wore in Purgatory."

Dean took the clothes. "You need to stop admitting you notice things like that, Cas."

But Cas merely smiled.
"'Angels are dicks,'" Stiles recited. "Does that mean all angels are dudes or that it wasn't love at first sight?"

"It means they're annoying sons of bitches," Dean answered, not taking his eyes off the road.

"I showed you respect. You acted like an ungrateful ferret," Cas retorted.

"A ferret?" Dean turned, leaning between the seats to look back at Cas.

"I was attempting to make an analogy. When we first met, I could have killed you as easily as you would a small rodent."

"But a ferret?"

"Your society deems your physical appearance to be highly attractive and most humans consider the ferret to be the 'cutest' rodent."

Stiles laughed, before dropping his eyes back to the journal. Dean was going to chose to believe it was at Cas's air quotes. Dean rolled his eyes and faced forward again.

"What's a vessel?"

"Angels and demons don't have physical forms," Dean answered.

"But I'm looking at him."

"No. You're looking at the guy asking to have his body get taken over by an angel."

"My true form is approximately the size of the Chrysler Building."

"And you glow?"

"I shine."

Dean scoffed. Cas actually sounded offended. He heard Cas shift, probably returning his attention out the window. It was getting dark, but that never seemed to be a problem for Cas.

A couple hours passed and nothing changed. Derek really wanted to be rid of them. He was speeding. Not by much. A cop would have to be in a bad mood to pull them over. Stiles would ask the odd question, but the car was otherwise silent.

Derek hadn't said a word since they left the hospital. Stiles got glaring at when he suggested stopping for food, even though he waited until his stomach growled so loudly Dean felt it through the seat. Derek just reached into the glove compartment and tossed him the half-eaten pack of jerky.

It was pitch black now. They may have been on a major highway, but only people crossing the country would use this road. It was too windy for trucks so the only breaks in road were for small towns, cheap motels and gas stations.
Derek slammed his foot down on the breaks, testing every single seatbelt in the car. He skidded a couple feet, before Dean was thrown back in his seat.

A massive tree was lying across the road, Derek was seething and it didn't take long for Dean to connect the dots. Dean reached into the backseat, grabbing his dad's journal and throwing open his door.

"Thanks. We'll walk from here."

"It's a two-day walk, Dean," Cas replied, not moving.

"We walked plenty far in Purgatory, but feel free to zap us the rest of the way once you're up for it." Dean slammed his door shut, approaching the tree.

"We can grab a room for the night and finish the drive in the morning," Stiles said, getting out of the car and chasing after him.

"You've done enough."

"It'll take us longer to backtrack than it would to spend the night. They can't leave this road blocked," Stiles reasoned.

"Trust me, kid. It's for the best," Dean snapped, following the tree to where it snapped.

"And why's that? Because you storming off alone the last time turned out so well?"

"Have a good life." Dean threw his hand over his head in a wave, refusing to look at Stiles.

He dropped off the road. Dean pushed through the thicket and back up to the street to see Cas standing there with his eyebrows creased and hands in his pocket.

"You're tired, huh?" Dean hit the tree with his fist, glaring at Cas. "Trees just fall over when you're tired?"

"The one thing I always underestimate how stubborn you are."

"You know my past. Count up the people that I trust and tell me how many of them are breathing."

Cas didn't bother responding. He knew Dean didn't care about the number. They both knew it was pathetically small.

"People around me die and I'm sick of burning the bodies of people I care about."

"You should not be blaming yourself."

"Mom died putting Sammy on his path. Dad sold his soul so that I could keep going. Jo and Ellen went on that suicide mission I dragged them on. And how many times have I got you killed?"

"None of those were--"

"Just because I'm not pulling the trigger doesn't mean those deaths aren't on me." Dean laughed his mind drifting. "Doesn't matter that I stopped the apocalypse. You and I are heading right for that messed up future."

"Dying for you and because of you are two different--"
"No, they're not!"

"You had your chance to talk," Cas snapped, stepping up to Dean. "Now you are going to close your mouth and deal with your fears."

"I'm not--"

"Shut it."

Dean bit his tongue, backing down.

"I am deciding what I do with my life. I intend to spend it with you. You can force me from your car, but I will not stop watching over you."

Dean felt his jaw clench. He had no interest in listening to any form of pep talk. Cas sucked at them and he didn't need one.

"You are not better off alone. And neither am I."

Dean's head snapped to Cas. He was being sincere. Dean released the breath he was holding in a huff, biting back the string of arguments his mind had already come up with.

"Why them?" Dean asked.

"Talk to them and you might find out yourself."

Estherville, Oklahoma

"Of course you pick now to be Mister Nice Guy?" Stiles complained as Derek emerged freshly showered.

"Four people sleeping in one car didn't seem like a good idea," Derek replied, riffling through his bag for clean clothes.

"Yeah, but we could have all shared the same room," Stile argued, scratching the back of his head.

"You wake me up enough with your tossing and turning. I don't need to be in the same room as hunters too."

"Oh yeah, because locks work on angels."

"He's not an angel."

"Unless you know what he is, I'm going with angel. He may not play a harp and roll around in the clouds, but white light and invisible wings say 'angel' to me."

"Put down the fairytales and go for a shower."

"Just because they're wrong about werewolves doesn't mean they're wrong about everything."

"You're not stupid enough to stake your life on something that's mostly right, are you?"

"I trust you, don't I?"

Derek scoffed. He still didn't believe that Stiles trusted him.
"He's killed werewolves before. Well, what he calls werewolves. But there was one case where the werewolves were more like you. So. Question. How do you feel about hearts?"

"That if someone draws one on anything I own, I'd kill them."

"No. I mean like... actual beating, like thump-thump, hearts."

Derek raised an eyebrow, looking at Stiles.

"Have you ever eaten one?"

"No!"

"Hmm."

"What?"

"Even Dean's come across two different types of werewolves. Well, kinda. Apparently all monsters come from a single alpha. Werewolves bitten within a few generations of the alpha, which you aren't by the way, are more like you. They have more control, except with human hearts. According to this, it's like catnip for werewolves."

"Never had one, never wanted one."

"That's just it. If you haven't had one, it's possible to resist."

"Stiles, I'm not going to turn rabid because I get a little bloody."

"Obviously, but this seems to be specific to human hearts."

"How about this? I promise not to eat any human organs."

"Best to steer clear of hearts all together." Stiles clapped the journal shut, swinging off the bed and to his feet. "Let's not test it."

Derek rolled his eyes, shoving Stiles into the bathroom, but Stiles returned to the doorframe.

"For future reference, I wouldn't be insulted if you told me I stunk."

"You stink." Derek pushed him back into the bathroom and shut the door for him.

Derek picked up the journal, flicking through it when he felt a shift in the air. He turned to see Castiel seated beneath his duffle bag, picking through his belongings. Derek yanked his bag free, tossing it next to the television.

"Get out."

"When I raised Dean from perdition, it didn't matter that I pieced him back together. The body does not make the man. Physical strength is useless without mind and pointless without heart."

"Get back to your hunter."

Castiel stood, but he moved towards Derek, not the door. "Dean had no faith in a higher power when I met him. But you don't have faith." He was getting too close again. Whoever taught the so-called angel about personal space needed to be shot. "In anyone."
"What part of 'get out' is so hard understand?"

"It must be exhausting," Castiel took another step closer, "having no one to turn to."

Derek's back hit the wall. He hadn't even realized he was backing up.

"Humans don't fair well alone. Neither do wolves."

Derek snapped, fisting his hand in the back of Castiel's coat and slamming him face down into the dresser. "What are you saying?"

Castiel reached back, his hand digging into Derek's with inhuman strength. Derek acted quickly, reaching into the wrinkled overcoat and pulling out the smooth blade. He pressed the tip into the back of Castiel's neck, nearly breaking the skin. Castiel's hand released Derek's, submitting. Magical or not, Castiel saw the weapon as a threat. His heartbeat was still as steady as ever and his muscles were relaxed.

"I know what you are," Castiel admitted.

"And what? The plan was to separate me from Stiles so he wouldn't see you two kill me?"

"Dean doesn't know."

"What?"

"You're a different breed of werewolf. You have control."

Derek glanced outside at the full moon. It barely effected him anymore. He had his anchor and had no interest on losing his grip on reality.

"True. But hunters don't care. You see a monster, but I've only ever killed in self-defense or to protect my pack."

Derek stepped back, keeping his grip firm on the blade. Cas stood, fixing his coat as he turned to face Derek again.

"When Stiles goes looking for you two in the morning, you better not be there."

"You are not the strongest creature in this room, Derek. My time on earth gives great advantage over you and I've taken many lives, human and not, to protect Dean. I know you would benefit from each other, but you're both stubborn and intent on remaining alone." Castiel moved forward again, glancing momentarily at the blade, before returning his eyes to Derek's. "Dean has me, who do you have?"

"I have myself. I don't need anyone else."

"You believe that. That may even be true. But that's not what you want. You want a family, a pack; people you can depend on. You deserve that and you can have that. With us."

Derek flipped his grip to the edgeless blade and extended the sword to Castiel. "What I want is to be rid of you."

Castiel took back his weapon, returning it to its place within his jacket, and was gone the moment Derek blinked. Derek crouched down to pick up the journal he had dropped when he pinned Castiel, but all he found was a picture.
It was Dean. He saw the buried pain masked with a smile. Derek was twenty before he could hide his pain this well. Dean was five. He was reaching out towards a toddler and smiling, genuinely, which Derek rarely did, but Dean had reason to. The writing on the back explained that.

*Sammy's first steps.*

**Two Hours Later**

Castiel most certainly had a meddling problem. He couldn't always pick up on sarcasm or understand all of Dean's references, but he could perform simple human calculations. He knew many of the angels that ensured Dean and Sam didn't stray too far from their paths. If two people that should be talking weren't, the solution was to keep pushing them together until they gave in.

Though Castiel couldn't imagine any of his brothers or sisters successfully combating the extreme stubbornness that both Dean and Derek were displaying. Stiles was cooperating. He waited longer than Castiel expected, but John's journal was far too tempting to give up. Then his growling stomach left Dean powerless. He was, *coincidentally*, ordering pizza when Stiles came to the door. Castiel couldn't possibly be responsible since he was still seated at the edge of his bed and focused on the movie Dean had found on TV.

And when Stiles saw which movie come back from its commercial break, he burst out laughing.

"Mean Girls? Really?" he asked, unable to stop smiling.

"The movie was made while you were still drinking juice boxes. The fact that you *know* it means it's iconic."

"Iconic? That's what we're calling it?"

"Cas likes learning where references come from. Like it or not, everyone gets Mean Girls references."

"Netflix recommended it after Dean watched the newest Doctor Sexy MD episodes," Castiel explained.

He watched Dean tense and Stiles smile grew again. It seemed Castiel wasn't supposed to say that.

"What else do you watch?" Stiles asked, barely managing to resist laughing.

"Doctor Sexy is art," defended Dean.

Stiles opened his mouth, but Dean raised a finger.

"Careful. What I watch doesn't change the fact that I could kill you six ways to Sunday before you hit the ground."

"Okay. How do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"I threaten someone and swear it's a miracle they don't pat me on the head like I'm some drop-kick attack dog. But you can defend a show that even their most avid fans probably wouldn't admit to watching and still come off bad ass. You're a bad ass dork. Those things aren't supposed to go together."
"What can I say, kid? I'm one of a kind." Dean held his arms out to the side for a moment, before dropping onto his bed. "Now are you going to watch Mean Girls with us or not?"

"Oh yeah."

Stiles threw himself on the bed behind Castiel hard enough that he bounced and Castiel moved to the side, giving Stiles a clearer view of the small screen.

They didn't say much. Stiles was multitasking, rereading the section on wendigos, not missing a single joke from the movie and studying Dean. He'd shift behind Castiel occasionally, before finally matching Dean's lean against the headboard with crossed ankles and arms. Castiel glanced back at Dean. He was pretending not to notice Stiles, but Castiel was the first to use that micro smile.

Castiel focused on the movie, enjoying the comparison between the animal kingdom and high school. He understood why Dean wanted him to watch it. The redhead knew fewer references than him and Regina George was obviously possessed by Crowley.

It was very satisfying to see her get hit by a bus.

There was a knock on the door and Dean got up to answer. He grabbed the cash off the table and passed it off to the delivery boy. Castiel tilted his head. That wasn't how he expected things to go. Dean caught his expression and his face curled quizzically as he put down the pizza boxes.

"What?"

"How come none of the men that bring you pizza drop their pants or spank you?"

"Because this is real life. Not a porno."

"Angels watch porn?" Stiles asked.

"Dean left it on," Castiel defended.

"You watch porn together?" Stiles head turned to Dean.

"No!" Dean reacted, handing the second box to Stiles. "Cas just likes going through other people's things."

"I understand the pizza man far more than the unnaturally endowed Asian women Dean admires most."

"Cas?"

"Yes, Dean?"

"Shut up."

Cas frowned. After all this time watching humanity, he was shocked how much he still didn't understand. Dean and Stiles both liked porn. It could have been a conversation they all enjoyed and could partake in.

Dean shoved half a slice in his mouth and let it hang so that his hand was free. He banged on the wall between their room and Derek. Derek entered, expecting trouble, but he quickly spotted Stiles hunched over a pizza box with a piece of pizza in each hand. Derek's muscles relaxed ever so slightly, but his facial features didn't shift. Stiles held out the still-whole slice to him, but Derek
refused it, shaking his head.

"You a salad eater?" Dean asked, his mouth still half full.

"I like food, not grease," Derek answered, remaining near the door.

"Let loose," Stiles pushed, swallowing what was in his mouth.

"Those abs will still pop if you eat a couple slices," Dean added.

"That what you told yourself?" Derek quipped.

Dean pitched a slice at Derek and the werewolf caught it, managing not to destroy the flimsy food. Derek looked it over, his nose wrinkling a little. He was about to drop the pizza, but Stiles kicked his thigh.

"Don't be such a sourwolf. Eat it."

Derek picked up a few napkins, dabbing away as much grease as he could.

"So I found out that angels watch porn and Dean's a dork."

"Hey. Come on," Dean protested, picking up another slice.

"There's nothing wrong with being a dork."

"Just don't wear matching Batman shirts," Derek remarked.

"Dean's too cool to actually own superhero paraphernalia," Stiles argued.

"There's superhero kiddy porn?"

Derek and Stiles both looked at Dean and Castiel smiled. He may miss references and inside jokes, but Castiel's language skills surpassed Dean's.


"Oh. Well, good."

Derek finished off his slice and stood, moving for the door. "We're on the road at five. Don't keep him up too late."

Stiles threw a dirty napkin at Derek, but he swatted it away.

"Mama Mia is coming up next. You should stick around."

"You think I'd watch that?"

"No. Of course not. Derek Hale avoids happiness. He tried it once. It was horrible."

Dean laughed, remembering the picture of a grumpy-looking cat Stiles had shown them.

"But it has James Bond singing and dancing in spandex. That's something everyone should see."

"No thanks."

"Fine. Go work off your slice of pizza. I don't think your junk could handle it if those jeans got any
"When the witnesses are gone, you're dead."
"Like your family?"

The silence that came after Castiel's question was more than a lack of talking. It was like everyone stopped breathing and hearts stopped beating. Castiel looked to each of them, but none of them were willing to break the silence.

"Most of Derek's family was killed by a fire set by hunters," Castiel elaborated

Castiel far enough away to watch everyone in the room. Derek shot Castiel a quick glare, but walked out without a single word and no one stopped him. Stiles cringed, waiting for the door to slam, but it shut normally. That was unexpected and unhelpful.

Derek should work on that.

Dean ran a hand down his face and massaged his jaw. "That true?"

"Yeah," Stiles confessed, dropping what was left of his slice. "They thought his family were monsters, but they were innocent." Stiles picked up the journal and closed up his pizza box. "Screwed up Derek more than he'll realize. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

He was angry. Stiles wasn't glaring at Castiel, but he looked betrayed for some reason. Castiel wasn't expecting that. Stiles was clearly a boy people often ignored and gave half truths to. He should be happy that Castiel was encouraging an open dialogue and Stiles was present to hear it all.

"Dean lost much when his house was set on fire," Castiel answered. "His mother--"

"Don't," Stiles cut him off. "Not everyone is willing to talk about their past and they shouldn't have to." Stiles huffed, tucking away his anger and turning to Dean. "I've heard it all. Broken homes, murdered family members, abused kids and every other messed up thing humans do to each other. If you wanna talk about the crap you've been through, I'm here for you. I'm a good friend."

Dean smiled, but it wasn't the smile Castiel wanted to see. "Thanks, kid." He was closing himself off again, shutting down. "But Zoolander has it right."

"Dean..." Castiel didn't see things turning out this way.

"You've done enough, Cas."

Castiel looked at Stiles, but Stiles agreed with Dean.

Two Hours Later

Stiles jumped when the door flew open. He'd come back to their room to find it empty. Stiles assumed Derek had gone for a run and, seeing him sweaty and shirtless, confirmed that.

Derek didn't say a word.

He crossed the room, hitting the bathroom doorframe a couple times to test its strength, before beginning to do pull ups. He'd make it through about ten, before dropping to the ground for a set of push ups. Derek never made a noise, except for his aggressive breathing during the push ups.
Unsure of what else to do, Stiles began reading aloud journal entries, hoping to annoy Derek into talking, but the werewolf seemed to have no problem ignoring him. Stiles throat was dry by the time he lost count of how many times Derek seamlessly switched between the doorframe and the ground at the base of his bed.

And he was about halfway through when Derek dropped to his feet without continuing down to his hands. He was panting lightly and even sweater now, but still wasn't looking at Stiles. It was like he wasn't there.

"Did you know that--" But Stiles didn't get a chance to finish.

Derek stepped back, shutting the bathroom door, and Stiles heard the shower turn on. Stiles pulled out his phone, quickly snapping pictures of every page. He couldn't possibly remember everything and something in here would have to come in handy. Life was turning out like a monster movie or at least a TV show.

It explained the copious amount of hot people and half naked bodies.

Derek emerged, body dry and in a pair of sweats. He turned off every light on his way to the bed closest to the door. Derek dropped face first onto a pillow and that was the end of it. Stiles read by cellphone light for a bit, but gave up. He moved beneath his covers and stared at the wall.

But Stiles couldn't sleep. He was a jerk at times, but he shouldn't have yelled at Cas for trying to help. He didn't know any better and Stiles knew what it was like to feel helpless while friends or family suffered and refused to talk about it. When his mother died, Stiles' dad could barely look at him. His dad tried hard not to blame him, but it was his fault. No one would tell him that and, sure, people could justify it by saying he was a kid. But he was hyper and stupid and couldn't grasp the concept of his mother needing to rest. Of course, his father blamed him. He should.

Stiles rolled over, trying to get comfortable and shut off his brain, but it wasn't happening. He tossed and turned for at least an hour. Derek was asleep. Legitimately, actually asleep. Stiles had never seen that before. He usually just rested. He'd look asleep, but Stiles would move an inch and Derek's eyes would be open and focused. Typically glaring at him

Derek must have worked out into exhaustion. His breathing was slow and heavy. There was no sign of tension in his muscles. Stiles had never seen him like this. Derek never relaxed. He faked it, sometimes, but just because every single muscle he had wasn't visible, didn't mean it wasn't less than a second away from being flexed and ready to use to cause bodily harm.

Stiles couldn't imagine it. Stiles was screwed up, he knew that, but Derek was on a whole other level. He didn't talk about things, ever. The only time he brought up his past was to convince people to side with him or to see the evil in others. It was never about him. Derek could admit that his family was murdered, but he'd never say a word about what that did to him. Stiles had put together plenty of pieces, but there was no way he knew everything. It was impossible.

Derek had lost so much and gained very little. When Peter bit Scott, Derek was hoping for a brother, but Scott never embraced the bite and Stiles wasn't the least bit helpful. He worked hard to be needed, but even that barely worked. Isaac confided in Derek, trusted him, but grew closer to Scott in the end.

Stiles seemed to be the closest thing he had to a sure thing when things went bad, but Derek still believed Stiles helped out of fear. It wasn't true. He hated Derek for the longest time. But then things started to click. The only way to survive alone was to be hard and ruthless. It was dangerous to care, but he couldn't help but protect people. He could have left town after Laura died and let
Scott got put down by the Argents. He could have let a lot of people die, but he didn't.

No matter how hard Derek hid it, he was a good person.

Stiles sat up, expecting to see Derek's eyes open and focused, but he was out cold. He reached for his pants, which came off during his tossing and turning, and pulled them on.

"I'm grabbing some fresh air," Stiles said quietly, but Derek still didn't react.

Stiles buttoned up his fly, moving around to where Derek's head was. He was breathing. Stiles could see the rise and fall of Derek's torso. Stiles reached out to wake him. He didn't want to wake him, but they just came away from a nightmare creature and Derek never slept soundly.

His hand was snatched away before it made contact with Derek and Stiles spun to see Cas standing there. Cas nodded to the door and Stiles spun to see Cas standing there. Cas nodded to the door and Stiles followed him outside.

"Did you do that?" Stiles asked, closing the door.

"I convinced his primal side to sleep, yes," Cas answered, leaning against the railing dividing the motel from the parking lot. "Even werewolves deserve to sleep through the night."

"So you know what he is."

"Yes. But Dean has not encountered his kind."

"So Dean doesn't know..."

"No."

"And you're okay with that?"

"Dean doesn't leave a hunt unfinished. I know we will be going back into the woods to find that second wendigo and I know it takes a great deal to make Dean walk away from something he believes to be a threat. Derek's lineage of werewolf must have bred with another supernatural species. I imagine a skin walker."

"Those are the dog shape shifter things, right?"

Cas nodded. "Hybrids are rare, but that's evolution." He smiled, seemingly proud of human development.

"So what does that mean? You think he's dangerous?"

"Absolutely. Derek is a lethal individual."

"Yeah, but he's good. He's innocent."

"Innocent is negotiable term, but yes he is a good man."

"So you're not going to kill him."

"No. There's enough people that want to hurt him. Derek doesn't need Dean Winchester after him."

Stiles let out a sigh of relief. He didn't know how to take on an angel and he really didn't want to try.
"So what's your tragic backstory?" Stiles deadpanned. "What makes you an expert in guilt?"

"I killed many of my brothers and sisters, conspired and succeeded to begin the apocalypse, was solely responsible for allowing leviathans to plague the country, harmed Dean and those he's closest to in more ways than I will ever understand and caused the deaths of thousands of innocent lives."

Stiles stared at him, jaw hanging. "I was expecting to hear daddy didn't love you."

"He didn't. Angels are obedient and dangerous. Much like weapons. No one loves weapons. Well, Dean has shown sentiment to some of his arms so perhaps humans do, but it is irrational."

"How do you live with yourself?"

Cas tilted his head and Stiles realized how horrible his question sounded.

"Oh no. I mean, how did you deal, cope, with what you did?"

"What's happened to you, Stiles?"

"What? You read Derek's mind and not mine?" He was almost insulted. He should have been relieved, but Stiles was interesting. Really interesting.

"I never read Derek's mind. Dean said mindreading is rude and inappropriate. I try to imitate appropriate human behavior."

"And Dean never taught you the topics people don't discuss?"

"Of course. To ensure civility, humans do not talk about politics, religion or economics."

"Well, that is true." Stiles hopped up on the railing, knotting his foot around one of the support rods for balance. "But you should also steer clear of telling people you barely know secrets about your friends."

"So telling Dean about Derek was not inappropriate."

"No. No. That was wrong too."

"How else can you convince two stubborn males to communicate."

"You don't. You be there for them and hope they'll come to you. Clearly you've made progress with Dean, but Derek never had an angel watching over him. And if he does, then wow. You guys really suck."

"Angels enjoy making humans suffer. Derek's life could have been infinitely worse had the angels taken interest in his life."

"I'll tell him he's lucky then."

"Derek is not a lucky individual. Whoever decided his path is creatively cruel."

One Hour Later

Dean shot awake as the motel door opened, knife in hand and hunter instincts in overdrive, and he
was on his feet within a second. Stiles laughed at him, pushing the door shut and dropping onto the foot of the bed.

"Uh. Figured you'd be the type of guy to go commando," Stiles remarked.

Dean rolled his eyes, pulling on his pants.

"Got breakfast. I picked the greasiest, meatiest thing on the menu and ordered three," Stiles explained, taking out styrofoam containers.

"Where's Cas?" Dean asked.

"He got distracted by a swarm of bees," Stiles answered, handing Dean a cup of coffee.

Dean sighed, flashing back the last time Cas hung out with bees. "It's a good thing Derek doesn't have a hood ornament." Dean swallowed down a good chunk of his coffee and looked at the clock. "Zoolander already pushing to get on the road?"

"Nah. He's still asleep."

"Thought kids your age slept in." Dean put down his cup and flicked open one of the containers, sitting down in front of Stiles.

"I'm not most kids." He picked up his sandwich, sinking his teeth into the multiple breakfast meats.

Stiles was right. He wasn't like most people his age. Stiles held his own against the croats and didn't whine over a single injury. Stiles chewed for a moment, watching Dean go through a few bites of his own.

"What?" Dean asked, his mouth still half full.

"So I'm gonna play the kid card and be sentimental."

"I don't do chick flick moments."

"Then don't call it one."

Dean scoffed, going back to his sandwich.

"I don't know what you've been through, but it's obviously a lot. I've lost people, but, uh, I've been lucky. Most of them I got to say 'bye' to. You know? Make my peace. My, um, mom. She died slowly. It wasn't anything supernatural or foul play, but it really sucked." Stiles pulled out his keys, fiddling with them.

This was a mistake. Dean was no Dr. Phil. "Kid, you don't--"

"I know. But as awesome as you are, I don't want to be just like you. I don't want to be emotionally shut off. I get not talking about everything or letting strangers see that you're hurting and I know you're practically a stranger, but I don't care and I am babbling," Stiles re-crossed his legs, running a hand down his face. "Christmas after my mom died, my dad found a gift she bought me. She must have worked hard for it, but she got her hands on old Spiderman comic book and she, uh," Stiles smiled. "I don't know how she did it. She got Stan Lee to sign it."

"Cool mom," Dean approved.

"Yeah. She was." Stiles was beaming, but his eyes were getting redder and waterier every time he
blinked. "I must have read that comic a hundred times. I can still recite it word for word and see every picture. Anyways, I had it with me at Scott's house. He's my best friend. And, well, I was a kid. His mum called us in for lunch and this rainstorm came out of nowhere and paper doesn't exactly do well against water. I was a wreck. Full-blown panic attack. It was-- it was bad. But Scott's mom's a nurse. She calmed me down and made me this."

He showed off a flat plastic sphere. It was designed for parents to keep pictures of their kids, but Stiles' was loaded with worn paper. Dean reached for it and Stiles surrendered it, giving Dean a better look.

Stiles inched closer, pointing out the different tiny pieces of paper. "That's the 'Lee' of Stan Lee's signature and that's Spiderman's crest and there's Peter Parker's camera and that's the issue number and that's Gwen Stacy's butt."

Dean laughed. He couldn't help himself. He was looking at cartoon butt. That's something anyone with a soul would have to laugh at.

"I want you to take it."

Dean looked up at Stiles. "I'm not taking something that reminds you of your mom. You miss her and you're not giving up anything for me."

"I'm not going to pretend it's given me good luck, but I can pretend it's kept me alive. Angels obviously aren't responsible for that and as much as I wanna believe she's watching over me, I don't think it works that way."

"It doesn't," Dean admitted.

"Yeah. Figured. But I can tell you that I've been in situations where I probably should have died, but I'm still here and I want to believe it was her in some way and this is what I have left. And you need help not dying. You won't let me help, but you could at least take this and maybe it'll bring you some luck."

"Stiles, keep it."

"You're gonna take it. And you're gonna give me your number. The one you actually pay the bill for. The one you actually answer, because I'd like to be able to call an expert if things go bad for me."

"Logical."

"Yeah. It is. And, whenever you're in California, you're gonna call me and we're gonna do badass dork stuff. Doesn't have to be monsters. We can get coffee or see a movie. You don't owe me anything, but I know how important it is to enjoy life, because you can lose yourself in the chaos and forget what it's like to live or why it's worthwhile to keep pushing."

"You put your number in my phone already, didn't you?"

"Yep. Four of them and Cas has it memorized. So no excuses."

"What's in it for you?"

"Told you. You don't owe me anything. I'd just rather you not spiral out of control like some of the other hunters I've met." Stiles finished off his sandwich. "But if you were willing to show me how to fight, I wouldn't object."
One Hour Later

Derek felt the sun on his face and it took him a moment to realize he had been asleep. He rolled over, seeing Stiles' bed empty. Derek sat up after that, getting changed efficiently. It was seven and they weren't on the road. He packed up his bag and grabbed Stiles stuff, when he heard Stiles cry out in pain. Derek dropped everything was outside faster than he planned for. Stiles was on the ground and Dean standing over him, but Derek managed to hold back long enough to hear Stiles' laugh. Dean offered him a hand and pulled Stiles' back to his feet.

They were sparring.

Stiles was outmatched. Dean was hitting his arm or lightly kicking his foot any time he lost his posture. But Stiles wasn't frustrated like most would have been. He was excited and pushing himself. Dean smacked him on the side of the head, his hands moving quickly and efficiently until Stiles' reflexes began to adjust. He began blocking Dean's blows, but the moment he began picking up patterns, Dean put him in his place.

"He's quick learner," Castiel said, approaching Derek. "And Dean's a good teacher."

"I thought I told you to be gone by morning."

"You've not earned the right to give me orders. And you certainly have not earned the right to make me follow orders."

"Don't talk to me about rights," Derek snapped, glaring at Castiel. "I don't know what you did to know what I am or what happened to my family, but you had no right to screw with my head and no right to ask me about it."

Dean laughed and Derek looked over to see him rubbing his jaw. "Nice."

"Yeah?" Stiles was beaming, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

"Yeah." Dean twisted Stiles into a headlock, forcing him off balance.

"Cheater!"

Castiel smiled, settling in close to Derek. Too close. Derek fought not to twitch, but didn't move.

"I didn't screw with your head. I've had control taken away from me. I wouldn't do that to anyone else."

"Then how?"

"In death, souls are freed to endure the afterlife," Castiel explained. "For humans, they go to Heaven or Hell. For supernatural beings such as ourselves, we're sentenced to Purgatory. God decided that our fate, in death, was to prey on each other for all eternity. Dean and I were put there and I abandoned him for his protection. I spent a long time on my own there. I came across horrible creatures. Ones twisted by the need to survive. There were newcomers that didn't understand where they were and executed and killed. It's very hard to survive alone there. Even Dean found a comrade.

"Before I found a place to rest away from Dean, I met a girl. She was overwhelmed, but a survivor. I believed for a moment that she was human. Most of those that were once human lose their
humanity so quickly in Purgatory, but she didn't act like an animal. She was good. One of the many
don't deserve an eternity of fearing for their survival and losing every modern advancement
they had come accustomed to.

"It took time to gain her trust, but an angel makes for a good travelling companion and wolves don't
fair well on their own. Her name was Laura," Castiel confessed. "I was with her for about a month.
I saved her from a pack of gorilla-wolves and she told me about her family. She told me about
you."

Derek felt his stomach twist, his mind coming up with stories, but he swallowed it. Laura was gone
and there was no way to communicate with her. Castiel was lying.

He had to be.

"She never understood why the fire happened. Your family was good. She believed you blamed
yourself, but couldn't understand why. You would never hurt your family and it's not your fault you
weren't there when the fire started. It wouldn't have made a difference."

Derek expected Castiel to say Laura told him everything, told him about Kate, but Derek had kept
that from everyone. Peter found out on his own, but Laura didn't know. She never knew.

"Did-did--" Derek stopped himself, clearing his throat before his voice cracked. "Did she find
them?"

"The ones that weren't allowed into Heaven, yes. We found them."

Derek swallowed, refusing to let Castiel see anything, but his breathing was shaky and his knees
were weak.

"I will never tell him about you. I'll watch over you."

Derek shifted away, moving for his room.

"Shall I tell them it's time to go?" Castiel offered.

"Yeah."

"Would you benefit from a hug?"

"No."

Castiel nodded, his arms falling to his side as he moved towards Dean and Stiles, who were now
rolling around on the ground. Derek exhaled slowly, forcing himself back into his motel room. He
felt the tears prick at the back of his eyes and he was trembling. Stiles tried to come in, but Derek
just fell back against the door, shutting him out.

"I need to get my bag," Stiles said.

Derek took a couple more deep breaths, shaking his head to make sure there wasn't a single sign of
weakness on his body, before opening the door.

"Man. Dean's really good at fighting. I mean, I've seen you and Scott go at it, but he knows how to
actually fight. Not just--" Stiles growled, pretending his hands were claws. "You know?"

"He's not bad."
"Not bad? He'd give you a run for your money. He could definitely kick Chris Argent's ass."

"Yeah. Probably."

Derek crossed the room to pick up his bag. He turned to leave only to have Stiles plastered to his front with Stiles' arms wrapped around his waist. Derek stepped back, knowing this had to be a mistake, but Stiles grabbed his own wrist, tightening his grip. Derek squirmed, looking down to see the top of Stiles' head and the teenager's cheek pressed against his chest. Derek stood there, his hands twitching. He didn't know what to do. He didn't hug people

Not anymore.

Stiles withdrew. "You can kill me later." He shot Derek a small smile, before walking out with bag in hand.

Four Hours Later

"I do not look like a grumpy kitten," Derek fought.

"Yes, you do," Cas disagreed earnestly from his position between the front seats, before turning to Dean. "Tell him, Dean."

"Dude, you're a freakin' kitten."

Derek glared at him.

"Don't be such a sourwolf," Stiles scolded, kicking the back of Derek's seat. "It means you're adorable."

"I'm going to kill you."

"Easy, humans don't have nine lives," Stiles teased, going back to the journal.

Dean laughed and Cas was smiling. Things were finally light again. Cas settled back into his seat, before leaning over to see what Stiles was reading.

The car jerked suddenly and Stiles heard a loud clank.

"You have got to be kidding me," Derek groaned, pulling off the road and shutting off the engine.

He got out, pulling the hood release on his way out, and opening up his car. Dean twisted in his seat, looking back at Cas.

"Did you do this?"

"I'm an angel, not a mechanic, Dean."

Dean pushed open his door and climbed out. Stiles looked over, but Cas was already outside. He followed the trend, getting out. Derek was leaning over his engine, but Stiles could tell he didn't know what he was looking for.

"I know about cars," Dean offered. "I rebuilt my baby a few times."
Derek shifted, giving Dean space to look at the engine. He reached in a couple times, before Cas opened the trunk and remove the toolkit that came when Derek bought his Camaro. He handed it to Dean, before moving next to Stiles.

"New cars," Dean scoffed, lying out the tools, before reaching for Derek's shoulder and guiding him to hunch over further with Dean. "See this? Cars are rigged to shut off the fuel supply if you crash. Problem is sometimes it switches off for no reason."

"So my car's fine?"

"Yeah. But these pistons have seen better days. You push this car hard, don't you?"

"Had a couple close calls," Derek admitted.

"She's a beaut," Dean approved. "When'd you get her?"

"Few years ago."

Dean managed to keep Derek talking as they worked on the engine.

Stiles looked up at Cas, seeing that he was smiling. "You tripped the switch, didn't you?"

Cas's smile grew, not taking his eyes off Dean and Derek. "Was it inappropriate?"

"Only if they figure it out."
"No, Dad. I did not join a cult," Stiles groaned, his head falling backwards. "If I was in a cult, I'd be giving you some spiel seeing the light."

"You were supposed to be home three weeks ago," his dad countered over the phone.

"Yeah, I know. But everything's fine." Stiles ducked as Derek was thrown over his head. "Dad, give me a sec." He hit mute, holding his cell against his chest. "You guys okay?" Stiles called.

Dean hacked at the tentacles wriggling towards him, clearing away the closest set, before letting out an exasperated breath and forcing a smile. "Peachy."

Stiles took out the hunting knife holstered to his calve as Derek stumbled back to his feet. He spun it, catching the blade carefully in his hand, and offered it to Derek. "Keep it down, would you?"

Derek glared at him, taking the weapon and returning to Dean's side.

Stiles unmuted his dad. "Where were we?"

"I want you home."

"I know, but this is an amazing opportunity. I'm helping people and I'm being someone you'd be proud of."

"I'm already proud of you, Stiles."

Stiles swallowed. He hadn't been home in a month and that was long for him. It was long for most kids, but he and his dad were close. He worried about his dad, but no more than he would have if he was home. Scott was checking on him and he'd give updates with their regular texting. He was eating out more than usual, which wasn't good for his heart, but Mrs. McCall had him over for dinner a few times and she was dropping off food when he was on shift near their house or the hospital.

"You've done enough. Come home."

"Sorry, Dad. But I'm doing the right thing. If I was home, all I'd be doing is playing video games with Scott and digging through unsolved cases."

"This is your last summer before college. I'd like to spend at least part of it with you."

"Oh. I gotta get back to work."

"Stiles."

"I love you, Dad. Call you when I can."

"Stiles!"

Stiles hung up, staring at his phone as his dad almost instantly called him back. But Stiles ignored him.
"We could visit him," Cas suggested. "Beacon Hills is only a day's drive from here."

"Are you crazy?" Stiles shot Cas a look, switching his phone to silent before putting it in his pocket. "We're not going anywhere near Beacon Hills."

"Why not?"

"My dad thinks I'm helping with hurricane victims and still wants me to come home. He'll lock me up in prison and throw away the key if he found out I was road-tripping with two men, not boys, but full-grown men, that go around killing monsters."

"You may have a point."

"I know my dad. College isn't that far from home so I'll see him loads. He'll understand." Stiles stood up. "You guys want help yet?"

"We're good," Derek replied, now dangling in the air as he lashed out.

"Drop your machete," Dean ordered.

"Are you insane?"

"Trust me!"

But Derek ignored Dean, cutting through another tentacle, before getting whipped against the wall hard enough to drop his blade anyway. Derek was dizzy; Stiles could see his eyes unable to focus for a moment. By the time he could, it was too late. Another six tentacles were chasing after him.

"Cas, help him!"

But Dean held up a hand to tell him 'no'.

Dean took the new opening, managing to get close enough to the small body of the beast and to stab it. The beast wailed, each of it's slippery appendages flailing wildly. Derek was dumped on the ground. Dean stepped over the spasming tentacles to help him up.

"If you trusted me, you wouldn't be covered in tentacle goo."

"Don't talk to me about trust," Derek snapped, slipping in the slime as he refused Dean's hand. "You don't trust me."

"I trust you to realize I'm the pro here. If you want to live, you do what I say." Dean grabbed Derek's arm, pulling him to a dry section of the floor.

Derek jerked free, his feet still sliding in every direction beneath him. Stiles wouldn't say it out loud, but the werewolf looked like Bambi on ice. Derek managed to slide over to the wall and steady himself long enough scrape off his shoes.

"You're no pro. You've been lucky and you got..." Derek's arm flew out towards Cas, "whatever he is."

"Why is it so hard for Derek to accept I'm an angel?" Cas asked, sounding more hurt than insulted. "Dean was nowhere near this hard to convince."

"Yeah, well, I think Derek's got Dean beat in the stubbornness department."
"You realize we can hear you, right?" Dean replied, heading for the door.

"Just because you hear us doesn't mean you're listening," Stiles shouted after him. "Cavemen have more social skills than these two."

"I'm not sure that's true," Cas replied. "Dean is very practiced in--"

"I was being sarcastic, Cas."

"Oh." An almost smile crossed Cas's face as he figured out Stiles' joke.

Minneapolis, Illinois

"I don't like cities," Dean grumbled. "All the messed up crap in cities is caused by humans."

"You sound like my dad when I got him a new cell phone," Stiles replied, coming back with a tourist map. "Ooh. There's an aquarium."

"Really?" Derek reacted.

"We just took on some demon squid beast and you want to go look at fish?" Dean finished.

"Aquariums are pretty."

"We ain't here to sightsee," Dean said.

"Maybe you're not. But until you find our next gig, I'm going to enjoy myself." Stiles turned the booklet over. "So what are you thinking? Four Seasons or Hilton?"

"Neither."

Derek and Stiles both looked at Dean.

"There's not a dingy motel around for miles," Derek replied.

"Fancy hotels and fake credit cards don't go well together."

"My credit card's real. So is Derek's. You've been pretend-paying for long enough that we can handle one night, right?"

Derek shrugged. "If he wants to drive out to some retro motel, I'm not going to stop him."

"The Four Seasons has a deal on suites."

Derek patted Dean's arm, pushing off his Camaro. "Don't look so miserable. There's worse fates than high thread counts and room service."

"Never had room service."

"What? You..." Stiles cleared his throat. "Okay. So tonight, we're having an upscale, grown-up, mature slumber party."

"No," Derek and Dean managed to say in perfect synchronization.
"Oh, come on! We could watch pay-per-view."

"And stay up late and paint each others toenails," Dean teased.

"We're not having room service," Derek decided.

"What? Why?" Stiles looked like a kicked dog.

"Because I've been dragged to every grease factory for the past six states."

"I don't do salads," Dean warned.

"Do I look like a herbivore?" Derek asked, drawing attention to his toned physic.

"No. You look like you're in training to play Gaston at Disneyland."

"Pretty sure he's the beast," Stiles retorted. "Of course, the beast has more social skills than Derek by the end of the movie."

"Glad you two are feeling so cultured. Come."

Derek turned, starting down the street, and Dean's hunter instincts instantly kicked in.

"We're about to be really unhappy, aren't we?" Stiles asked.

"We aren't getting deep fried perfection. So yeah. This is going to suck."

"We-we could gang up on him." Stiles looked up at him. "Well, you can tell him 'no' and I'll stand behind you."

"Nah. Let the male model have his moment. How bad could it be?"

**One Hour Later**

"If I wanted company, I would have asked for it," Derek huffed, passing Castiel in the lobby.

"You never ask anyone to join you," Castiel pointed out, matching Derek's pace with ease.

"And why do you think that is?"

"I decided you were afraid to ask for company."

Derek stopped suddenly enough that Castiel walked into his shoulder. "You know what I am. Why would I be afraid of anything?"

"There's plenty for you to be afraid of. There's much you *are* afraid of."

"You're wrong."

"You're afraid that remaining with us will put Stiles in danger, you worry Dean will find out what you are and you refuse to trust anyone."

"That's not fear. That's caution."

"You're surprisingly cautious for a werewolf." Castiel's face twitched, like he was trying to smile or
be funny.

But Derek wasn't laughing. He continued down the street, trying to ignore the irritable swish the oversized coat made with each of Castiel's strides. Derek probably trusted him least out of the three, but at least he could handle the silence.

Castiel let out one remark about how poorly Dean would take Derek's meal choice, but otherwise, he observed everything and everyone. Derek paid the waitress and took the couple bags of food from the counter. Castiel vanished, but he returned to Derek's side as he exited the restaurant.

"Your wolf is showing," Castiel remarked, his almost smile returning to his face.

"No it's not." Derek tried to widen the gap between them.

"You're bringing food back to your pack," Castiel explained.

"We're not a pack."

"Then why are we bringing food to our humans?"

"Because if they had things their way, we'd once again be eating more grease than food. You may not need food, but I do."

"I've never met a werewolf that would eat such a meal. Your kind typically prefer meats that comes from animals with a strong pulse."

"Clearly you never met my uncle."

"He's still alive?"

Derek shot Castiel a look, waiting for Castiel to elaborate.

"He's the one that killed your sister. You must know that by now."

"He's the only family I have left."

Castiel was staring again. He stared a lot and Derek tried hard to ignore it, but Castiel wasn't even subtle about it.

"What?" Derek eventually snapped.

"Why haven't you asked me about them?"

"About who?"

"Your family. You haven't asked me anything."

"You're wondering why I'm not asking a so-called angel about my dead family? Why I wouldn't believe you went to Purgatory and back? Of course, that's plausible. You survived storming the gates of Hell to rescue Dean."

"Are you aware you sound sarcastic?"

Derek scoffed. "You were in a mental institution. How are you sure those things happened?"

"It was my choice to stay there. I was hallucinating Lucifer's existence."
"Do you ever listen to what you say?"

"Of course. It's very difficult not to hear your own voice."

Derek rolled his eyes.

"You think I'm still insane?"

"I think you being insane is far more likely than you being an angel."

Castiel put his hand on Derek's shoulder and the next step they took was in the lobby of their hotel. Derek's insides churned, like they had been thrown across the city to catch up with his body. Castiel steadied him, but Derek jerked free, heading for the elevators.

"I'm not sure what more I can do to convince you."

"Angels don't exist."

"Not the ones in the stories your mother told."

"Don't speak about my family."

"You don't think about them constantly?"

"I won't let you use them to con me into thinking you're something that doesn't exist." Derek pushed the button feverishly, but the elevator still took its time coming.

"Dean remembers his time in Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. You may question my sanity, but you don't question his."

"I did kill Peter. And yes, he was dead. I made sure of it. He was buried under the floorboards for months and then he got resurrected. There weren't any stories about Purgatory. He didn't know anything from the other side. Wherever you were, it wasn't the afterlife."

"Then how did I meet your sister?"

"You wouldn't be the first one that lied to me."

The elevator finally showed up and Derek stepped in. Castiel settled at his side, but Derek had had enough. He gently, yet forcefully, pushed Castiel to the middle of the elevator.

"Do you assume that everyone lies to you?"

"I know everyone lies. That's a fact. I'm not going to believe what someone says, just because I want it to be true."

"So you're unwilling to take joy in the fact that your family is together."

"I don't trust you, which means I don't trust what you say."

"And how do I earn your trust?"

"You don't."

Derek stepped off the elevator, pulling the keycard out of his pocket as he went to open their door. There were wrappers, pop cans and tiny alcohol bottles all over the floor. The minibar was open
and empty. Stiles was doing a victory dance, while Dean stared at the television with an expression lost somewhere between confused an angry.

"This isn’t racing. If we were on the streets, I’d run over that turtle shell."

"Don't hate on the game, just because you aren't good at it," Stiles boasted, downing at least half a can of red bull in single go. "Hey, Derek! I just kicked Dean's ass at Mario Kart."

"You did not."

"I lapped you on Rainbow Road. You didn't even finish the race."

"Someone high designed that track."

"Doesn't change the fact that I beat you."

"We were gone twenty minutes," Derek said.

"We got bored and you don't leave two hungry people with an unlocked minibar." Stiles cracked open another can of red bull.

But Derek took it away before Stiles could get his lips on it. "Time to put something in your body other than sugar."

Stiles rolled his eyes, shutting off the console. "Better be good. Otherwise, I'm ordering room service."

"No one is ordering room service."

"Not even for dessert?"

"I got dessert."

Derek began pulling out the various containers, laying them out on the table. He picked out the couple small cylinders of ice cream and put them into the freezer portion of the fridge, shutting the door. Stiles approached the table and hooked a finger on one of the bags, pulling it open wider. He inhaled, his nose wrinkling at the scent.

"What is this?" Stiles looked for a restaurant label, but he wouldn't find one.

"Dinner."

Dean got up, crossing the room and knocking open one of the containers. "Oh no. Not a chance."

"Have you even had it before?"

"No. And I ain't about to start now." Dean backed away, riffling through the desk. "Where's that room service menu?"

Derek reached in, taking away the leather binder.

"You do not want to get between me and food," Dean threatened, raising a finger at Derek.

"Try it."

"You can play daddy for the kid, but I decide what I put in my body and that ain't going in this
Derek laughed. "Temple? We're going with that?" He pinched the flesh above Dean's hip, making the hunter squirm away. "Lay off the fries and you might be more intimidating."

Dean chuckled, taking a final sip of the beer he had been nursing, before putting it down. "I'm the one monsters have nightmares about."

He stepped towards Derek, height matched and displaying his own animal. Killing, humans or otherwise, changed a person. It broke the weak, but it fueled the primal side in the strong.

"Okay, big boys. Calm down or I'll give you a time out," Stiles said, squeezing between the two of them and pushing them apart.

Dean snatched the hotel information out of Derek's hands.

"Chicken," Derek taunted.

"That doesn't work on me. If it didn't have a proper pulse, I ain't eating it. But some deep fried chicken sounds like a good idea." Dean smiled, flipping through the leather binder.

"Honestly, Dean. It can't be that bad," Castiel remarked.

Dean raised an eyebrow. He didn't believe Castiel in the slightest. Castiel sighed and picked up a piece of sashimi. The moment he closed his mouth, the disgust was apparent. Castiel tried to maintain his composure, but he spit out the fish in a napkin.

"I knew that salmon's uncle," Castiel said remorsefully.

"And you didn't know a single one of the cows you ate?"

"There are multiple cows in a single burger." Castiel was still trying to get the taste out of his mouth. "That was all Constantine."

Stiles held out a glass bottle of sprite, knocking it against Castiel's shoulder. Castiel took it, breaking it open and downing it in a single go. Derek sat down at the table, separating a pair of chopsticks and helping himself to a pristine cut of whitefish.

"Do you eat bunnies raw too?" Stiles asked, watching Derek chew.

"Just because the fish is raw, doesn't mean it's not expertly prepared."

"I'm sure the bears that eat salmon off their claws feel the same way." Stiles checked the other boxes, finding a serving of plain rice. "If I'm gonna eat fish, I want it cooked." He shoved aside the toss-away chopsticks, finding the plastic fork. "Preferably deep-fried, but definitely not wrapped in seaweed." Stiles dropped into the chair by Derek, crossing his ankles on an empty chair.

"The eel's cooked," Derek offed, before putting a segment of one of the rolls in his mouth. "I even ordered the deep fried roll."

"Deep fried?" Stiles perked up a bit.

Derek scanned the marker-writing on the containers, picking out the Las Vegas roll. "Here." He slid it towards Stiles, before going in search of the tempura. "And these are pretty much Japanese french-fries."
Dean looked over Stiles' shoulder. "You're not gonna try it, are you?"

"Sushi is kinda classy. Chicks dig classy," Stiles reasoned.

"You wanna make out with a chick that eats raw fish?"

"I'm not the one with three issues of Busty Asian Beauties stashed around my car."

Derek scoffed, opening the serving of green tea he had picked up and sipping it.

"How much longer are you going to snoop through my stuff?"

"Until you stop being cool."

Derek reached across the table, helping himself to a piece of the Las Vegas roll, interrupting their conversation. "You gonna try it or not?"

Stiles looked up at Dean. "I will if you will."

"Cas?" Dean looked back at Castiel, who was on his fifth chocolate bar.

"I'm not interested in eating any of Constantine's relatives."

Derek picked out the California roll, holding it out to Castiel. "Try that."

Castiel picked up a roll with his fingers, looking it over. Derek waited, but they were acting like children. No one was willing to be the first to take a bite. Derek rolled his eyes, claiming the sashimi for himself.

"Okay. I'm going to do it."

Stiles stabbed one of the pieces with his fork, eyeing it for a final moment, before stuffing it in his mouth. He chewed it fast and swallowed it prematurely. Derek corked an eyebrow at him, making it clear that he thought Stiles was being overly dramatic. Dean didn't. He was staring at Stiles like there was a fifty percent chance he was going to die.

"It's not the worst thing I ate."

"Yeah. I'm ordering a burger."

"Get me one too!" Stiles ditched his container, getting up and following Dean to the phone.

"Is now the appropriate time to say 'I told you so'?" Castiel asked, abandoning the California roll as well.

"No."

"When is?"

"Never."

"What'd you get for desert?" Stiles asked.

"And it better not be fruit," Dean added.

"Ice cream."
"Still get the lava cake," Stiles decided.

Fifteen Hours Later

Stiles yawned as he sat up. He looked around, enjoying the fact that he had his own bedroom for once. Stiles reached for the digital clock, turning it towards him so he could see the time. It was mid-morning and no one was hounding him to get on the road. Stiles stood with a content sigh, stretching his arms over his head, and wandered into the main room.

Dean looked like he was advertising the hotel. He had claimed one of the plush robes from the bathroom and had newspaper in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. He was in one of the arm chairs with his feet propped up on an ottoman. There was a room service tray next to him, loaded with every worthwhile breakfast item and then some.

"Hungry?" Dean asked, not looking up.

"Always." Stiles picked up a plate, loading it up.

Dean tugged on Stiles' pj pants. "Really?"

Stiles slept like a proper superhero supporter. His pants were black with the Batman logo all over them and he was wearing a worn Spiderman t-shirt.

"You wished you looked this cool." Stiles stuck a couple pieces of toast in his mouth and sat down near Dean with plenty of food and fresh orange juice.

"Dean doesn't own pajamas," Cas explained, focusing on the television.

"Who doesn't own pajamas?" Stiles began eating a piece of bacon, watching a rerun of the Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show Cas had on.

"They take up room. Why would I own clothing I can only wear at night?"

"Because they're super comfy."

"I could get you a pair, Dean," Cas offered. "You clearly like them."

Stiles looked back to see Dean eyeing his pants. Stiles smirked, stuffing a piece of pancake into his mouth.

The bathroom door opened and Derek emerged, steam smoking away from his body.

"Zoolander hit the gym at dawn," Dean teased, throwing a grape at Derek.

Derek caught it, in his hand, before tossing it in his mouth. "Amazed you know what a gym is."

"Just because each of my abs doesn't look like a hot dog doesn't mean you're any stronger than me."

Stiles laughed, getting a glare from Dean.

"Hunters don't lose to male models," Dean argued.

"Not a male model." Derek began picking at the fruit Stiles and Dean both ignored. "That a case?"
Stiles perked up, his feet returning to the floor. "What? Where?"

"Page one. Sixteen disappearances this year."

"Monsters don't do cities. It's probably just a serial killer."

"Just a serial killer?"

"Yeah. They exist. I don't know anything about finding serial killers so I leave that to the professionals."

"If it was a serial killer, he'd be caught by now." Stiles yanked the paper free, reading over the article. "There's no relation or similarities between victims. There's pattern to the dates, but every victim was last seen in this neighbourhood." Stiles looked at the addresses, before picking up the takeout menu from last night. "Good thing you had Cas with you. You walked right through the middle of it."

"It didn't see us," Cas remarked.

Everyone turned to the angel, who was still engrossed with the cartoon characters.

"Hey!" Dean called, drawing Cas's attention. "What didn't see you?"

"Something you've never faced before."

"What is it?" Stiles asked.

Whatever Cas said next, it wasn't English.

"Come again?" Dean shifted forward, trying to focus on what Cas was saying.

But none of them understood him.

"It's quite amazing that it's adapted to a city. I've never seen one in an environment like this."

"But what is it?" Derek took his turn to ask.

"Yeah. Tell me what it is and I can look it up. We got free wifi."

Cas was about to answer, when his head turned. It was like he heard something, but there was nothing but the near-muted television.

"Cas?"

But Stiles blinked and he was gone. He put his plate down, looking around, but there was no sign of the angel.

"Where'd he go?"

"I believe that's his way of telling us to figure this out ourselves." Dean took the newspaper back, taking a closer look at the article. "Crap."

"What?"

"The other reason I hate big cities." Dean put the paper out for them all to see, pointing to one of the last paragraphs. "A couple of cops disappeared investigating in the sewers."
Four Hours Later

Castiel was waiting at the sewer entrance. He saw no benefit in joining them in the labyrinth of waste. They weren't going to find the kappa that had taken refuge in Minneapolis's sewer system. It had found itself the perfect nook and the three would turn around the moment one of them slipped into the water.

His money was on Stiles.

Castiel had popped over to check on Sam. Whenever he could spare the energy, Castiel would watch him. Sam never knew; Castiel never let the younger Winchester see him. It wasn't his place. Besides, if Castiel's suspicions were correct, they would have plenty to deal with. He wanted Dean not to worry about Sam. Dean never asked Castiel to watch over him, but Castiel couldn't help himself. Like Dean, Castiel wanted Sam to have a happy life, free of the horrors most humans believed were fiction.

And something dangerous was coming. Castiel hadn't admitted it to Dean. There wasn't much to say. He didn't know what was happening, but there weren't many things that drained him. Heaven hadn't been the same since the apocalypse, it hadn't recovered from the carnage Castiel caused and Naomi only made things worse. He had come across angels still affected by her reign and it made Castiel question if he was still broken.

He was in control. Castiel had no doubt. His mind was his own. His actions were his own. But he couldn't do everything he once could. His strength was erratic. At times, he felt little stronger than a human. He shifted, stepping away from Dean's beloved car. His skin felt like it was ready to tear. This was definitely one of those second times: when his vessel could barely contain him. It took every ounce of self-control to save every window, wall and bone around him.

Dean didn't know.

And Castiel intended to keep it that way.

He prepared to vanish, when he heard Stiles. "Cas! Hey!"

Castiel shifted, raising the corners of his lips before looking at the three of them. "Hello."

Stiles was dripping wet, but thankfully spared of feces, and Castiel could hear the squelch of Stiles' soaked sneakers. "By any chance, is that not a magical trench coat and you could spare my nose?"

Of course, he could clean Stiles up. But Castiel didn't trust himself. "I'm an angel, not a drycleaner."

"And I am so happy you were generous enough to let me drive," Dean groaned.

Derek merely smirked.

"You wanna zap him back to the hotel? My baby doesn't deserve this," Dean requested, looking at Castiel.

"Oh please," Stiles snipped. "There were two inches of dirt and grime caked on 'your baby' when we met. The only reason it's getting frequent washes is because Derek can't handle a single speck on his Camaro and you don't want your car getting jealous. Meanwhile, my Jeep is home collecting dust." Stiles sighed at the memory of his car. "Can we go?"
Dean looked at Castiel, repeating his question without uttering a single word. But Castiel wasn't willing to risk it. He opened one of the back doors and sat down. He heard Dean groan, but Stiles got in next to him without a single complaint.

And he smelt atrocious.

Eight Hours Later

Dean was still half asleep as he shuffled through the main room of their suite. Dean put up with Cas using angel mojo to help him sleep, but that didn't spare his bladder from everything he and Stiles drank. Dean twisted the doorknob to the bathroom and propped up the toilet seat. He sighed in relief, even grinned as he shook out the last couple drops.

He kicked the handle to flush and began washing his hands, when he realized two things: the bathroom light was already on and there was a pungent fruity/flowery scent. Dean snorted, trying to save his nose from the strong scent. Dean turned around to see Derek frozen in the tub, underneath a foot of bubbles.

Dean bit down on his lips, working hard to hide his enjoyment. He walked out and heard the slosh of Derek rushing to get out. Dean heard him slip, water splashing over the floor, and quickly picked up his phone, clicking on the camera and hurrying back to the bathroom. Derek nearly fell out and Dean got it all on film, including the stack of bubbles that had settled on top of Derek's head in the struggle.

"Sushi and bubble baths. What other secrets do you have?"

Derek tried to snatch the phone, but Dean stepped backwards, keeping it trained on Derek as his foot slid on the tile. "Turn it off."

"Don't worry, Zoolander. You still look pretty."

Derek growled, literally growled, and it was all the warning Dean got before he pounced. Instinct and training kicked in and Dean flipped them so they went tumbling into the main room, each fighting to be on top. They took out one of the chairs, before rolling right into the couch. Derek used the sofa as leverage to keep Dean pinned. He reached for Dean's hand and slammed Dean's wrist into the floor, making the phone go skittering across the carpet.

Dean laughed. He hadn't had a challenge in a long time. Stiles was learning, but Dean was an expert and Derek was proving to be one himself. It took more than two hundred pounds of muscle to keep Dean down. He twisted his legs with Derek's, forcing Derek off balance.

It became a blur after that. Each of them was scrambling for any kind of advantage, but they were getting nowhere. And, if it wasn't bad enough that Dean was struggling to put a male model in his place, he could tell Derek was holding back.

A bucket of freezing cold water got thrown on them and they both shot apart and to their feet. Stiles tossed the ice bucket aside and looked at them for an explanation.

"Someone better say something or I'm going to start making assumptions about a pair of guys that both look like they have a modeling background," Stiles said.

But they were both quiet. Somehow the escalation between bubble bath to brawl didn't line up.
"One of you is naked."

Derek turned, heading for the bathroom, while Dean realized there was zero time for Derek to get dressed.

"Should I get a different room?" Stiles called after Derek. "Or I can set up a camera and we can probably make millions on the internet." He shot a look at Dean, before scoffing. "What'd you do? Tell him he smelt like a wet dog?"

"Caught him taking a bubble bath," Dean admitted.

Stiles burst out laughing. "Seriously? Alpha caveman takes bubble baths?"

"Hey!" Derek burst out again, livid. "I was going for a bath. Meaning soaking in hot water, because every backwoods motel runs out of it."

"Then where'd the bubbles come from, Zoolander?"

"It fell in."

"And unscrewed itself?"

"I smelt it and sneezed and..." Derek swallowed, before softly muttering, "bubbles."

Stiles smiled, patting Derek's shoulder. "Well, at least you smell good."

Derek practically snarled at him and Stiles backed off, sitting down on the sofa. Dean laughed, but his smile ended when Derek picked up his phone.

"Don't you dare."

But Derek snapped it in half. Dean locked his jaw, watching Derek disappear into his room. That was when Dean heard the sound of water splashing. Stiles snickered and Derek reemerged, just as angry as before and Stiles shot to his feet, shoving Dean between himself and Derek.

"Down, boy. Or I will send this to Scott and Isaac and everyone else you want to keep intimidated."
Stiles dropped his phone on the coffee table next to Derek. "I already e-mailed it to myself. So don't you dare break my phone. Not all of us have fifty cellphones at our disposal."

Stiles disappeared back into his room and Derek managed a final glare at Dean, before doing the same. Dean glanced at the balcony, expecting, hoping, to see Cas looking over the city, but no one was there. He moved over to the glass door, clicking it unlocked in case Cas decided to land outside. He headed for his own bedroom, but paused when he saw a faint light coming from Stiles' room.

Dean pushed the cracked door open wider, seeing him sitting crossed-legged and focused on his computer screen.

"Looking for something?" Stiles asked, chewing on his lip, but not looking up.

"What are you doing?"

"Trying to figure out what we're dealing with."

Dean moved behind Stiles, looking over his shoulder with crossed arms and his eyebrows pulled together. He was clicking through sites faster than Dean could make it through the title.
"So has hunting become a sport or a game?"

"What?"

Stiles closed his computer, turning to face Dean. "Sixteen people are dead. Cas knows what this is and he's not talking. Angels may be dicks, but Cas isn't. Ever since I met you, he's never told us what we're up against. It's always been you. So either he's not saying so you can play detective or because you need the hunt." Stiles re-crossed his legs. "So which is it?"

Dean pinched the bridge of his nose. "Cas, you wanna back me up?"

But there was no shift in the air or sound of wings.

"Great." Dean shut Stiles' laptop and pushed aside, sitting down in front of him. "Look, kid. I don't risk people's lives."

"First of all, we are not backtracking. My name is 'Stiles' not 'kid'. Second, there is no pattern to this creature's attacks. Someone could die tonight and all I see is one missing angel and a hunter that doesn't care. So maybe that was true, but right now people's lives are at risk and I seem to be the only one trying to do something about it."

"Kid-- Stiles. We got nothing to go on. We went back to the sewers at night. We've spent hours down there and nothing. Now, I don't like this any more than you do, but right now, we have no leads. So get some shut eye." Dean stood, taking the laptop with him. "You can interrogate Cas in the morning."

"Oh yeah. Because that's been working great."

Seven Hours Later

Stiles's arms shot into the air with a cheer, knocking off his headphones. "Anime, I knew you'd save my life one day!"

Derek and Dean both looked over at him expectantly.

"It's Japanese," Stiles realized, quickly hurrying to work on his laptop again. "It's a kappa."

"A what?" Derek questioned.

"Kappa." He spun his computer around, letting the taller two see the screen. "An amphibious water spirit. It drowns its victims then mutilates them. It's usually in rivers, lakes and ponds, but I guess this one's adapted to the sewer. It loves guts and blood and it's small. Looks like a monkey-tortoise hybrid with webbed feet. And it likes cucumbers."

"Cucumbers?" Dean asked.

"They're a vegetable," Derek answered.

Dean glared at him. "I know what a freaking cucumber is."

"Wasn't even sure you knew what a vegetable was." Derek finished his drink. "How do we kill it?"

"That depends if you trust Super Kick Ass Good Guys."
"How could something with that name possibly be good?"

"Hey. I saw Happy Time Sleepover on your laptop. Do not question my taste in anime."

"Cas, you ever face one of these guys before?"

Stiles spun around, not having even noticed Cas's appearance. "You could have told us what we were up against."

"I had faith you would figure it out."

"And what if someone died before we did?"

"I would have intervened."

Stiles scoffed. "You could have intervened sooner."

"It would have made no difference."

"No diff--" Stiles let out a sharp breath. "We could have killed it by now."

"I had hoped it wouldn't come to that, but this one is angry and cannot see reason." Cas stepped away from the window, standing near Derek. "The new owners didn't continue the offerings," he said only to Derek.

"It lives under the sushi place?" Derek figured out.

"I made an offering, but I suspect it wasn't accepted. It's become quite irate."

"That's why you disappeared in the sushi restaurant," Derek realized. "You stole a cucumber and what? Dropped it down a drain?"

"That is what they used to do, yes. But I hand-delivered mine. It wasn't happy. The previous owners gave it a cucumber a day."

"So the cucumber thing is real?" Dean rifled through the fridge until he found the chocolate bar Stiles had stashed in the back as an emergency reserve.

"Not everything lives off grease and sugar."

"At least I don't have rabbit teeth."

Stiles couldn't help but laugh as images of a were-rabbit flooded his head. Of course his imagination somewhat failed him so Stiles was left with the thought of Derek hopping along wearing fluffy rabbit ears and eating a carrot.

Derek resisted showing off his fangs, turning his attention to Cas. "How do we kill it?"

"In all my time, I've never had to kill one."

"Yeah, but you must know how."

"It regrows limbs, so I'd question if decapitation would work. My advice is cripple it and burn the body to ash. Its strength comes from water so--" Cas stopped talking.

Stiles couldn't see the cause. He just stopped.
"Cas?" Dean was concerned.

But Cas just shook his head. "I'm fine."

"See if you can find us a map of the sewers, would you?" Dean ordered, patting Stiles' shoulder, before guiding Cas to the balcony.

"Can you hear them?" Stiles asked, watching Dean's body language.

"Yeah."

"And?"

"More lies. He's not fine."

"What's wrong with him?"

"A lot. He thinks he's an angel."

**Two Hours Later**

Castiel took up the rear once they returned to the sewers. Not because he wanted to, but because it was the only way to avoid Dean's gaze. Stiles was leading the way, utilizing his cellphone, which was sealed into a bag for protection, as a map. Dean was behind him, heavily armed, with a shotgun at the ready. Castiel was fairly certain that weapon would only anger the creature, but it wasn't his place.

Derek was walking on the other side of the water, nudging the rats out of his way with his foot. He was watching the water for movement, but only saw rats, and one goldfish that had grown twice as large as it should.

Castiel heard the sound of a strong swimmer and he and Derek both turned, but the kappa was faster. A webbed hand shot out of the water, catching hold of the hem of Dean's jeans, and Dean was drawn underwater and pulled away faster than either of them were ready for. Derek broke into a run and Stiles wasn't far behind him, but Castiel was paralyzed as he watched them round a corner.

He had spent the ride thankful that the vibrations from the car hid that he was quivering. Now, it was like he had no strength in either his vessel or angelic self. His body sagged and Castiel felt the wet stone beneath his posterior. Whiteness crowded in at the edges of his vision and he could see the light spilling out from his vessel.

Derek got thrown into his line of sight, his eyes flashing a bright red as he fractured the wall. He managed to keep himself out of the water. Derek shook his head, regaining his senses, before noticing Castiel. He looked shocked, perhaps that he was finally accepting what Castiel was.

"Guys! Help!" Stiles shouted.

Castiel forced himself back to his feet, containing himself. Derek got up, leaping over the waterway and rushing to where Dean was thrashing to keep his head above water for more than a moment. Stiles was trying to aim, but Dean's body was being thrown around in every direction so fast that he knew he was more likely to hit Dean than his target.
Dean mouth breached the water and he gasped for air, before getting pulled back below. Derek took hold of some metal piping, before reaching into the water, taking hold of Dean's arm and pulling as hard as he could, but Derek was outmatched. Castiel saw the strain in his arm as he held onto Dean, who probably felt like he was being bent in half. The iron creaked as Derek managed to pull Dean back to the surface. Dean swallowed down as much air as he could, but Derek's grip slipped and he lost Dean all together.

"Do something!" Stiles shouted.

But Castiel was more dangerous than helpful right now.

Derek groaned, before diving in after Dean.

Minutes passed and no one surfaced. Stiles was twitchy, but he held back. He followed the motion, taking whatever steps he needed to remain by the action. Another minute passed and still nothing.

Castiel crouched, touching the water. It bubbled beneath his hand, before parting, taking out himself and Stiles as the water began climbing the walls. He slid into Stiles', who was awestruck by his work. Dean coughed, freeing his lungs of water and Derek swiftly returned to his feet, balancing himself with a hand on the floor.

The kappa was nowhere to be seen.

Derek looked up and Castiel followed his gaze to see the kappa swimming precise circles in the violent water with ease.

"That's not good," Stiles muttered, scrambling to his feet.

Castiel could see its eyes through the water and its target. Dean was still slow moving as his body readjusted to the free access to air. Stiles shot into the water, missing, but the action surprised the spirit. Its webbed foot slipped free of the water and it slid down the side, spinning to a stop between them all.

If it was angry before, it was now livid. Its head remained steady, barely moving as its body settled into a poised stance. Stiles shot the creature a few times, but each bullet bounced off the hard shell. Dean tried next, having access to the scaled flesh of his front, and drew his gun, taking aim within the second and firing the next, but it did nothing.

Winchesters did not waterproof their firearms.

Knowing his gun was as useful as pebble, Dean dropped the weapon and drew the machete sheathed at his hip. Stiles shot again, splattering the water pooled atop its head. The kappa moved quickly after that, charging Castiel. He tried to avoid it, but the distraction made him lose his hold on the water.

The murky water hit them all hard. Castiel tried to right himself, but he was lost in light. He reached out to touch anything that could ground him, but he couldn't differentiate between the spill of his grace and the water.

Castiel felt a hand on his shoulder, fingers curling into the coat he wore, and he was pulled from the water. He wiped the water from his face, but it did little. His ears were ringing so loud it made his vessel shake and his vision blurry. He could see Stiles massaging his knuckles and the child's lips were moving.

Castiel blinked, trying to tune out the ringing, but he couldn't hear the human. Rushing water
combatted the alien noise, but it wasn't loud enough to overpower it. Stiles shook him, his vessel rippling around his true form, and that was it. He had become a liability.

He pushed Stiles back and vanished, before losing control entirely.

--

Derek surfaced, shaking his head to get rid of as much water as he could. Stiles was sitting in a dissipating pool of light, dumbstruck, but looked unharmed. Derek turned in the water and Dean surfaced like a whale, trying to huff away the water from his lips as he breathed. He asked if Derek was okay with a quick cock of his head and Derek nodded.

"Stiles?" Dean called.

Stiles waved haphazardly and Derek swam to where he was half kneeling, half sitting, before climbing out. Derek smelt blood. Stiles' knuckles were slightly swollen, the result of a hard punch to an unrelenting surface, but that would heal within the hour. There was a cut at his eyebrow that must have happened when the water knocked him to the ground. He didn't have a concussion, but it must have rattled Stiles with the way he was acting.

"Cas?" Dean shouted, planting his hands on the opposite edge of the water and pushing his body out.

"He's gone," Stiles answered.

"What?" Dean's tone instantly turned urgent and concerned.

"He pretty much turned into a human glow stick and then poof."

"What kind of poof? Explosion or blip?" Desperation was sneaking into Dean's voice now.

And Derek figured out why when he saw Castiel's blade sitting at Stiles' foot.

"Like a candle getting blown out." Stiles raked a hand down his face, clearing it of water and forcing himself to focus.

"Okay." Dean let out a breath, his concern still high, but lowering slightly. "Okay. He left." He nodded to himself, planning. "We finish this and then we find him."

Stiles agreed, getting his feet beneath him.

"You sure he wants to be found?" Derek asked, standing as well.

"Never stopped me before." Dean rubbed his hair with both hands, chasing out as much water as he could. "What's everyone's weapon status?"

Derek picked up Castiel's discarded blade and pulled out the bowie knife strapped to his calf beneath his jeans. Stiles tapped the narrow sword he always picked out of Dean's trunk. Dean stood, redrawing his machete.

"The plan is to hack off its limbs until it can't move."

Derek rolled his eyes. "Because that worked out so well against the swamp thing."

"Angry monsters lash out. We pissed this sucker off. We don't end this now and this water will be red."
Derek raised an eyebrow as a rat swam past and churning the disgustingly brown water. He looked at Dean, who reconsidered his words.

"Okay. So it'll turn a reddish brown. Point is we gotta kill this thing before it goes topside again. Capisce?"

"Yeah. Fine."

"Good." Dean spun his blade, strengthening his grip.

Stiles moved to follow, but Derek cut him off.

"Head back to the car," Derek ordered.

"What? No!"

Derek touched the gash at Stiles' eyebrow, applying just enough pressure to make him recoil. Stiles checked it himself, putting a finger to the injury and finding the watered down blood, but it didn't faze him.

"I'm fine."

"Yeah. Now. But you get hurt worse and all he's got to offer you is a damaged angel. Assuming we find him."

Stiles stared at him, confused and shocked, before closing his jaw. "No. I'm going. Your track record with water sucks."

"Either you walk out of here or I carry you."

"Dean!"

"I'm with Zoolander."

Derek locked his jaw, resisting the urge to turn his rage on Dean, and returned his eyes to Stiles, letting the flash red. "Go."

Stiles shook his head, now seething with rage, but that was just another reason why he couldn't stay. "I'm not useless," Stiles grit.

"Not saying you are. But this is a closed space. No time to think. No time to figure things out. This is a fight about instinct and you haven't been in enough fights to have those instincts. So walk away."

Derek wasn't going to budge and Stiles knew that, but that didn't mean Stiles had changed his mind either.

"Go."

Stiles caved. Not because he wanted to, but because he had no other option. He turned, walking away and resisting the urge to look back. Derek watched until Stiles was out of sight and waited a few extra seconds to make sure Stiles didn't double back. He didn't.

Derek threw a quick glance at Dean and they pressed on. They didn't say much, but that was the norm during hunts. They were both focused, watching for any unnatural movement in the water. Derek listened closely. He could hear water dripping, cars above them and rats. The rats took over
most of Derek's senses. They stunk and were noisy pests. They'd already past a dozen swimmers. Derek had kicked aside plenty, watched them swim and even watched one sink its teeth into Dean's boot after he stepped on its tail.

Finally, they reached a point where the water stood still. It didn't matter that mere meters away, the water was gushing in. Derek pointed it out to Dean, who nodded in response, tightening his grip on the dagger. Derek knocked a rat into the smooth surface, making the water ripple, but nothing happened. Dean shrugged, inching closer. The water was so filthy that neither of them could see the bottom.

Something surfaced, but by the time Derek turned, it was too late.

Dean got knocked into the water and Derek was charged. He tried to plant his feet, but the stone was slippery wet and the kappa was fast and strong. His back collided with a wall with almost enough force to crack his back. Derek fought to unpin himself, but he was the weaker creature.

The kappa jerked suddenly, hissing in pain. Derek was flung aside and Dean was tackled. He stabbed the creature repeatedly, but it did nothing. It drove Dean backwards, tipping him into the water. Dean swung wildly, trying to take hold of anything to pull himself back to air. Derek moved quickly burying his bowie knife to the hilt in the creature's neck.

It still didn't waver. The kappa lashed out, pitching both Derek and Dean into a dead end. He heard Dean's shoulder pop out of its socket, but Dean barely groaned. He rolled onto his stomach, throwing his shoulder against the ground to knock it back in place. The kappa charged again, picking up more speed than before and it was headed straight for Dean. Dean wasn't moving fast enough and Derek managed to push off the wall.

He shoved Dean aside, but didn't have time to get out of the way himself. It rammed Derek into the wall behind him and this time it was definitely hard enough to break his back. Derek didn't even have a chance to howl in pain, before it threw him aside. He quickly lost feeling in his legs and was struggling to keep his wolf hidden.

His eyes were flashing between green and red, the shift in his vision making his head spin. His teeth were sharpening into fangs and his claws emerged. Derek squeezed his eyes shut and balled his hands into fists, burying his claws into his palms to hide them from Dean. He felt Dean's hand on his shoulder and jerked away, flooding his body with excruciating pain.

He heard the creature charge again and Dean turned away to face it. Derek opened his eyes. It rushed Dean, putting the hunter on his back. Dean grappled with it, struggling to keep his head away from the water. Derek reached for the blade still lodged in the creature's throat and cut through its shoulder until Dean could rip its arm clean off.

It slammed Dean into the floor with its good arm, leaving Dean dizzy and disoriented. He tried to attack it again, but hadn't even registered that the weight on his chest was gone and the kappa was once again going after Derek. Derek tried to move, but each tiny movement caused more and more pain. He lashed out pathetically, slicing its remaining arm with his claws.

A loud splash caught both creatures' attentions. Stiles skidded to a stop, nearly face-planting. The kappa turned and Derek did everything to stop it, but he was useless.

"Run," Derek growled.

But Stiles drew his sword.
Derek threw everything he could reach at the kappa and Dean fought to find his feet, his brain still rattled from the blow, but the creature didn't stop. Stiles raised his large blade, only to have the creature bow to him.

Everyone was confused. Derek could actually feel the confusion, before the metaphorical light bulb went off in Stiles' eyes. He bowed to the beast and it returned the gesture. Stiles continued the action, until Dean stood, picking up the machete that got lost in the fight. He waited for the kappa's head to dip, before he hurriedly sawed through its neck, decapitating it.

Dean straightened up and moved for Derek, who turned his head, hiding his second form, but he couldn't hide it much longer.

"Hey! Hack him up. We don't know if he can piece himself back together."

Dean hesitated, but Derek heard Dean's boot twist in the puddle behind him as he went to deal with the kappa's body. Stiles took his place, crouching down at Derek's side.

"Now would be the time to heal," Stiles whispered.

"My back is broken," Derek grit, his voice shaking along with the rest of his body.

"Okay. So why aren't you healing?"

"Serious injuries take longer."

"We don't have longer." He pushed Derek's shirt up, before his hands shot away.

"What?" Derek pressed his forehead into the stone, struggling to keep calm.

"I think I can see one of your vertebrae." Stiles touched Derek's spine and the pain was instant, drawing a snarl before Derek could silence it. "Yep. That's bone."

"Push it back in place."

"Oh no. I'm gonna take you to either a doctor or Cas. Your choice."

"Stiles!" Derek tried to glare at him, but it backfired, causing far too much pain.

"It's your spine."

"Please." The word came out more like a plea than a command, but Derek was desperate. He didn't know how much longer the kappa's body would keep Dean busy.

"I have a whole new appreciation for Pepper Potts."

Derek could feel Stiles' hand hovering over his spine and braced himself, steadying his breathing.

"On three. One, t--"

Stiles snapped the segment of bone back into alignment and Derek groaned, panting heavily into the pool of water beneath his head. His healing abilities finally kicked in, finishing off the job.

"You all right?" Dean asked.

"Yeah." Derek took his time getting up. "Just a sprain."
Dean eyed him closely, but Derek didn't let him pry. "How'd you know what to do?"

"Harry Potter." Stiles was beaming. "The Sorcerer's Companion. Knew it would be a good investment. I just didn't figure it out until it bowed. As deadly as they are, they are always polite and must return a bow. And, once the bowl in their skull is empty, their powers are gone."

"You're saying a story about teenagers with fancy sticks saved our asses?" Dean motioned himself and Derek.

"No. I did that. But JK Rowling is genius. And if you're not going to read Harry Potter, you should read The Sorcerer's Companion. Might save your life one day."

"Well, what does the genius say? Is it going to stay dead?"

"It doesn't exactly cover killing. Just how to survive."

"Of course. It's a children's book."

"Hey! Don't you ever knock Harry Potter. I could not have saved your hunter ass if it wasn't for Harry freaking Potter."

"Yeah, yeah," Dean muttered, picking up a few pieces of the kappa.

"Don't 'yeah, yeah' me. Accept that someone half your age saved you."

"You're not..." Dean paused, obviously trying to do the math. "Damn that's almost true." He turned without another word, starting off.

Stiles picked up a couple limbs, before looking at Derek. "You are okay, right?"

"Good as new." Derek took the remaining bits, walking away.

Stiles managed not to say another word. Dean was already coating the torso and head in lighter fluid when they surfaced. Derek and Stiles each added their parts. Dean finished drenching the carcasses and set it ablaze.

Stiles phone went off as the smoke turned black and Stiles unwrapped the plastic around it only to be confused by what he saw on the screen.

"What?" Dean asked.

"40.9, -98.3. Bring pants. Castiel."
"Cas!" Stiles shouted, getting out of the Impala. "CAS!"

"He's not here," Dean said, rolling down his window.

"How do you know? He wasn't at the exact coordinates. How do you know we're going to find him?"

"Because he wants to be found." Dean reached across the seat, pushing Stiles' door open again. "Come on."

Stiles got in, once again fiddling with his cellphone. They checked another four corn fields, before turning down a new stretch of road. Derek had texted. He hadn't found Cas either. Stiles had chosen to ride with Dean and Dean drove hard. He made the seven-hour drive in under six. Derek wasn't far behind and there were plenty of land-heavy properties to search.

It was starting to get dark, when one of Dean's phones rang. Stiles dug through the glove compartment to find it. He took it out and saw Cas's name on the screen. He answered it instantly, taking it to his ear.

"Cas! Where are you?"

"Tell Dean to drive straight for a mile."

"How--"

"I know the sound of Dean's car. You are a mile away." Cas hung up without another word.

Stiles stared at it for a moment, calling Cas back, but his call was rejected. "Drive straight. One mile," Stiles directed, switching to his own phone to text Derek. "He sounds okay."

"He's not."

Stiles looked at Dean, wanting to object, but it had to be bad if Cas ran away in the middle of a fight.

They came to a dead end, but the road could have gone for million more miles and they still would have known this was the spot. Dean turned off the engine and they both got out. After miles of nothing but corn, they were staring at a totally levelled field. It was like a steam roller turned the dying cornfield into one massive crop circle.

Dean and Stiles continued forward. Everything was leveled from a single central point and they headed right for it. There was a dip in the otherwise flat land. Dean picked up his pace and Stiles was right on his heels.

They made it to the rim. Cas was lying on his stomach, buck ass naked with feet swaying in the air and pair of brightly coloured sparrows hopping around in front of him.

"He's naked," Stiles said obviously.

"I can see that," Dean responded, shifting his gaze to the open sky.
Cas waved the birds off and stood up. Dean and Stiles looked at each other, expecting modesty from an angel, but he didn't have an inch of shame. Of course, there wasn't any reason for him to be ashamed of his body. It just felt like seeing an angel naked was grounds to be smote or killed or something painful.

But Cas just walked on past like he was wearing a parka.

"I miss the damn-ass bees," Dean muttered, following Cas. "Where's the coat?"

"Everywhere."

Stiles looked down, seeing a few threads of blue and beige. He scanned the whole, seeing a few scraps of fabric that clearly came from Cas's jacket and shirt. Stiles hurried after Dean and Cas.

"And your angel mojo?"

"Gone." Cas opened the trunk.

"What?"

"Cas?"

"Gone." He began digging through Dean's duffle. "Did you lose your hearing since you last saw me?"

Dean's eyes narrowed at Cas's attitude, but the angel, or ex-angel, didn't care.

"What do you mean gone?" Stiles asked.

"I mean, not naked by choice." Cas propped Dean's duffle up on the bumper. "Must you bury your undergarments?"

"You're not stealing my underwear."

"Borrowing, Dean."

"That's worse."

"They've been washed and you haven't soiled yourself in any of these." Cas pulled out a pair of Dean's boxer briefs, but Dean snatched them away.

"We're not sharing skivvies. Men don't do that."

"I'm not a man. I am an angel. And I have become accustomed to having my vessel's genitals supported by cotton. There is no logical reason why we cannot share your 'skivvies'." Cas threw a pair of air quotes at Dean.

"I don't want these back," Dean announced, holding out the pair of black boxer briefs.

Cas rolled his eyes, reminding them both that being alive for thousands of years meant more sass than his tax accountant façade could cover up. He leaned against the tail light, shimmying into the clothes as Derek pulled up. He got out, glancing at Cas, before looking to Stiles. Stiles pretended to flap wings, before motioning a slit throat, hoping Derek understood him, but the crease in his forehead made it abundantly clear Derek didn't.

"Stiles is attempting to inform you that my celestial abilities are presently nonexistent." Cas stood
up, threading a belt through the loops at his hips in hopes to keep the denim from falling down. "My peripheral vision is still excellent." He finished buckling the belt, before sitting back down to help himself to a pair of socks and boots.

"How long is this going to last?" Derek asked.

"I'm unsure. The first time I was this... human. It didn't pass until I died."

"Yeah or you picked a town where the next Eve has popped up."

"This is different."

"How?"

"Because it doesn't matter where I am. And there is nothing dangerous here."

"How do you know that?"

"I come here often. It's a safe place." He began riffling in Dean's bag again. "Do you realize how much plaid is in here?"

"Really? The guy who's worn the same outfit for half a decade is complaining about a little plaid?"

"A little plaid, no." Castiel picked one of Dean's dark gray tees, pulling it over his head. "But this isn't a little plaid, Dean."

"Enough about the clothes. What happened?" Stiles asked.

"My grace erupted."

"You mean your powers? That light?"

"Yes."

"And that's what did..." Stiles aimed his thumb at the wrecked field behind them. Cas nodded, putting the duffle back in the trunk and closing it.

"Then how'd you call him?" Derek asked.

"Somehow the phone survived." Cas revealed an old cellphone.

"Nokia. Man, not even angels can kill them," Stiles laughed, taking the phone and looking it over. "It's not even scratched."

"The last time this happened, you still had your coat."

"Forget about the coat, Dean. Until my batteries recharge, it's not coming back."

"But you're gonna be good as new, right?" Stiles asked.

The look Cas gave him wasn't an answer. He didn't know. Stiles was worried and he wasn't the only one.
"Why Grand Island?" Dean asked, shutting off his engine.

"You'll see," Cas answered, cleaning off the last traces of dirt from his face.

"I've hit my mystery cap for the day."

But Cas didn't elaborate. He only got out of the car. Dean followed him, groaning because it was all too clear that Cas was planning something.

"This better not be another playdate."

"I'm not introducing you to anyone new."

"Cas."

But the angel merely smiled, before going into a local sports bar. Dean looked around, spotting Derek parking on the other side of street. He waited for one of them to see him, before going after Cas. The bar was full and loud. There was a football game playing on the dozen televisions spread out around the place and everyone seemed to be reacting to every pass.

Cas had found a table and was already looking over a menu. If he was hungry, things were even worse than Dean thought.

"You can stop looking so worried," Cas assured, kicking out the chair across from him. "Worry causes humans to wrinkle. And not the attractive ones by your eyes. Those come from smiling."

"Cas. You're wearing my underwear. Let's not make this any weirder," Dean said, sitting down in the offered chair.

"Only you consider this weird."

"Men don't share underwear."

"I'm more than a man."

"Not right now."

Cas's eyes narrowed, before he blocked Dean with his menu. Stiles dropped down next to Cas and Derek took the remaining chair.

"I want mozzarella sticks," Cas announced.

"Because you feel like eating or because you're hungry?"

"Does it matter?"

"Angels don't get hungry. I just wanna know how bad this thing is."

"It's like I'm trapped in a circle of holy oil, but there is no getting out."

"And this afternoon? When you put that hole in the ground?"

"My grace overpowered me."

"Did you lose it?" Stiles asked.

"No. I can feel it. It's still there, but it's fragile."
"Fragile?" Derek reacted.

"Yes. I'm damaged." Cas swallowed. "Useless."

"Cas, we're all human here," Dean assured, pushing the menu into the table. "Angel mojo doesn't make you useful."

"The number of injuries I've repaired suggests otherwise. You wouldn't be here or alive without my celestial powers. I am infinitely more useful with my grace intact." Cas pulled the menu out from beneath Dean's hand. "This place makes good burgers. We should all have burgers."

"Cas--"

But Dean was cut off as the bar exploded with cheers and excitement. The game had to be over.

"There is nothing more to discuss," Cas decided. "Consider me human until further notice."

"What caused this?" Dean pushed.

"I don't know."

"Then we're not done talking."

"I have no answers."

"Then we got to come up with some."

Cas sighed, flattening out the menu once more and leaning forward. "Get me a drink and then we can talk."

"Seriously?"

"I am without grace. You've opened a beer for less. I expect something stronger. Something worthy of your flask."

Dean got up with a groan only to get nearly trampled by the amount of people leaving. He pushed his way past a few, before finally making it to the bar. The bartender was still rushing to close out tabs and clear off the bar.

"I'll be with you in a sec!" she called, throwing him a quick glance.

Dean gave her a nod. He wasn't in a rush. They didn't have their next case so all they had to do was find a place to crash for the night and hopefully figure out what was wrong with Cas. He waited, fiddling with a menu. Stiles came up beside him, joining him at the bar.

"Did you order yet?"

"No."

"Good. I want a burger."

"And Zoolander?"

"The grilled chicken," Stiles answered, hopping up on the counter out of boredom and began playing with a brightly coloured umbrella.
Dean scoffed. "Of course he does."

"Dean?"

He turned, not believing the voice or the face he saw.

Sam was standing a few feet from him.

"You know the sasquatch?" Stiles asked, looking between the two brothers.

Dean didn't answer, couldn't answer. He wasn't really sure which. Sam closed the gap, tugging him into a hug. Dean returned the grip, holding on so tight he was waiting for Sam's back to break. Sam pulled back, his hand still gripping his bicep as if he was expecting Dean to run.

Dean looked him over. He was fine. If the iron grip below his shoulder was any indication, Sam was still as strong as he ever was, but he looked happy. He didn't look like someone responsible for starting the apocalypse. He didn't look like an ex-blood junkie. He was a happy, healthy Sammy.

"What are you doing here?"

But Dean just stared at him, convinced he was smiling like a twelve-year-old girl, but he didn't care. He wanted to ignore every instinct told him to cut his brother with the silver blade inches from his hand or pull out the flask of holy water stuffed in his jacket, but Sam had no plans to do the same. Why would he? Dean wasn't even sure he remembered Latin.

Stiles cleared his throat.

Dean looked over at him, nodding at the table.

"Seriously?"

"Go." His voice cracked a little, but Dean cleared his throat and tried again, "Go."

"Fine." Stiles jumped down, sticking the umbrella in Dean's hair. "But if you're not ordering, send a waitress over. I'm hungry."

Sam watched him walk away, barely holding in the laugh. "Who's the kid?" His face shifted as he saw Stiles sit down with Cas and Derek. "Anything you wanna tell me?" Sam was smirking, almost waiting to hear that Dean had tumbled into some debauched foursome.

"It's summer. Students looking for money."

"That kid can pick up power tools?"

"He's my buddy's cousin."

"And he brought his boyfriend... Dean. Come on. How much longer are you going to tell me you're a construction worker?"

"Who else wears these boots?"

"Those guys don't do manual labor and neither do you."

"Of course I do."

"Hey, Ernie!"
Dean turned around, following Sam's eyes to the door. An actual construction worker walked in the door. He had the cliché workman's uniform: a tight white wifebeater, a yellow hard hat tucked under his arm and sawdust still clinging to his heavy jeans.

"This is my brother."

"The famous Dean Winchester." The man smiled, clapping his hand with Dean's and shaking it roughly. His palms were calloused and his grip was almost painful. "I was beginning to think you didn't exist."

"Depends who you ask," Dean laughed.

"We still on for Sunday?" Ernie asked Sam.

"Yeah. Unlike you, I like your husband's cooking."

"Because you don't have to eat it every night. Tag along if you're still in town, cupcake." He patted Dean's shoulder hard enough to knock him off balance. "Get a better bottle of wine than last time."

"Yeah, yeah. Tell Bert I say 'hi'."

"Say it yourself. His shift starts in ten," Ernie replied, taking a seat at the end of the bar.

"You know a Bert and Ernie?"

"Technically, he's an Albert, but not even they can pass up the opportunity to call themselves Bert and Ernie. But my point is, Ernie is a construction worker. You live out of a duffel and don't leave a paper trail."

"You've been looking into me."

"You're my brother, Dean. We were close and then you disappeared. I haven't heard from you in months. I mean, if you knew I moved here, would we even be having this conversation?"

Dean shifted his weight. They wouldn't. The phone Sam called was at the bottom of some creek and he hadn't gone within a ten mile radius of where he thought Sam was living. The safest thing for Sam was if they had zero contact so Dean was going to keep it that way.

"No. I thought you were still back in Washington."

"Too many people. I spent two months looking for you."

"And you ended up here?"

"Started looking for jobs near the middle of the States. Decided my best chance of finding you was to stay put and hope you came through town."

A part of Dean was impressed. It wasn't easy to hunt a Winchester down. It was twice as hard without demons or witchcraft. Dean learned his lesson about being sloppy. It'd taken long enough to clean up the mess their Leviathan counterparts had made and he just wanted Sam to not have to deal with any of it.

"And I was right. You're here."

"But I'm not staying."
"I'm not expecting you to. But you are going to stay at my place and we're going to talk about what you've been doing the past four months. Because I know you haven't road tripping to construction sites around the country."

"Sammy--"

"You're not changing my mind, Dean."

--

"That's his brother?" Stiles gaped.

"Yes," Castiel answered.

"His little brother?"

"Yes."

"I thought his brother was dead," Derek mentioned.

"And you wonder why I encourage you two to speak..." Castiel stuck the menu back in its place and leaned forward. "Sam is fine. He is perfectly healthy and happy, apart from the fact that his brother never calls, writes or anything else you humans do these days." He shrugged slightly as he looked at Derek; he was human enough to be counted as such. "The Winchesters are the most famous hunters of their era. Even Angels eventually viewed them a threat. Sam and Dean have killed demi gods, outsmarted arch angels and defeated away the truly immortal."

"But he doesn't hunt anymore?" Stiles leaned forward, utterly eager.

"He doesn't remember having ever hunted anything."

Stiles tried to form his next question and while his face continued to move and show signs of shock, he wasn't making any noise.

"How does he not remember?" Derek asked.

"The Winchesters have a fairly tragic story. Their mother was killed by a demon and their father became a hunter in search of revenge. Dean put family before all else and the innocent closely after. He embraced the life, but Sam never wanted to be a hunter. After everything they'd accomplished, Sam finally decided he wanted to live the normal life he always wanted and the best way, the safest way, for him to do that was to forget."

"But he remembered Dean," Stiles said.

"I don't think there's a force alive that could make either of them forget the other."

"What did you do?"

Castiel shifted, hearing the edge in Derek's voice. "I did what was asked of me by my friend."

"You had no right, either of you, to mess with a guy's head. Being an angel doesn't give you that right."

Castiel glanced at Stiles. He was silent, but that only displayed that he sided with Derek.

"Dean didn't ask. Sam did." Castiel sighed, crossing his ankles on Dean's vacant seat. "As pleased
I am that you've accepted that I'm an angel, I'd much rather you realize that I am not like the worst of my kind. I've extended that courtesy to you."

"We have our memories for a reason. No one should be erasing, altering or anything with them."

It took Castiel a moment, but he understood the anger. "Do your kind have that ability?"

"Some," Stiles answered when Derek didn't. "Let's just say we had a few months that were a pure mindfuck."

"My sympathies. I do understand what it's like to suffer a mindfuck."

Derek shifted. Castiel decided it was an appreciative gesture. Not one he would ever verify or perhaps one that his conscious didn't notice. Though Derek hadn't allowed Castiel to see more than the change in his eye colour, he was beginning to notice signs of the wolf locked within. He studied Derek when the opportunity arose, but Derek always noticed his gaze.

"He would make a great Thor cosplayer," Stiles blurted out, staring at the two brothers. "And he should do shampoo commercials and walk around with a fan on him at all times."

Castiel leant towards Derek. "What is the appropriate response to that statement?"

"There isn't one," Derek answered.

"He could be the next Fabio."

"Is he aware that we hear him speaking?" Castiel questioned.

"Don't try to get into his head. You'll only hurt yourself."

Dean approached them and it was obvious that he had lost an argument.

"You picked scissors again," Castiel deduced.

Dean's glare confirmed Castiel's suspicions.

Castiel sighed. "So much for my burger."

"Do you want us gone?" Derek asked, surprising them all.

Stiles wanted to object, but something the three of them understood was you don't come intrude on family affairs. While it was true that family didn't end with blood, having a biological tie enhanced the bond.

"I saw a motel a few blocks over," Stiles finally said.

"Or we can leave town," Derek clarified. "You don't owe us anything. He's your family."

"Which is why I'm not staying."

Derek wanted to argue, Castiel could see it, but he dropped his gaze.

"We're gonna spend the night and you're gonna back me when I say we have to leave in the morning."

"Fine," Derek agreed, but he wasn't pleased with Dean's decision. "And when he asks what we
"Construction," Dean answered. "Stiles, you're Cas's cousin."

"Feel free to call him Miguel," Derek suggested, standing.

"You're never going to let that go, are you?" Stiles remarked.

Derek glared at him, before heading for the door.

"I'd apologize again if I thought it'd make a difference," Stiles called, going after him.

Castiel stood to follow, but Dean stopped him with a rough hand to his chest.

"Why?"

"Because you deserve to be happy too, Dean."

"I'm not staying."

"I'm not suggesting that you should, only that you could. I want you to know that he is safe and you don't need to cut yourself off from him. You don't need to suffer."

"I didn't want to come here. I was doing just fine."

"You were running."

Dean's jaw clenched. He was desperate to not cause a scene with Sam scarcely out of earshot.

"He's a part of you, Dean. That's not going to change. You don't have to stay, but you don't have to go and you don't have to stay gone."

"Guessing you know where he lives."

Castiel nodded.

"Good. Take them there and fill them in on the cover story."

He moved for the door, but Dean blocked him again.

"If you try anything, you and I are done. We're leaving in the morning and that's that. We're not coming back and you're not going to let me get within a hundred miles of him. Am I understood?"

"As you wish."

Fifteen Minutes Later

Dean felt his heart clench as Sam pulled into a driveway. He recognized the white picket fence and the impossible green of his lawn. Sam shut off his baby's engine and took the keys with him when he got out. Sam was at the road by the time Dean got out, shaking Derek's hand and introducing himself. Stiles still didn't seem to be over Sam's enormous size. His heels barely stayed on the ground as tried desperately not to look five feet tall around Sam, but his brother had been sizing up basket ball players since he was sixteen.

Cas excused himself from the others, taking the driveway to stand at Dean's side.
"The house is warded against everything, but angels," Cas said. "I like coming here."

"I saw this place too. When that thing messed with my head back in Oklahoma. I watched Sammy die on his doorstep."

"It wasn't real."

"It was this place. This exact place."

"When I felt that creature's hold on your mind, I tried to offer you a reprieve. My intention was to give you something to live for."

"It got into my memories. Showed me the truth."

"Sam is safe here."

"Every time I come back here is another chance for something to follow me. Sam doesn't remember how to deal with vampires, werewolves, shapeshifters, any of it. Only protection he has against those is me gone and not coming back."

"Then at least make this visit count. Nothing followed you."

"How do you know?"

"Because I would never risk Sam's safety."

"All your memories are back, right?"

"Yes."

"When the leviathans clawed their way out of you, what happened?"

"I was possessed at that point."

"But you were conscious. You fought it. I would have been dead if you didn't take control."

"Dean--"

"No. I want you to tell me. Did we walk away from you while they tore you apart?"

"I don't know. I wish I could assure you that my vessel's destruction was swift but I don't know."

"You two coming?" Sam called, walking for his front door.

Dean swallowed, pushing down the guilt and smiling at his brother.

"All that time I couldn't find you, I would come here. There is no safer place in the world. The doors, windows and walls are salted and marked with sigils from within. They cannot be broken, erased or altered without destroying the whole house. I wanted to promise you he was safe and he is."

A dog burst out the door the second Sam had it opened, gushing over Sam.

"Of course there's a dog."

"Should I have mentioned that?"
"It's an actual dog, right? Not secretly a chick or a dude or anything other than a dog, right?"

"Yes."

Dean twitched, taking some relief as the dog practically bowed to Derek. But its submission ended as Stiles crouched down to rub its ears. It broke away from the three of them and ran for Dean. It jumped up on him excitedly, its tail wagging so aggressively it shook its whole body. Dean kept his hands up, not ready to touch the fifty pounds of fur and muscle.

"It's not a hellhound, Dean."

"I know."

"The worst it'll do is bite you."

"I know!"

"Then I do not understand your discomfort. Are you what they call a cat person? Can we get a cat?"

"I'm allergic--"

"No. I fixed that."

"We're not getting a cat."

"You're right. We should get a kitten. We can raise him to be accustomed to life on the road. And I would love him and feed him."

"My baby doesn't do fur. I just got the smell of wet dog out."

"Cats clean themselves and most of them hate being wet. We could get one that hates being wet."

"It's not happening." Dean squirmed to get free of the dog, but it followed him across the lawn.

"Mutt!" Sam snapped his fingers.

But the dog stayed with Dean, rubbing his head against Dean's knee and thigh affectionately. Derek whistled at the dog and he rushed to sit in front of him, staring up at Derek.

"Of course you'd end up with a male model dog whisperer," Sam laughed.

"I've never modeled," Derek said, exasperated.

"You pose. Constantly," Dean said.

Derek shifted and Stiles took a picture with his phone.

"Don't worry. You'll get that blue steel look right eventually."

"I hate you all."

One Hour Later

"So, Sam, what do you do?" Stiles asked, passing the green beans on almost as fast as Dean.
"I work at the town library."

Dean almost dropped the bowl of potatoes. "You're a librarian?"

Sam rolled his eyes, taking the bowl from his brother. "Archivist."

"What's the difference?"

"Archivists acquire, manage and maintain documents and other materials that have historical significance," Cas answered.

"Wow. You managed to find a job more boring than sticking books on a shelf."

"It's not boring. Grand Island has local ghost stories so I get to go through all this lore."

"Local ghost stories?" Dean glanced at Cas, before turning his focus back on Sam.

Sam handed off a piece of his pork chop to Mutt, who ate it quickly. He snacked on it happily, before going to Dean's side. He nosed at his arm, but Dean merely shifted to block his plate. Mutt was tall enough that he could get his head to Dean's plate the slightest hop. The way his eyes were watching Dean eat, it looked like he was considering taking the food right off his fork. Sam pulled Mutt back, trying to give his brother some relief, and he went to the other side of the table.

"Yeah. There's a bridge that half the locals think is haunted. Witch's Bridge." Sam smiled. "A witch and her son were burned alive and the story says she's still there. And if you drive across the bridge, she'll follow you home and burn down your house."

Dean laughed, trying to brush it off, but Stiles could see his mind turning, trying to decide if there was a chance the urban legend was based off truth. Mutt came to sit at Derek's side, staring at him in utter awe, and Stiles rolled his eyes.

"And what does Sam Winchester think make things go bump in the night? Aliens or the supernatural?" Stiles asked bluntly, stabbing his fork into one of the pork chops.

"Neither, but just because you don't believe something doesn't mean you insult it. I don't plan on making an ass of myself if I turn out to be wrong." Sam reached for his beer. "Like werewolves."

"You don't believe in ghosts, but you believe in werewolves?" Stiles asked.

"Don't believe in any of it, but I have read so many stories about werewolves. Yeah, most of them die with silver bullets to the heart. But back in 1846, there was a werewolf pack that took over the town a couple counties over. Hunters shot them full of silver bullets, but it did nothing and they killed any hunters that entered their territory. Then in 1902, a family of werewolf specialists showed up and killed every werewolf in the state. Turns out, they were responsible for taking out the beast of Gévaudan using silver bullets laced with specific type of wolfs bane. So when they heard about this seemingly invincible pack of wolves, of course they showed up."

"Let me guess. Winchesters? You like the story because you shared the name?" Derek claimed the rest of the green beans.

"No. They're French. Family's name is Argent."

Derek lost hold of the bowl, taking out Cas's glass and launching his fork. Sam had to duck to avoid getting stabbed in the eye. Instead, it was buried prongs deep in the wall behind the brothers.
It took everyone a moment to register the situation, before Sam pushed his chair back and got up.

"I'll get you another fork," Sam offered.

"Thank you, Sam," Cas reacted, watching Sam pull the fork free and go into the kitchen.

"Pass the potatoes, would you?" Stiles asked, covering for Derek.

"Do I know the Argents?" Dean whispered to Cas.

"One of them, I believe."

"So Sam--"

Mutt rested his head in Dean's lap, surprising Dean enough that he barely managed to keep hold of the potato bowl. One of the round root vegetables hit the floor and the dog sprinted into the other room with it.

"He found out about some hunters that thinks wolfs bane turns silver into super silver," Stiles said. "All it takes to kill a werewolf is a silver bullet to the heart. You've seen that yourself. Monsters don't evolve. They just get desperate."

Sam came back and Cas took the fork from Sam with a smile.

"So, Stiles, what story did Dean tell you to tell me?"

Stiles scoffed, biding his time. "We're a traveling stripper group."

"What? No!" Dean tried to object.

"I am not a stripper," Derek added.

"It was my idea. Cas had access to plenty of hot guys. I mean..." Stiles pointed at both Derek and Dean.

"I DJ. Derek and Dean take lead, because, well, look at them. Cas does this adorable angel routine with these epic lightning effects and Derek doesn't even need a ploy, only to show off his muscles and ass, and Dean really knows how to shake his ass when he has his tool belt on."

Sam broke down laughing.

"You should see the angel/devil routine that Dean and Cas do to close the show. Or the red riding hood routine. We get a chick up on stage and Derek poses as the big bad wolf and Dean gets to be the hunter that saves her. Unless she wants to get eaten by the big bad wolf."

"I'm going to kill you," Derek growled.

But Stiles only smirked, wriggling in his seat.

"I know I shouldn't believe it, but it's so much more realistic than you wearing a hardhat for its intended purposes."

"You can join us. I can set you up with a Tarzan routine. You'd look cute in a loincloth. Or maybe we set up a sexy brother routine. Chicks would eat that up."

"I like him," Sam laughed.
"Because I'm awesome."

Ten Hours Later

Everyone passed out during a Harry Potter marathon. They turned on the television thirty minutes into the first movie and Stiles wouldn't let Dean change channels.

Castiel was the last one asleep and he was the also first one awake. Dean was hunched sideways in an arm chair. Sam was too long for the couch so he wound up stretched out on the floor, his ankles knotted with Dean's and Mutt slotted into the bend of his knees.

Derek had slumped over the couch arm about ten minutes into the third movie and never sat up. Stiles tried to take advantage and doodle on his face, but Derek was by no means a heavy sleeper. So he twisted Stiles' wrist until he crumpled against the back of the couch. By the end of the movie, Stiles somehow ended up asleep underneath Derek, each limb tangled with one of Derek's.

Castiel smiled at the image, not willing to stand. Most of the men before him would wake up from a dropped pin. Castiel despised sleep. Without his celestial powers, his vessel required it, but angels did not dream. They had all the creativity and fantasy of man, but they made their visions reality.

It's what makes angels dangerous.

Castiel leant back, hitching his leg over the arm of his seat, and enjoyed the serenity. He was surrounded by steady heartbeats and slow breathing. There wasn't a single nightmare among them. Each person in the room was from a broken family, but here they found peace. It wouldn't last. As much as Castiel wished this happiness for Dean, he knew his friend wouldn't accept this life.

It didn't matter how much Dean did for the world, Dean never considered himself worthy of freedom, but Castiel only wanted Dean to realize he was worthy of happiness. Sam had managed to find happiness, but it was hollow in Dean's absence. Dean and Sam had spent so much time together that they didn't know how to be apart. It hadn't stopped them from trying, but their souls longed for one another.

It was hours before the sun rose. The light hit Dean's face first, but Dean rebelled against the suggestion to wake. He curled inwards, tucking his face into the crook of his arm. Sam stirred next and Mutt raised his head. Sam patted his head, easing his dog back to sleep, before looking around. Castiel raised his fingers, offering a silent greeting.

Sam pushed himself up, muscles clearly sore from his time on the hard floor. He slid free of Dean, signaling Mutt to remain in place. Mutt slid along the floor, settling beneath Derek's hanging hand and Sam rubbed his belly, before standing. He took his tablet and the keys off the coffee table and went to the front door, opening it silently. Castiel followed, matching the younger Winchester's stealth.

Castiel tilted his head as Sam slid onto the front bench, leaving the door wide open.

"You can wake Dean. I'm not stealing anything."

Castiel moved closer, watching him look through every hiding spot in the car. Dean had hidden every extra cellphone along with his fake badges, credit cards and IDs.

"Can I help you find something?"
"Just looking for answers." Sam flipped down the visors.

"To which questions?"

"What do you do?" Sam got out, walking to the trunk. "And honestly, that kid's story is far more believable than Dean's."

"I assure you, I do not possess the ability to gyrate my hips in an erotic fashion. I could demonstrate my lack of artistic movement."

Sam laughed. "I'm not calling you a stripper. I'm just saying you're more likely to be a stripper than a construction worker."

"Someone has to do the paperwork."

Sam rolled his eyes, opening the trunk. "What was your last job?" Sam pushed aside Dean's bags, looking for the fake bottom, but Dean had hidden the latch.

"Minneapolis. We corrected a flawed remodel of a sushi restaurant."

"I don't know why Dean's lying to me, but he's my brother. Why are you lying for him?"

"Why are you so convinced we're lying?"

Sam looked up at him. It was a stupid question. Of course, they were lying. But it wasn't Castiel's place to ruin Dean's secret. Sam closed the trunk and moved for Derek's Camaro, unlocking every door before he left the driveway.

"Derek doesn't like it when people touch his things."

"Then wake him up." Sam slid into the driver's seat, continuing his search.

"Do you really think you'll find anything?" Castiel questioned.

Sam found the registration for Derek's car and turned to his tablet. Castiel got into the passenger seat, watching him work. He missed Sam's determination and resourcefulness.

"If I looked you up, would your mom have died in a house fire too?" Sam asked.

"No. My mother did not die in a fire."

"What about the kid?"

"I've been told it's inappropriate to share others' pasts without their permission. But no. Fire was not the cause of death in his family."

"So they're both orphans?"

"No. Stiles' father is very much alive."

"So you just kidnapped your brother's kid for the summer?"

Castiel smiled. "I do enjoy his company. But his choice in traveling with us was his own."

"And Derek? How did you find him?"

"He is a friend of Stiles. Though they both deny it. It's quite comical."
"I'll bet. What's your last name?"

"I have no last name."

Sam looked over at him, before trying a few more searches on his tablet. Castiel watched him work, believing there was nothing to be found, but Sam found an obituary for Stiles' mother. Castiel hurried to read the words, but Sam tilted the screen away from him.

"Tell me about your brother. About Stiles' father."

"Sam..."

"I'm asking you about your family. That's not inappropriate. So either he's not your blood. Or maybe there's another secret you're trying to hide."

Castiel took a breath. "Stiles' father was a better man than yours. Yes, he fell into a depression after his wife died, but he didn't seek vengeance."

Sam shot from the car and Castiel hurried after him. He had to have said something wrong. He pushed through the front door with Castiel right behind him and Derek and Dean both shot awake so fast that Stiles somehow ended up on the floor.

"You never got out," Sam said, glaring at Dean. "You never stopped."

Dean froze along with everyone else in the room.

"You swore to me you were done. I know we had to do it, but we don't anymore. We said we were through." Sam crouched in front of his brother, sinking down so that they were eye level. "You're going to get caught. Credit card scams aren't as easy as they used to be."

Castiel watched Dean try to hide his sigh of relief.

"I don't want to have to visit you in jail. There's work here. Honest work. There's an auto shop looking for a mechanic. I've talked to the owner. They've been wanting to branch out into restorations for years. You said you could make a living out of that. And, hey, if construction really is your thing, Ernie is always looking for more men."

"Sammy--"

"You can stop running, Dean. You can stay."

Dean ran a hand down his face, shifting forward. "I can't."

"There's no trace of you. Trust me. I've been looking for you for months and found nothing. Get out now. While you still can."

Dean looked over at Castiel. He didn't want to leave as the bad guy, but he was running out of options.

"It's my fault," Stiles suddenly said. "Like, I'm not the reason he started, but he's doing it to help me."

Everyone was looking at him now and it was remarkable how well Stiles hid the fact that he was thinking up a lie before them.

"My dad's the sheriff and I'm the son any cop would hate to have. I listen in on his phone calls and
steal police radios all the time. Half the time I'd beat them to the scene. A while back, I saw something I shouldn't have. It wouldn't have been a big deal, but the guy had good lawyers and he went free." Stiles stood up, rolling up his sleeve to show an old cut that Castiel hadn't healed. "The guy didn't like loose ends. My dad wanted to leave town, but there weren't any transfers and we didn't have the money for it.

"A couple months ago, Dean came into town and my dad caught him in the middle of a scam. He made Dean an offer: keep me safe or get locked up. Dean's been stuck with me ever since. I would say call my dad, but he'll deny it all and probably put out an arrest warrant on Dean. So please don't. But Dean's not a bad guy and, yeah, I want to punch the guy in the face from time to time. But he doesn't deserve to go to jail."

"And them?" Sam asked, not taking his eyes from Stiles'.

"Cas is blood. He came along to make sure Dean didn't ditch me first chance he got. Derek is an overprotective ass. He honestly followed us around for a week before Dean finally broke. They pretty much still hate each other. So, now, I am probably the most protected person in the country. Like try and take a swing at me. Dean would probably let you because you guys are blood, but Derek will put you on your ass and it will hurt."

"Could he beat Dean?"

"If he cheated, easily. If they both played nice, it'd be a close call."

Sam shifted. "What was the case?"

"It happened a town over. My dad's station got called in as back up. The guy's name was Dmitri Romanov."

"He telling the truth?" Sam turned back to Dean.

Dean nodded.

"So if I look up this creep--"

"You'll see that he, allegedly, killed eight people," Stiles answered. "My dad worked hard to keep my name out of the paper, but I'm sure my name's somewhere." Stiles sunk onto the couch next to Derek. "So stop blaming your brother. He did something he's not supposed to, but he's stuck doing it until Romanov winds up behind bars. If you want to be mad at someone, be mad at me. I was a stupid kid and now a lot of people are paying for it."

"You could have told me."

"Dean's been shot at twice since this started. You can't blame him for not wanting them to know about you."

"Seriously?"

Dean shrugged, going along with it.

Sam exhaled sharply, running a hand down his face. "Give us a minute, would you?"

Derek got up, pulling Stiles from the room before he could consider protesting. Castiel hesitated, but Dean nodded at him to go so he did. He closed the door behind him, joining Derek and Stiles in the kitchen. Castiel remained next to the door with Stiles, their hearing not as good as Derek's.
"That kid needs me."

"And what about what you need?"

Dean laughed. "I'm fine, Sammy."

"I saw the stash of whiskey. You're drinking again."

"I don't get it," Stiles whispered. "How can you just change that much? I saw the pictures. They grew up knowing about it all."

"The human mind is remarkable. You take away one key bit of knowledge and the mind fixes itself. It fills in the blank on its own. I took the moments that told Sam that supernatural creatures exist. It clings to the truth that it can. He remembers the roles they played, the nights spent hustling pool, perhaps even the dead bodies. But he knows their actions were justified. He knows they saved a lot of people."

"I tried staying put!" Dean snapped, startling them. "I tried this life and it's not for me. I don't want to do the same thing every day. I don't want to cut lawns or stay in the same place for the rest of my life. It's not for me."

"The bunker we found. It was a home."

"It was a base. A great one. But a base. It's where we stayed when you were sick and yeah. I had a room there. But the plan was never to live there. I don't like staying put."

"You were smiling like an idiot when you had your own room. You've got one of those here."

"But I can't stay. We're not going to have family dinners every Sunday."

"Fine, but I deserve to know my brother's okay."

"We're not staying in contact because it puts you at risk."

"I'm not a kid. There's nothing you can do that I can't."

"Either you can accept this or I will beat your ass and leave before you wake up."

Sam scoffed. "I know your moves, Dean. So let me make this clear. I don't want to follow you and you don't want to be here. You clearly trust me enough to survive on my own. The problem is you. So you have two choices."

"One, you're going to be a stubborn ass and drive out of here without saying goodbye. You're going to think you got away from me, but you're haven't. I'll follow you to every back end town that's ignoring all the security updates to credit card systems. I'll even make reservations at places before you pull into the parking lot just to piss you off. I'll be there to give you coffee in the morning, I'll set your radio to blast that pop music crap you hate so much, I'll even start stealing your aliases."

"Two, you're going to leave here on good terms. I'll let you be the overprotective brother, because yeah, Dean, I know you. I don't expect you home every Sunday. I don't expect to you to read me freaking bedtime stories over the phone. I expect the goddamn courtesy to know you're not dead in a ditch and I don't want to be scouring newsfeeds to see if that kid turns up dead."

"So, yeah. You're gonna call. You can use payphones, burners, email me from libraries or internet cafes. I don't care what you do, but you're gonna let me know you're not dead. Otherwise, I'm going
to hunt you down and you'll be staring at my face so long you hate it. You're gonna show up on my doorstep on random days. It doesn't have to be Christmas or my birthday, but Dean, we're gonna do that family crap. When there's snow on the ground, I'm going to give you a stupid gift wrapped with a stupid bow and you're gonna stop at a truck stop and get me something too.

"We're brothers, Dean. And just because we don't want the same things doesn't mean we stop knowing each other. It doesn't mean we stop talking. It doesn't mean we stop being brothers. We've lost enough people. We don't need to lose each other as well."

Four Hours Later

"So this number and this email go to my BlackBerry," Sam said, handing Dean a piece of paper.

Dean looked it over quickly, making sure it was all legible before tucking it into his pocket.

"Use it, or the next time I see you, I'll carve it into the backseat and spray paint it inside the trunk."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me."

"Next time we come through here, you're driving," Dean said as Derek passed.

"Yeah. Fine," Derek muttered, letting Mutt hold his bag while he opened the trunk.

" Seriously?" Dean reacted.

Derek smirked, tapping the bumper and Mutt reared up to put the bag in the trunk. "Dogs respect me." He scratched behind Mutt's ear, before signaling him to drop back to the ground.

"You sure he doesn't just have a crush on you?"

Derek rolled his eyes, before nodding at Dean. Mutt shot off, tackling Dean to the grass before anyone was able to stop him. Sam laughed, watching his brother squirm.

"Wasn't my leg he was humping last night."

Dean pushed Mutt's head away from his. He was already had two stripes of tongue spit on his face and refused to get a third. Sam finally stepped in, pulling Mutt off, and shooed him back a few feet, where Stiles took over spoiling him.

Cas emerged from the house, still wearing the same set of Dean's clothes. They really had to go shopping. The belt keeping Dean's jeans from pooling around his ankles was far too necessary.

Dean had to give Cas credit. He didn't spend their entire trip staring at Sam. There would have been no explaining that.

"You better visit before thanksgiving," Sam said.

Dean nodded, but he wasn't sure how to make that work. Stiles and Derek would be gone by then so he'd have to leave Cas somewhere and that just didn't seem fair.

Cas had made a great sacrifice in letting Sam forget him. Dean saw Sam's lingering stares as he tried to figure Cas out; it was like a part of him remembered the angel, but he couldn't. He didn't
remember that Cas pulled Lucifer from his mind and suffered in his stead for months. He didn't remember how many times Cas saved their lives. He didn't get to remember how much of Cas's humanity he was responsible for. It was tragic and Cas took it without complaint. He was happy to smile and sit across the room from Sam. He owed Cas more than he could ever repay.

"Thanks for the couch. Even if it came with a two-hundred-pound duvet," Stiles said.

"No problem." Sam reached for Stiles' hand, shaking it. "Watch out for my brother." Sam took out a second scrap of paper. "If anything happens, get a hold of me."


"Good."

Derek pushed Stiles towards the car, offering Sam a small smile as a goodbye.

"You get the old man," Stiles said, climbing into Derek's Camaro. "See you at the gas station."

Dean waved them off and Cas stole a final glance at Sam, before moving to the passenger door and getting in.

"If you ever change your mind..." Sam swallowed. "You always have a place here. I'm not asking, but I would never regret having my brother here."

"I know. And if I knew how not to screw up your life--"

"You wouldn't. I'm just as much of a freak as you."

"No. You were the good kid growing up. This is what you've always wanted. So you're gonna enjoy it."

"I will, but there's no way I'm going to if I have to worry about your ass."

"All this time. Have I ever given you reason to worry?"

"You're kidding me, right? You've had so many near death experiences it feels like I've seen you die a hundred times. And I don't ever want you to die when I'm not around. Dad did it. He knew it was coming and he didn't let either of us be there. You get out before you die, before you get caught. That's all I ask. I don't care if you never stay."

Dean stepped in, hauling Sam into a hug. "I'll be back, but don't you ever worry about me. If anything happens, I won't leave you wondering." Dean backed off, smiling at his brother. "I'm the big brother. It's my job to worry."

"Bitch," Sam said, holding his ground as Dean sunk into the driver's seat.

"Jerk." He gave Sam a final smile, before taking off.

Dean looked back as long as he could. Cas was quiet, staring out the window. Dean pulled up to the traffic light, setting his eyes on the 'help wanted' sign hanging outside a mechanic garage. He ignored it, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel.

"If you ever change your mind, I would gladly watch over you both."

Dean shook his head.
"Why not?"
"Because it's my job to save people."
"Why?"
"If I don't do it, no one else will."
"It's not up to you to save everyone. You can't save everyone."
"I can't live knowing people are dying because I didn't do my job. Sammy first then everyone else."
"What about you?"
"This is what I do."
"But what do you want?"
"The day things stop going bump in the night, I'll figure that out. In the meantime, this. The family business. I'm the last one doing this so I'm gonna make it count. If you want out, that's fine. I ain't keeping you. I ain't forcing this life on anyone."
"I want to be here. Though I wish you could travel faster. Have you considered getting over your fear of flying?"
Dean shook his head. "No."
"First the cats and now the flying," Cas grumbled.
"Cas, we already got a cat. He's grumpy and calls himself Derek." Dean glanced over, relieved to see his friend smile.
Dean knew this was an important mission. It was his idea, but bringing the two of them in was proving to be a mistake. He should have handled this by himself.

But it was too late for that now.

They had split up. Stiles and Derek had each flanked out on either side of the area, fanning out and taking the matter absolutely seriously. Cas had gone right down the middle. He was relaxed, but he was also in the most dangerous section, getting hit left and right to the point where he was sneezing and desperate for retreat.

"This is unnecessary, Dean," Cas said, his nose still twitching.

"Wrong." Dean clapped a hand on his shoulder. "This might be the hardest thing we've had to do but it is definitely necessary."

"I don't like it."

"Of course you don't. Because I don't like this. This isn't how I'd do things, but you decided to take advice from a male model."

"The blame for our present predicament lays also upon you. I was content leaving things alone, but you insisted otherwise."

"You can't keep stealing my underwear, Cas!"

"It was never my intent to steal it."

"Borrowing it is worse."

"Then we could have bought underwear and been done with it. I intend to be back in my own apparel as soon as possible."

"Yeah, well. It's not soon enough."

Derek whistled, drawing their attention. He nodded at the dressing room, each arm hidden under a pile of overpriced clothing. Stiles was dashing along the wall, his head bouncing above the clothing racks as he moved beside Derek. He raised his hands as well, showing off the array of brightly coloured t-shirts and jeans he had picked out.

"Well, at least this'll be entertaining," Dean decided

Dean smiled at Cas, whose eyes were wide. He was miserable. But this was payback. He turned his nose up at Dean's offer stop at every thrift store they passed. He pushed Cas all the way to the dressing rooms. The angel couldn't dig his heels in well enough to save himself.

"Suit up," Stiles said, dumping his collection in Cas's arms. "We'll look awesome together."

Dean dug through the pile to see the witty phrases and comic book logos. Half of what Derek was holding was leather and the pants looked too small for any hunter. Dean liked knowing his pants wouldn't fall down, but he also liked knowing he could get a gun or knife down them. When they
were in pubic, Derek's pants were like a second skin. Yeah, they looked good, but Dean still couldn't figure out how he moved in them let alone how he didn't sound like a twelve-year-old boy.

"Have fun," Dean teased, sitting down in one of the husband chairs and getting comfortable.

Cas looked at Dean, absolutely begging to be saved, but Dean just scoffed.

"Save those puppy eyes for someone that likes dogs."

Cas turned to Derek.

"For once, I'm with him. A man needs his own clothes," Derek said, dropping down next to Dean.

"What do you mean 'for once'? I'm the leader."

Derek offered him a mockingly sympathetic smile. "You go ahead and think that."

"I'm the one that gets us cases. You guys follow me."

Stiles phone rang and he pulled it out. "Garth! My man! Whatcha got for me?"

Dean watched Stiles walk away, jaw hanging open. He should have guessed those two would be a match made in heaven, but Dean felt left out.

"How long--"

"Two weeks." Derek smirked, turning to face Dean. "We knew about that ghoul in Tennessee and the haunting in Montana before you. By the way, the wraith problem in Maine got taken care of."

"And same with the Rakshasa in Delaware," Stiles announced, wandering back towards them.

Dean sighed. "I miss the old days."

"By the way, I'm starting to work on a digital database of everything you've encountered."

"It's been done."

"What?" Stiles took the last chair.

Dean opened his mouth to answer when Cas pushed open his change room door.

"I feel ridiculous," Cas said, looking absolutely mortified.

Dean had to hold his breath to stop from laughing, which wasn't easy now that Stiles was beating the floor in laughter. The leather pants on his legs had to be tighter than Derek intended and they didn't match the brightly coloured 'BAZINGA' shirt from Stiles' pile. They were the pants rock stars used to wear to make sure they hit the high notes. Cas could barely walk and each step looked like pure torture. He tried to stand like he usually did, but he looked like he was in pain.

"If your pants are this tight, my respect for you has greatly increased."

Dean cracked, laughing as he looked over at Derek. Derek was doing the best at hiding his amusement, using his fist to hide his smile. He took a breath, before lowering his hand, somehow keeping his composure.

"My pants aren't that tight."
"Are they supposed to be this hot? My legs feel overheated."

"Okay. So I remain the only one that can handle leather." Derek got up. "I'll get you some pants that'll actually fit."

"What's wrong with ones I picked out?"

Derek looked over Stiles slowly, before one of his eyebrows raised, not needing a single word to make his point. Cas went back into change room and Stiles dumped himself in Derek's chair, hooking his legs over the side.

"So who made the database?" Stiles asked, letting his head fall backwards so he could look at Dean upside-down.

"What?"

"You said someone made a database. Who?"

"Charlie--"

There was a loud crash and Dean and Stiles both looked to the changing room.

"Cas?"

"I'm fine," he groaned, clearly struggling to right himself. "Could you help?"

"You're on your own, cupcake."

There were a couple more tumbles and the door even shook in its frame, before he seemed to make it out of his pants. Stiles kicked his wrist, annoyed at the lack of attention, and urged Dean to answer his question through his hands.

"Charlie Bradbury. She's pro with the computer crap. Makes Sam look like, well, you."

"Yeah, well. I got a hacker too. He's probably better looking than your dude. Everybody loves Danny."

Dean smiled. "Charlie's not a dude. Even if she plays for the same team as them."

Stiles' eyes widened, sitting up. "You have a lesbian hacker? Why am I just hearing about this now?"

"I tell you what you need to know."

Stiles rolled his eyes, taking out his phone to make a call. "Hey, Garth. I need contact information for Charlie Bradbury."

"Give me that." Dean reached forward and yanked the phone from Stiles' hands, and hanging up and stuffing it in his own pocket. "How did you even get his number?"

"Do you really need to ask that?" Stiles took out a second phone. "Ooh. She made it into back up phone number four. She must be cool."

Dean reached over, taking that phone as well. "You got a life to go back to, kid."

"Seriously. What is wrong with Stiles?"
Derek returned as Cas pushed open his door. He took one look at Cas, before pushing him back inside with the jeans he had brought.

"Dean's got a point," Derek said, leaning on one of the stalls.

"I hate it when you two agree," Stiles grumbled.

"Good. Then we can go home."

"No. No way. We still got another seven weeks before we have to be back."

Derek huffed and Dean swore he could feel Derek's blood boil from across the area.

"Seriously? You're still not over wanting to go back?"

Derek shifted his weight, arms crossing tightly over his chest.

"Then go. I can handle myself. I'll catch a flight back at the end of summer."

"I'm not leaving you."

"Amazing," Dean remarked, getting up. "I ditch my little brother and still get stuck dealing with chick flick moments." He knocked on Cas's door. "Those pants crushing your nuts?"

"No. I think these are sufficient."

Cas pushed open his door and Dean tilted his head. The jeans he was wearing actually fit, the t-shirt he had on looked like Thor's armor in the Avengers, but it was subtle enough that most people wouldn't notice and the leather jacket coating his arms looked like it was straight out of Derek's bag.

"Not bad."

Stiles popped up at Dean's side. "Not bad? Cas, you look awesome!"

Cas smiled.

Two Hours Later

Stiles turned on his phone. His father was done listening to excuses. He gave Scott the number to one of the cells Dean never used and kept his phone off most of the time. Scott would tell him when his dad was on shift and Stiles would leave messages on the answering machine to make sure his dad didn't worry. He stared at his phone, letting his thumb hover over his home phone number.

Stiles sighed, looking for an excuse not to call home.

He didn't have to look far.

Cas was looking over the Impala, eyebrows furrowed. Stiles got out, shoving his phone in his pocket.

"You doing all right?" Stiles asked.

"Fine." He looked over at Stiles, his lips lifting into a smile.
"Really? I mean, it can't be easy."

"I don't want to talk about it." Cas leant against the side of the Impala.

"You lost your powers. I mean, I'm with you. I'm hoping it's temporary, but I mean..." Stiles couldn't think of the words to finish his question so his hands took over.

"I am open to suggestions. Do you know something about angels that I don't?"

"No, but I'd like to think I can offer a fresh perspective. What about filling that hula-hoop with rock salt? That was pretty genius."

"And colorful." Cas rubbed away a speck of mud on the door.

Stiles glanced over to see Derek and Dean in the motel office. Dean leant over Derek to help himself to the bowl of mints. Derek still couldn't let down his guard. Stiles knew he shouldn't be surprised, but it was a vicious cycle. Derek wasn't comfortable around Dean, which stopped Dean from trusting Derek and so on.

"Do you think there's ever a chance Dean would accept Derek?"

Cas looked over his shoulder, watching the two men.

"I mean, it wouldn't be the first time. He talks about that vampire from Purgatory. The good one." 

Cas looked back at Stiles. He thought about it, but couldn't decide on an answer. Stiles chewed on his lips, looking at the two of them again. There had to be a solution and it would only get harder the longer they waited. It didn't matter that Dean had seen Derek himself when the full moon was out and he was about to make it through another full moon tonight.

"That memory wipe thing you did to Sam." Stiles focused on Cas again. "Have you ever done it to a person without their permission?"

"Yes."

Stiles' eyebrows raised. He wasn't expecting the answer to be yes. He knew Cas had a past; Cas had been honest about that. But he still couldn't wrap his head around half the stuff Cas had taken responsibility for.

Derek and Dean emerged from office. Dean laughed, slapping Derek's shoulder, before they separated. Derek went to the Camaro, popping open the trunk.

"If we told Dean about Derek and he didn't take it well, would you make him forget?"

"I'm not presently able."

"But if you could?"

Cas shifted, wetting his lips. "No. I don't think it would be fair to Dean."

Stiles nodded. Cas had already done plenty by merely keeping Derek's secret.

"Grab the bags and get in here," Dean ordered, unlocking one of the motel rooms.

"Training?" Stiles asked, perking up.
"Yeah. You too, Cas. Need to make sure you ain't rusty."

Cas watched as Stiles propped open the false bottom to Dean's trunk. Stiles took the packed duffel bags. Cas took the six pack resting in the corner and closed the trunk. He followed Stiles into the motel room, looking over Derek as he passed with a raised eyebrow. Derek's eyes narrowed, but Stiles ignored it. It wasn't the first time they had a stare off. Stiles laid out every weapon on the table, matching the boxes of ammo to their guns. Cas inspected one of the silver blades, settling into the chair closest to Derek.

"Good," Dean approved, jostling Stiles as he clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Take them apart, clean them and put them back together," Dean ordered, taking the six pack away from Cas. "If you do it right, you can have a beer."

"No, he can't," Derek snapped.

"It wouldn't be the first time," Stiles said, knowing just how many times he'd raided both the evidence locker and his father's liquor cabinet.

"Great. You're on your way to destroying someone else's life," Derek grumbled, helping himself to a bottle as he shoved past Dean.

"Come again?" Dean glared at Derek.

But Derek merely scoffed, cracking open his bottle and draining it in a single go.

"He's on his period," Stiles laughed. "Go on, princess. Make yourself a bubble bath."

Derek's eyes fixed on Stiles. His sobriety wasn't in question. His glare wasn't hazy and his balance was perfect. He was pissed, more so than usual.

"Twelve hours of driving is enough to screw with anyone," Stiles trying to justify, even he was restless.

"If he was a good brother, we wouldn't be here."

Stiles could feel the room turn ice cold.

Dean set down the remaining beers, stepping towards Derek. "You mention Sammy again and your modeling career is over."

Derek scoffed, closing the remaining gap. His chest was puffed out and Dean was matching every inch of intimidation. Dean had his anger under control, but there was a long list of triggers that could leave a professional boxer on the floor. Derek had an obvious advantage, but there were only so many hits the guy could take before Dean started asking questions.

"Go ahead. Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me what you did to your brother was right."

"Okay. So we're gonna turn in for the night," Stiles decided.

But Dean's hand raised; he wasn't going to back down. "He doesn't need to be hiding behind you."

"He's not the one I'm protecting."

Dean spun around, surprised by Stiles' implication, only to laugh when he saw that Stiles was serious. "I don't need protecting."
"Back me up here, Cas." Stiles looked over at the angel.

But Cas raised his hands, wanting nothing to do with the fight.

"He's living the life he should have always had," Dean reasoned.

"If he wanted that life, he could have had it," Derek disagreed.

"You don't know us if you believe that. Sammy tried. He walked away from all this and they killed Jess. She got lit up like our mom. Free will doesn't mean there aren't bastards trying to force you down a path. I wanted this life, but Sammy? We forced it on him, then half the evil sons of bitches we were after kept him in it. So don't you dare say he had no right to get out."

"Fine. You were wrong forcing it on him to begin with."

"Derek!" Stiles barked, but the werewolf wasn't backing down.

He stepped closer to Dean. "You failed your brother growing up and you're failing him again now."

Stiles forced his way between them, shoving Derek backwards before Dean could get his hands on him. "Outside, now."

But Derek's attention was still on Dean.

"I said 'now'!"

Stiles had to push Derek right out the door, before he did any of the moving himself. Derek was seething, his entire body heaving with every breath. Stiles took a final look inside to see Dean looked like he was just as worked up as Derek. Stiles signaled Cas to help Dean out, before closing the door.

Derek was halfway across the parking lot by the time Stiles turned around. His fists were clenched tight and Stiles knew he should walk away, but he was pissed. Derek had gone too far.

"I don't care how much you hate the guy. You can't--"

"He's an idiot," Derek cut off, spinning around. "You too."

Stiles stared at him. He didn't understand. Derek practically rolled his eyes, before continuing his walk across the parking lot.

"You guys still have family and you want to walk away from them," Derek growled.

"I'm not--"

"You abandoned your father."

Stiles bit his tongue, resisting the urge to rip Derek a new one. "Okay. I'm going to let that slide because of the moon."

"How do you know your dad's not bleeding out in an alley? What about that bottle of Jack? You think he hasn't downed it all?"

Stiles swallowed. He was not willing or prepared to have this fight. He turned away, backing down, but Derek jerked him backwards, putting himself between Stiles and his room. Stiles tried to step around him, but Derek wouldn't let him past.
"You're picking all these random people over your own father."

"Innocent peop--"

"And what did your father do? Isn't he a good man?"

Stiles bit down on his tongue, knowing that any word out of his mouth would just get twisted. But silence wasn't acceptable.

"Isn't he?"

"Yes."

"He's not more important than the nameless people we're protecting?"

"Yes." Stiles could barely hear his own voice.

But that didn't seem to be a problem for Derek. He was advancing on Stiles again, making Stiles feel like he was two feet tall.

"Or maybe you haven't told him about werewolves because he can handle himself. Maybe that squad car he drives has a trick trunk like Dean's. Maybe you've swapped all the bullets in town to ones laced with wolfsbane in case some rogue werewolf comes through town. What if we don't kill everything? What if we piss off something and don't kill it? Plenty of the things we hunt travel."

"Stop."

"He's gonna die. That's life. But if he dies while you're out here, you're going to regret it. If you could have stopped it, people are going to hug you and tell you it's not your fault, but you know they're wrong; that you're going to carry that guilt, because he's your family and there is no reason not be there for him."

Stiles worked to get around Derek again, but the alpha wasn't letting him. Stiles took a swing at him, but Derek had the advantage. Stiles fought hard, but it ended with him pinned against the motel wall. He tried to get free, but Derek wouldn't allow it. He lashed out, clawing and swinging, but Derek managed to get both Stiles' wrists in one hand, squeezing them until he stopped struggling. Stiles wasn't looking at Derek; Derek had pushed Stiles past his breaking point and he just wanted to get away and Derek wasn't allowing it.

"Scott checks on him, does he? How's he doing with the full moon? Maybe he'll take Isaac tonight. He's good with full moons. Most of the time."

Stiles struggled again, but Derek only tightened his grip, pressing his fist into Stiles' chest. His chest felt tight; he was barely holding it together.

"Maybe I've got you all wrong and you're just waiting for the next tragedy in your life. Maybe you're okay if he dies."

Stiles snapped and he turned into a wild animal. He let Derek support his weight, kicking and thrashing, but it didn't stop Derek. He spun Stiles around, using his entire body to trap him in place.

"Maybe he's better off without you."

"Hey!" Dean shouted. "What the hell is wrong with you?"
Derek dropped and Stiles hurried to bury everything, keeping his face turned away from Dean as he wiped away any sign of how worked up he might be. He forced a laugh by the time Dean was there.

"It's all good. We were just sparring," Stiles covered.

He looked over at Derek, seeing every ounce of guilt that pooled in his face. It was obvious that he lost control and was still scrambling to keep it. Dean looked back and forth between them both. He smiled, but Dean didn't buy it.

"You gotta help me work on dealing with getting pinned," Stiles continued. "Not all of us can just go caveman."

"Get him away from me," Derek said.

Stiles looked at him. He wasn't ready to hear that out of Derek's mouth. Dean wasn't fazed. Stiles felt Dean's hand on his shoulder, pulling him away. Stiles went willingly, but tossed off Dean's grip. Cas held open the door for them both, neither of them giving him a chance to do anything other than to go inside.

Stiles took one of the beers, cracking it open. Dean opened his mouth to protest, but quickly saw there was no stopping him.

"Pass me one," Dean said.

Stiles pulled one out and tossed it to Dean. Stiles took a few gulps, before flopping onto one of the beds.

"You okay?" Dean asked.

"I'm fine," Stiles answered, staring at the popcorn ceiling.

"You're lying."

"No chick flick moments, remember?"

"Then don't call it one," Dean said, quoting Stiles.

Stiles scoffed, rolling his eyes. He had no interest in talking about himself. "Why did you let Sam forget? Isn't he safer knowing what's out there?"

Dean let out a breath, turning towards Stiles. "For years, do you know what my family did?"

"Save people?"

Dean laughed. "Yeah. We saved plenty. But we suck at saving each other. We literally kill ourselves saving each other. My dad gave his life for me to protect Sammy and I failed. He died in my arms. But the thing about demons is they're always happy to take souls. I gave up mine and went to Hell. I don't regret it. There isn't a thing I wouldn't do for my brother. Sam's the same way. If he doesn't know about demons or witchcraft, he'll leave me dead. He'll do what normal people do. He'll move on."

Three Hours Later
Dean waited until Stiles was asleep before joining Cas outside.

"Zoolander turn in yet?" Dean asked, leaning on the railing with Cas.

"Derek is in his room, yes," Cas answered. "Would you like me to stay with him?"

"I think we leave the male model alone. You saw his face. Whatever he said to the kid was enough
to make him realize he was being a tool."

"He's dangerous," Cas said, dropping his voice.

"Yeah, I'm seeing that," Dean agreed, tipping his bottle up for a fresh swig of beer. "What's his
deal?"

"His deal?"

"What don't I know about him?" He looked over at Cas, watching the angel decide on his answer.

Cas looked back at Stiles, before returning his attention to Dean. "I don't know what to tell you."

"What kind of man is he?"

Cas's eyebrows raised automatically as he once again thought about his answer.

"Is he a good guy?"

Cas hesitated again and Dean was getting pissed off. He shouldn't be thinking of how to word his
answer.

"Whatever it is you're hiding, you tell me. Did he hit that boy? Did his house get burned 'cause
they were witches? What? I'm sick of not knowing."

Derek's door creaked as it swung open. Derek came out, jaw tight and keeping his distance. Cas
shifted, letting Dean remain between himself and Derek. He was nervous. Even when Cas was
human, he didn't get nervous often.

"You got something to tell me?" Dean asked, making sure his voice carried down the few doors to
Derek, but wouldn't wake Stiles.

"You know everything about me you need to know, hunter," Derek answered.

Dean exhaled. "Watch over the kid," he instructed Cas. "If he wakes up, keep him inside." He
handed the angel his beer. "I'm sick of playing nice."

He went right at Derek, throwing a couple hard punches. Derek dodged them both and, worse,
managed to twist Dean around and throw him against his baby. Dean pushed himself up, but Derek
was right there to land a punch to his face, sending him to the ground.

"Can you do anything on your own?" Derek taunted, kicking Dean in the stomach.

Dean spit out a mop of blood as he used his Impala to get back to his feet. Derek took a step back,
giving Dean a chance to recover.

"Oh, I'm going to enjoy this," Dean grit.

Dean rushed him. Derek ducked his first swing again, but Dean was ready for the dodge. He
twisted Derek into a headlock and Derek took out his leg, slamming Dean into the concrete with his entire body weight. Dean groaned, before flipping Derek off him. Derek practically bounced off his car.

They both hurried back to their feet. Derek cracked his neck, both his shoulders rolling and popping audibly from the action. Dean egged Derek on with a hand motion and Derek came at him, charging Dean. Dean tried to fend him off, but Derek ran him into the wall hard enough that Dean knew he'd be bruised in the morning.

"Did you leave your brother because you couldn't protect him?" Derek growled in his ear.

Dean lashed out, forcing Derek to drop him, and he went at Derek before the model had a chance to prepare. Technique went out the window after that. There was far too much anger and aggression to merit any actual skill.

Derek finally got an advantage when their brawl left Dean with a dislocated shoulder. Derek twisted Dean's uselessly arm to his back and caught the hunter in a headlock, cutting off his air supply. Dean fought to free himself, but Derek had his legs pinned to the ground with his knees and was keeping Dean in pain and breathless.

Dean swung blindly and felt Derek's head move to avoid his fists. He waited for Derek's head to shift into the right spot and threw his head back. His skull collided with Derek's nose and Derek's grip loosened. Dean flipped Derek over his shoulder, but the model used the momentum, throwing Dean into a door and making the wood creak and rattle in its frame.

Dean tried to move, but Derek was on him, throwing punch after punch. Dean raised an arm to protect his face, but Derek forced it away. The door opened beside them and there was a loud clang. Derek rolled off Dean, rubbing the back of his head. Dean looked up to see Stiles standing over them with a fire extinguisher at the ready.

"Were you planning on stopping them?" Stiles asked, tossing his head at Cas, but never taking his eyes off Derek.

"Didn't need his help," Dean snapped, trying to hide the way he swayed as he got up.

"Clearly," Stiles remarked, unimpressed.

Derek stayed down. He was in infinitely better shape than Dean. His nose was blood and there was a single line of red out the corner of his mouth. Dean knew he was going to be sporting a black eye for at least a couple days and his arm was still hanging uselessly at his side.

Stiles spun the fire extinguisher once, before setting it back down in the motel room. He stepped past Dean and Derek, heading for Derek's still open motel room door.

"Come on, tough guy," Stiles said, looking at Derek expectantly.

"I don't think--"

"Lick your wounds, Batman." Stiles stood tall as Derek passed him. "Bane beat you this time."

"Who does that make you? Cat Woman?" Dean asked.

"I'm whoever you dream about at night." Stiles blew him a kiss and disappeared into the room with Derek.
"Stiles!"

Stiles forced his eyes open. The sun was barely up so his room was mostly dark. It only convinced Stiles that he just got to sleep an hour ago. He pushed himself out of bed with a groan, listening to Dean pound on his door, shouting his name and making Stiles damn happy he wasn't hung over.

"Stiles!"

He reached for the doorknob, but Dean broke down the door. Stiles barely managed to jump back to miss the wooden panel and the hunter barreling into the room.

"Whoa! What the hell is your problem?" Stiles reacted, wide awake now.

"You're here." Dean breathed a sigh of relief, gripping Stiles' shoulder, half to steady himself and half to feel Stiles' presence. "You okay? He hurt you?" Dean asked, looking him over.

"He who?" Stiles asked, fighting Dean as he turned his head. "I'm fine!"

He pushed Dean off and Dean went to the bathroom, knocking the door open. Stiles went for the light switch, flicking it on. Derek's bed was empty and Dean was in even worse shape than last night. There was a line of blood coming from his hairline showing that he'd been hit in the head and tri-cuts through his shirt at his torso and over his shoulder. He was a bloody mess.

"What happened to you?"

"Zoolander."

Stiles felt his throat close up. His mouth was open and his brain was trying to come up with anything to say, but Dean was walking around with three cuts to his abdomen.

"He got the jump on me and drove off with Cas in the trunk an hour ago," Dean said.

"Derek wouldn't--"

"I saw him!" Dean barked, crowding Stiles.

He was pissed and rightly so, but Derek couldn't have done this. Stiles knew Derek better than this. Yeah, he didn't like Dean, but this wasn't right.

"You need to tell me everything you know about him. Now."

"I know Derek wouldn't come at you if there wasn't a reason."

"Cas is missing." Dean pushed him back, trying to make his point.

But Stiles just hit back, before putting a couple feet between them. "I know that. But it doesn't make sense."

"You and I clearly remember last night differently."

"Asshole to kidnapper is a huge leap."
"I saw it. With my eyes."

"Opposed to what? Your elbow?"

Dean was in full death glare again. Stiles dragged a hand through his hair. He went outside, heading down to Dean's room.

"Uh oh," Stiles breathed.

The motel manager was standing with a police officer, answering questions and possibly more livid than Dean. Half of what he was shouting at the police officer wasn't English.

"This way," Dean hissed.

Stiles hesitated. His backpack was in there, which had his cellphone, laptop, wallet and who knew what else with his name on it. Stiles had been too sleepy to bring it with him when he switched rooms.

"Stiles," Dean urged.

He backed down, walking away casually as he followed Dean around to the back of the motel and into the woods.

"Where's your car?"

"Flat tire. Asshole pitched a glass bottle at my baby," Dean answered, picking up the pace.

"Then what's the plan?"

"I got an arsenal in my trunk. I plan on testing it out on that pretentious jerk."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Let's slow down a little."

"Do you not see me?" Dean snapped, turning around so fast that Stiles nearly fell over to avoid running into the hunter. "Do you not noticed one missing angel?"

"I also notice one missing..." Stiles mind drew a blank. "Derek."

"Because if he was still here, I'd have kicked his ass. Now come on."

Dean broke out into a run again and Stiles followed. He kept up with Dean, but after about five miles his footwork was getting sloppy. He tripped on a surfaced root and hit the ground hard, his head barely missing a rock. Stiles groaned, rubbing where the side of his face hit the dirt. Dean came back to help him up. He moved to get his hands beneath him, his arms dragging through the flower bed he landed on. Dean put Stiles back on his feet and Stiles looked at the petals that snagged in his fingers. He recognized the shade of purple and looked around, finally paying attention to the dominate flora.

Aconite.

"That's never good."

"What?"

Stiles smacked his hands together, ridding them of any trace of the flower. "I think I twisted my ankle." He faked a limp towards Dean.
Dean exhaled sharply, clearly weighing his options.

"Just go on ahead. I'll just make a straight line. You got enough tracking skills to find me again, right?"

"I got a male model acting like a homicidal maniac. I don't think leaving you on your own is a good idea."

"Thought he drove off."

"Yeah. I don't know how far."

"Look. I'll be fine."

Dean raised an eyebrow at him.

Stiles laughed. "Unless you wanna carry me, I--"

Dean moved for him and Stiles flailed, somehow ending up in a karate stance.

"You're not carrying me. Just haul ass. It's not that much farther, right?"

Dean looked onwards, trying to see through the trees. "Pretty sure there's still a few miles."

"Just go. I'll promise to scream if that makes you feel better."

"Liar."

"Either I stay put or I limp on. Take your pick."

Dean exhaled slowly. He wasn't happy with his options.

"Stay put."

Stiles nodded.

"I mean it." Dean took out the bowie knife he always had on him, handing it to Stiles.

"What? You don't trust me?"

Dean face showed that he didn't. He wasn't wrong. As soon as Dean was far enough away, Stiles planned to bolt in the other direction. Dean pointed to a log and Stiles limped over to it, sitting down innocently. Dean rolled his eyes, already regretting his decision, but hunters didn't like being improperly armed.

Stiles watched Dean take off, running at a damn impressive speed for a man that missed out on his morning breakfast of donuts and cheese doodles. Stiles waited until Dean was out of sight and then forced himself to wait a while longer. He didn't need Dean turning back early to find him hightailing it in the opposite direction. He drummed his hands on his knees, playing out the beat to a couple songs, before finally giving in.

Stiles bolted, sprinting back towards the motel. Aconite plus werewolves never ended well. He had to find Derek first. Dean couldn't have seen what he thought he saw. If he did, then, well, Stiles definitely had to find Derek first.
Ten Minutes Later

Derek shot awake after a sharp sting spread throughout his body. Moving that fast was a mistake. He didn't make it to his feet. He moved too sporadically to get any traction and fell back to the ground. He was dizzy and weak. Derek looked down. His torso was cut up, badly and he wasn't healing. Every cut stung and the purple that clouded his vision explained a lot.

It was common form of aconite. It grew in almost every state, but there was a lot in the woods here. It wasn't toxic, but direct contact stopped injuries from healing. He crawled away, finding a patch of sun to lie in. He was freezing and his shredded shirt wasn't helping. Derek ripped off the fabric sticking to his chest and began plucking out the petals sticking to his injuries. He watched his wounds close, before pushing himself to his feet.

Derek looked around, everything still a little hazy. The birds seemed too loud and the sun felt too bright. He didn't have a good night. He remembered struggling to keep any trace of control. He remembered not being able to sleep and leaving Stiles to run off some steam. Then, he got jumped and it all blurred together after that. There were fists and blades, maybe only one blade.

He wasn't sure.

Derek pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to regain control of his senses. There had to be a river and skunks near by, because the area reeked and his ears were filled with the sound of rushing water. This wasn't normal. Of course, nothing was normal these days. He'd hadn't had a night to himself in weeks and he'd bitten down on his tongue so many times Derek was amazed he hadn't bit it in half.

"You barely got away last night."

Derek spun around, seeing Castiel sitting on a log and picking at a spot of moss. Derek approached him slowly, keeping a fair amount of distance between them. The angel didn't have a trace of blood on him. Castiel flicked away an ant, before looking up at Derek.

Castiel shifted, his head tilting to the side waiting for Derek to speak. "What is your plan?"

"Plan?"

Castiel stood, his brows creasing in concern. "He knows what you are."

Derek took a step back. He had control. Dean couldn't know.

"Did you hear me?" Castiel came closer, but Derek maintained the gap between them. "Dean knows."

"No."

"Yes. And now he's using Stiles as bait."

Derek expanded the gap. "Stiles wouldn't--"

"Stiles doesn't know he knows."

Derek's hand went to his ass, but his phone wasn't there and neither was the pocket. Derek's eyebrows drew together at the feel of a sliver of flesh in the denim. He looked at Castiel, who nodded.
“Yes. There's a tear,” Castiel verified.

“Of course there is.”

“I promise not to stare.”

Thirty Minutes Later

Stiles was out of breath when he made it back to the motel. The cop car was gone, along with the cop and the motel manager as far as Stiles could tell. Stiles forced a few deep breaths into his system, needing to make sure he looked calmer than he was. He took a final look for either of them and straightened his appearance.

Stiles walked past the other rooms, heading straight for the broken door. He went inside and saw that it was wrecked. The mirror was smashed and every piece of furniture not bolted to the floor was turned over and broken. Stiles looked for anything that could have caused the triple cuts on Dean's body, but it looked like a bigger miracle that Dean didn't walk into his room with half a lamp hanging out of his ribcage.

His bag was gone, along with Dean's. Stiles swore under his breath and got out of the room. He went back to the one he and Derek shared, downing water straight out of the facet until the need for air overwhelmed his need for water. Stiles went straight for the phone after that, dialing Derek's number, but there was no answer.

"Damn it."

Stiles hung up and began trying to think up plan b.

Fifteen Minutes Later

Derek examined the broken branches in a bush. It had been a while, but he still knew the basic principals of tracking. Stiles' scent was clouded by the insane amount of skunk stench. It was like every single skunk in the area was pissed off.

"You're very protective," Castiel remarked.

"Yeah, well, he needs it," Derek responded.

"Hasn't seemed that way. Dean's taught him a lot."

Derek bit his tongue, but Castiel noticed his reaction.

"You're worried he'll turn out like Kate."

Derek's eyebrows creased as he looked back at Castiel, before standing. "How did you know about Kate?"

"Stiles likes to talk. He's told me. A lot."

"He wouldn't tell you about Kate."

Castiel huffed. "I didn't think you trusted anyone."
"I don't."

"But that's not true. You hide it so very well, but I understand it. Stiles is fragile. Even in your weakest state, you believe you can overpower him. That's why you keep Stiles close to you while Scott takes the hero role. He's much better at keeping people safe, while you, Derek, struggle to keep your pack alive.

"It's why you're so mad. You don't think they value their families, but the truth is that it's that distance that keeps them safe. Had you kept girlfriend away from your family, they would probably still be breathing. It's the need to keep those you care about close to you that get them hurt, killed.

"Now, Stiles. You want to trust him. After all, he trusts you. He's just not very good at closing his mouth. He's the reason I know all about you." Castiel stepped towards Derek, urging him backwards. "I suggest you run. Run far. Dean knows where you live. He may not have an address, but it won't take him long. So go. Run."

Derek stared at him, but Castiel only drew a gun and fired.

Ten Minutes Later

Dean was fairly certain he was going to kill Stiles when he got his hands on the kid. His trunk was empty so Dean was 100% unarmed. Dean gave up his pillow weapon and hated himself for not loading up, before checking to make sure Stiles was alive and now he was gone.

He wasn't surprised. It wasn't the first time Stiles disobeyed an order. Dean had checked most of the woods between where he left Stiles and his baby, but there was no trace of him.

"Stiles!" he shouted for what felt like the hundredth time. "Stiles!"

But all he heard was his voice echoing through the trees.

"Damn it."

A branch snapped and Dean spun around. He couldn't see anyone, but he was certain someone could see him. Dean reached down, picking up a rock, only to get tackled from the side. Dean fought back and they went rolling. He almost managed to get the upper hand when he got struck hard across the head.

Dean saw stars for a moment, before he found himself pinned with a hand to his throat. Derek said something, but Dean couldn't focus on the voice.

"Where is he?" Derek's face was blurry at first, but it was him.

Dean swiped at him, but Derek drew back. Dean felt around for anything in the dirt, but Derek just pushed down on his neck, cutting off his air.

"Where's Stiles?"

"Where's Cas?" Dean rasped. "If you hurt--"

"I haven't."

There was a noise followed by Stiles swearing. Derek backed off, standing. Dean watched Derek,
struggling to get his feet beneath him.

"Stay away from him," Dean ordered.

But Derek wasn't paying attention to him. He was breaking into a run towards Stiles' voice.

"Stiles! Run!" Dean shouted.

Dean took a final moment to regain his senses, before running after Derek, but he lost sight of him. He couldn't hear either of them.

"Stiles!" Dean waited for a response, but none came. "Stiles!"

Five Minutes Later

Stiles was probably as useful as a chicken with his head cut off right now. He didn't know the first thing about tracking and he wasn't even sure Derek was even anywhere he could reach. For all he knew, Derek had driven a town over and was trying to call him. But Stiles panicked and now he was pretty sure he was lost.

"Stiles?"

Stiles spun around so fast he almost fell over. Cas stumbled into view, swaying and barely remaining on his feet. He used the trees to keep upright. He had a black eye, a split up, bruises on his arm and neck and his shirt was torn and bloody. Stiles rushed forward, but he wasn't fast enough. Cas's hand went to a sapling, but the small tree gave out under his weight, leaving him on the ground.

Stiles skidded to his knees, rolling Cas onto his back. The angel clutched his sleeve, eyes struggling to find Stiles's.

"Derek-- Der..." His eyes rolled shut.

"No. Cas. You gotta keep talking to me."

Stiles shook the angel hard, but he didn't wake. At least, Cas was still breathing. Stiles pushed up the tattered shirt, seeing fresh claw marks in the angel's torso.

Thirty Minutes Later

This was starting to feel like Purgatory all over again. Dean didn't know who to trust and all that mattered was finding Cas. He'd surfaced on the road a few times, but he never came across Derek's Camaro. Dean was moving fast. He knew how to track, but he refused to slow down long enough to follow Stiles. He needed to get in front of the kid and cut him off before he did something stupid.

Suddenly, he heard it. It was soft, but it was definitely Stiles' voice. Dean turned, spotting hidden near a cluster of trees. He was worked up and as soon as Dean got closer he saw why. There was a blood drenched angel in his arms. Dean hurried the final couple steps, dropping to his knees to look Cas over.
"He won't wake up," Stiles said, his hands and shirt coated with blood.

The angel was still breathing and his heart was still beating. Dean tried to take solace in that, but he was livid.

"You believe me now?" Dean growled.

Stiles dropped his gaze, fingers winding tighter into Cas's t-shirt. Dean spotted his bowie knife sitting next to Stiles and took it back.

"We need to get Cas out of here," Stiles said.

Dean forced back the killer side of him. The kid had a point. He picked Cas up, making sure he had a good grip on the angel before he started moving. Stiles kept up. He didn't say a word. He was too busy trying to make sense of the whole thing.

They didn't make it far. Derek showed up in front of them. He stood at a distant, and was shirtless, but that wasn't odd. There was blood on him, but he was unharmed. The problem was the gun he had trained on Dean. Dean was used to such threats. A lot of people tended to point guns at him. Stiles stepped out, but Dean caught his shoulder.

"Let him go," Derek ordered.

"Put down the gun!"

Derek's head twitched. He looked like the tweaked out junkies that wandered around the crappier motels Dean stayed at; the ones housing meth labs and crack dens. Problem was Derek was no druggie.

"Stiles! Get over here."

But Stiles didn't fight Dean's grip.

"Take Cas." Dean forced Cas's body into Stiles' arms before Stiles could say anything. "Head for the road."

"But--"

"Relax. I don't kill people."

But Stiles didn't relax.

"Go!"

Dean walked away from Stiles. Cas really was too heavy for him, but Stiles wouldn't let him die anymore than Dean would. Derek's grip tightened on the gun and Dean made sure to keep his body between Derek and Stiles. Derek tried to steady his aim, but his shot missed. He splintered a tree near Stiles. Dean rushed him, narrowly avoiding the additional bullets Derek fired.

It wasn't until he was a foot away that a bullet pierced his forearm. Dean tackled him, but Derek fought back hard. He landed a couple hard punches to Dean's rib, incapacitating him momentarily with a blow to the deep cut in his side before flipping him off. Dean bounced off a tree, his back throbbing.

Derek hurried to his feet, making a run for Stiles. Dean forced himself to go after him, managing to catch one of Derek's ankles before he got far. Derek kicked free, but Dean wasn't letting him go
without a fight. He got enough traction to jump at Derek, taking the fight back to the ground.

They wrestled, before Derek flung Dean off again. Dean tried to find his feet again, only to see Derek already standing, rock in hand.

"Stay down," Derek snarled, fingers flexing on the rock as he raised it.

Dean spit the blood that pooled in his mouth out and pushed himself up. Derek hesitated, but he came at Dean when a shot sounded. Derek staggered, before falling to the ground, eyes wide and body still. Stiles was standing behind him, shaking as the gun fell from his hands. Cas shuffled to Derek's side, still weak, and inspected the body.

"He's dead," Cas said, walking back to Stiles. "I told you."

But Stiles was still in shock.

"Anyone wanna tell me?" Dean demanded, watching Cas pick up the gun.

"He's a shapeshifter," Cas explained.

"Tell me he's right." Stiles looked to Dean, eyes wide.

"He's right."

Dean hugged Stiles before he could give it another thought. Cas gave him a nod of assurance. It explained a lot. But Dean knew Stiles wouldn't sleep until they found Derek, dead or alive.

One Hour Later

"Hurry up," Dean ordered, stitching up the cuts to his side as he kept watch.

"Going as fast as I can."

Stiles was rewinding the security feed for the motel's parking lot. The nighttime footage was useless. The parking lot was horribly lit and Derek never looked up. He sped up to the early morning, watching Derek leave, but he never looked towards the camera. Stiles was about to fast forward again, when he saw Cas walk out of Dean's room.

"Faster, Stiles."

"Not helping."

"Cas is already burning the body. We need to go."

Derek turned to face the angel, his eyes their normal complicated colour, but Cas's blue eyes were replaced with a white flare as he waved Derek off.

"Shit!" Stiles shot to his feet, bolting out the door. "Cas isn't Cas," he managed to say as he rushed past Dean.

Dean wasn't far behind him, but Stiles already saw smoke.

"NO!"
"Stiles, wait!"

But Stiles was already sprinting into the trees. Dean tried to keep up, but his injuries slowed him down. Stiles never wanted to shoot Derek in the first place, but he trusted Cas and he'd survived worse. But Stiles saw what fire did to Peter.

Stiles followed the smoke, but by the time he found the fire there was almost nothing left. The ground was burned and the last flames were dying out. Stiles dropped to his knees, picking up a burnt scrap of denim.

Derek was gone.
Retribution

Rattlesnake, Montana

Castiel swung aimlessly in the darkness. He had been awake for hours, but it didn't matter. His hands were bound together and his body hung beneath. He'd tried to get free, but nothing worked. No matter how much he swung, his feet never touched anything, and no matter how hard he pulled and jerked at the ropes, they didn't weaken or stretch. He couldn't see, hear or smell anything. The air was stale and heavy.

After another hour, he heard footsteps. Castiel remained silent. He very much doubted anyone would know where to look for him. The footsteps grew close and a flame ignited on the ground, leaving Castiel face to face with himself.

"You're surprised I'm still alive," the shapeshifter said.

Castiel kept his mouth shut. Dean and Sam had always been so skilled at noticing shapeshifters, but this one was clever. It had jumped Castiel in the dressing room and, not that Castiel tried, he was not Sam. Dean knew his brother's habits and mannerisms in a way almost as well as Castiel knew Dean's. Sam and Dean had made each other the men they were today. Castiel only knew Dean as well as he did because it was his honour to put the man back together.

"Interesting group of friends you got. It made for quite a challenge, but it was worth it. I got to meet the great Dean Winchester. Him and his brother were the stuff of legends. Their family killed off more than a dozen of my kind. Doesn't seem like a lot, but when there aren't many of us to begin with. Not like humans."

"If you are expecting sympathy from me, you will be disappointed."

"I'm already disappointed." It shoved Castiel, making him swing. "For years I listened to stories about the Winchester brothers. How these two humans were more dangerous than anything else in this world. But it was so easy. He had no idea that I wasn't you. None of them did. He doesn't even know there's a werewolf sleeping next to him. It was fun being Derek. So much strength, yet so fragile. It's a pity I couldn't let him live. I would have loved to keep probing around in that mind."

Castiel tried to hide his reaction, but the shapeshifter's smile told him he hadn't done a good enough job.

"That boy's face when his wolf fell. It was intoxicating."

"Stiles wouldn't hurt Derek."

The shapeshifter laughed. "I assumed the same, but given how regenerative that man is, he barely hesitated. You should be happy. Your hunter would have been dead if he didn't." It leant against the wall, still smiling. "The only question is, who do I let live?"

Castiel stared at it.

"I know. It's foolish to let anyone live. But unlike most shapeshifters, I don't kill people. Of course that doesn't mean I don't convince people to kill themselves and others." It smiled again, proud of its actions. "My best work was a school shooting out in Minnesota. I convinced a professor to take two machine guns into his classroom. Twenty-eight kids dead. It was such a rush. I sat in the principal's office, listening to the screaming over the intercom."
"You're worse than a demon."

"And that surprises you? Shapeshifters are the closest supernatural creature to human." It shrugged, making a face similar to one Sam or Stiles would make when they made an odd deduction, as it approached Castiel once more. "If you think about it, we're really all of humanity rolled into a single body. People just need a reason to be cruel."

Castiel kicked, but the monster was quick and prepared. It punched Castiel in the face, hard, and there was no way he could dodge the strike. He felt blood pool in his mouth. Castiel waited for enough to gather, before spitting at the shapeshifter. It laughed, wiping its face.

"Feisty." It paced around to Castiel's back. "I like it." Its fingertips traced over his shoulder blades, making Castiel cringe. "How does your mind work?"

Castiel glared. Unlike humans, the shapeshifter could not duplicate his true form. It had no access to his memories.

"If I allowed one of them to live, who would you choose? Would an angel save the boy with a bright future or the hunter slipping past his prime?"

Ten Minutes Later

"We're gonna get this son of a bitch," Dean promised.

"Doesn't change the fact that Derek's dead," Stiles said, trying to wipe the ash from his hands with one of Dean's car rags.

Dean took the fabric from him, erasing every trace of black faster. Stiles was still vibrating. He was putting on a brave front, but Dean knew the kid was hurting. He'd earned the right to have a full mental meltdown, but willed himself on.

"I want you to trust me." Dean tilted Stiles' head up, getting the ash from beneath his chin and forcing Stiles' eyes to meet his. "Stay here."

"No. He-- It--" Stiles took a deep breath, forcing himself to stay calm. "I want to kill it."

"I'll let you kill it. But let me catch it."

Stiles shook his head.

"You're emotional," Dean insisted.

"And you're not? It took Cas. And we don't know if he's even alive."

"I know how not to let emotions get to me."

"Yeah. That's a freaking ass scary thing. Besides, I don't trust it not to turn into you."

Dean pulled out a newer pair of phones, both equipped with video cameras. "No one gets close to either of us without getting checked."

Stiles took the phone, hands still shaking.

"It had me fooled. There's now way you could have known," Dean tried to assure.
"Nothing could have made you shoot Sam."

"The way Sam and I grew up, we were always together. We didn't have friends. We had each other. So yeah, Sam and I are good at knowing whether we actually are one another. But I've known Cas for six years and I didn't catch this. So it's not your fault."

Stiles shook his head. He wasn't willing to not to take blame.

"You saved my life. Focus on that."

"How about you stop trying to make be believe this is okay?"

Stiles turned away from Dean, scrambling not to break down. Dean recognized the MO all too well. He'd been in Stiles' position. He had a long list of friends and family that died because of him.

Two Hours Later

Castiel had never felt useless before. He hadn't always been helpful and he hadn't always been strong, but he always been useful. Right now, he was anything but useful. His feet hadn't touched the ground in over a day, his hands were purple with the lack of blood and he was alone in the dark once more.

He tried to imagine what Dean or Sam would do in such a situation, but their escape planes typically came cleverly hidden knives, of which Castiel had none, or setting up their own trap, which he had not done.

Castiel heard footsteps again. He gave a final tug to his bindings, but it was futile. Fire ignited once more and Castiel found himself looking at a copy of Dean. The creature did a good job mimicking Dean's mannerisms, but Castiel could pick out the tiny flaws. Dean's eyes were minutely brighter and its smile was too large. The smile it bore was reserved for Sam and for Sam alone.

"Should have guessed an angel wouldn't be fooled. This guy knew you wouldn't be fooled. You may have lost your wings, but you didn't lose this." It tapped Castiel's temple. "I wish I could get into your mind. The things you must know."

"My knowledge is infinite."

"Infinite's an exaggeration. You don't know what's wrong with you."

Castiel's eyes narrowed as he recognized the little twinkle from within Dean's eyes. "But you do."

"I imagine I know a piece." It crossed the cavern, arms folded over its chest. "The reason I'm still alive is because I'm smart. I listen. I react."

"And what have you heard?"

"Come now, Castiel. How smart would I be if I told everything I know?" The corner of its mouth raised into a smirk. "I've been in the minds of hundreds of people from all over the world. I know a lot."

Castiel rolled his eyes. "You don't know anything."

Its fingers wound into Castiel's shirt, pulling him forward. "Don't try those games with me, you
little cherub."

"Very well."

Castiel jerked his head forward, knocking it hard against the shapeshifter's. The monster stepped back, but Castiel was faster, locking his legs around creature's neck. He squeeze hard, one of its arms trapped, while the other clawed, slapped and punched at Castiel's leg.

Strangulation wouldn't kill a shapeshifter, neither would a broken neck, but it would leave the monster unconscious for at least an hour. He waited until the creature's eyes rolled back and its body went limp, before flinging the body at the fire. Its arm caught fire and Castiel smiled.

He wasn't so useless after all.

One Hour Later

Dean pulled up to an abandoned mine. It was the only place between the mall where the shapeshifter had to have gotten Cas and the motel that it wouldn't have had to worry about foot traffic. Stiles still hadn't said more than he had to. There was no babbling or trivial references or long winded speeches about superheroes.

Stiles got out first, making a run for Derek's Camaro. It was just barely poking out from behind the entrance to the mine. Dean followed. Stiles' face was to the driver's window and Dean could see his weapons' duffel on the back seat.

"Is it locked?" Dean asked.

Stiles checked, before answering, "Yeah."

"Damn. I liked his car." Dean picked up a rock.

Stiles turned to question him, but Dean just pitched the rock through the back window. Stiles glared at him, but reached in all the same, opening the door. Dean took over, digging through the bag to find the clips of silver bullets and their matching guns. He offered a loaded pistol to Stiles and the kid hesitated, but took the gun.

"If we're separated, even for a moment, check my eyes. This bastard is smart."

"Yeah. I got it."


"I said 'I got it.'" Stiles cocked his gun for emphasis. "But I'm not shooting anyone until I see their eyes acting messed up myself."

"Good. I don't really need a bullet hole."

Dean cocked a second gun, tossing Stiles a flashlight, before clicking on one of his own. Stiles kept his light on as well, keeping Dean within the beam. The mine stunk as badly as the forest.

"God!"

Dean spun around to see Stiles flail, shaking off his sneaker.
"I think I stepped in fake Cas," Stiles deduced, scrapping off the bottom of his shoe on a rock.

"Come on."

Dean continued on and Stiles followed. Dean caught sight of a flickering light and put his arm out to stop Stiles. They each switched off their flashlights, keeping their steps silent. Dean signaled Stiles to hold back and Stiles nodded. Dean stepped around the corner, gun raised, but all he saw was Cas strung up next to a burning corpse.

"About time," Cas said, certainly looking worse for wear.

He was sporting a few bruises, had a few lines of dried blood and his lips were more chapped than usual.

"No retinal flare," Stiles said, lowering the phone Dean hadn't even seen him pull out.

He took out his knife and cut Cas free. Cas wobbled a little, but kept his footing, massaging his wrists. Stiles kicked the shapeshifter onto his back, letting Dean see his burnt and melted face. Stiles aimed his camera at Dean, checking to make sure Dean's eyes stayed green, before firing a few rounds into the creature's heart.

"I'll be by the car," Stiles said, before walking off.

"The shapeshifter wasn't lying, was it?" Cas asked once Stiles was out of earshot.

"Depends what it said," Dean responded.

"It said Stiles killed Derek."

Dean nodded. "Something made Zoo-- Derek go nuts and Stiles put him down."

Benbrook, Idaho

Stiles was trying hard not to think, but it was hard when no one filled the silence. He'd found his phone. His father left his usual half dozen messages, but they seemed far more bearable than the ones from Scott. He'd made it to the first of Scott's texts, but couldn't read a single one after 'we need to talk'. They'd finally formed an alliance with Derek over the last year and now he'd have to tell everyone back home that Derek was dead; that he had killed their alpha.

They'd only made it a few towns over, but Dean wasn't up to driving very far. They were all in rough shape, but Stiles needed to put some distance between himself and Derek's body. He thought the state line would help, but it didn't do much. Dean pulled up to a hotel and Cas got out, heading for the office. Even the sleaziest of motel owners would ship Dean off to a hospital. Dean insisted he'd had worse and Stiles knew that was true.

"Have you ever made a mistake like this?" Stiles asked.

"When I was fourteen, Sammy was at school and I was on a hunt with Dad. We were tracking a family of travelling witches. They were the stuff out of stories. They'd give you what you asked for with messed up loophole. It took us two months to catch up with them and we thought we did. Dad said shoot and I listened. Turned out, she wasn't a witch. She was their maid. She wasn't even aloud in their ritual room."
"And you were okay?"

"No. But I wasn't allowed to take fault. I was a good solider following orders. It would have been wrong not to shoot. It was Dad's call. So I watched him load up on liquor before Sammy was even home from school and pass out. I took Sammy camping so he wouldn't see and he complained the whole way."

"My dad drank a lot after my mom died. He never drank on the job. He was too good a cop to do that, but on his off days or after his shifts..." Stiles wet his lips, stopping himself; he didn't want to get into this. "I tried watering down his whiskey and making him eat more at dinner, but it never made a difference."

"It made a difference."

"How do you know?"

"Because I'm betting he doesn't drink like he used to. My dad didn't slow down until a troll broke his leg and almost killed Sammy. He was damn lucky he trained me as well as he did. I'd never faced one before. I managed to kill it, barely. We were ten miles from the nearest hospital and he spent the whole drive apologizing. He didn't even notice that I had a concussion or three broken fingers."

Cas passed them, heading for one of the rooms, and Stiles got out, moving to help Dean, but he refused the gesture. He'd ripped his stitches chasing Stiles to Derek's corpse and the bandage tapped over his ribcage wasn't doing its job anymore. There were fresh marks of red on his shirt where the blood soaked through.

Cas held open the door for Dean and Stiles got what they needed out of the trunk. Dean was adamant about not going to a hospital, but with Cas's lack of angel mojo, it was going to be a while before he was back to normal. Dean sat down on the bed, cradling his side. He hid it well, but he was hurting bad.

"Is there anything you can do for him?" Stiles asked, watching Dean unwrap his worst injury. He swayed a little, but remained standing. He'd gotten better about seeing blood, but it was bad.

"If I could, I would."

"I just need to clean it and stitch it up again," Dean insisted.

"Would you allow me to, Dean?" Cas asked

"Yeah, fine."

Dean held out his car keys to Stiles. "Pick us up something to eat."

"You're letting me drive?"

Dean nodded. Stiles knew it was Dean's way of trying to make him feel better. It wouldn't work, but Dean didn't need to know that. Stiles took the keys and left before Dean changed his mind. He climbed into the Impala, letting it purr to life and rumble beneath him. Somehow it felt so much better being in the driver's seat. He pulled out, heading down the empty road towards the few buildings in the small town.

He hit the turning signal only to notice another track of ash on his wrist. Stiles hurried to get free of his jacket seeing it spread up his forearm. He tried to wipe it off, but he wasn't doing a good job. It
smeared and clung to his skin. Stiles rubbed harder, but even when it was could still see gray.

His heart was pounding hard and fast and his breathing was shaky and even faster than his heart. His chest felt tight and he began breathing out the air faster than he could take it in. He tried to slow his breathing long enough for air to reach his lungs, but it wasn't working.

Stiles was about to pull off when Derek freaking Hale stepped onto the road. Stiles veered, barely managing to avoid a dead man and not drive into a ditch. His knuckles were pure white, his fingers unable to let go of the steering wheel. He was shaking all over, not daring to look over his shoulder.

He couldn't even decide what was worse. To look back and see he was hallucinating or to look back and see something new pretending to be Derek. The choice was made for him. Stiles could see movement in his side mirror. He reached for every lock in the car, locking himself in. Derek came to his door, bending over.

"It's me. Open up," Derek said.

"I shot you," Stiles answered, keeping his eyes forward.

"Silver doesn't work on me, remember?"

"But fire does."

"Look at me, Stiles."

Stiles shook his head.

"I'll break the window. Might as well pay Dean back for breaking mine."

Stiles turned. Derek had changed clothes, but the leather jacket he had on didn't hide the burn that scarred his neck and the back of his hand. Stiles was willing to bet it covered his arm at least. His face was untouched and, if any shapeshifter could duplicate that complicated mix of greens, grays and everything in between, it deserved to win.

"Pick up a camera and check my eyes. Do whatever you want. It's me."

Stiles took out his phone, tapping his camera app and aiming it at Derek's face. No retinal flare.

"All good?"

Stiles shut off the engine and got out. "Where have you been?"

Derek laughed, teeth flashing arrogantly. "You mean since you shot me and left my body with a deranged shapeshifter, who was whistling show tunes as he built a fire to burn me alive?"

"Yeah. And I've been believing that for the past six hours. I don't need to be responsible for any more deaths."

Derek's eyebrows tightened and Stiles saw him forming a question he didn't want asked.

"So yes," he started again, instantly turning defensive. "I shot you. And you wanna know why?"

Anger settled back into Derek's face. "Why?"

"Because it was so much easier to believe that wasn't you. I couldn't-- I needed to believe that
wasn't you. You don't trust me, you don't like me, I don't care. That's fine. I can't change how you feel, but you-- you weren't you. I tried so hard to believe in you. I covered for you until I finally had another option."

"You trusted a shapeshifter over me."

"I didn't know! I can pretend to know Cas, but I don't. I know you. I know you were born dealing with this. That you've been a werewolf decades longer than Scott and last night you were more out of control than he ever was. So tell me I was wrong to believe you weren't you. Am I an idiot for thinking you're not a violent asshole?"

Stiles glared at him, waiting for Derek to speak, but Derek only dropped his head. He muttered something out under his breath, but Stiles wasn't sure anyone could hear it. Stiles stepped forward, his body motioning Derek to repeat himself.

Derek let out a breath, straightening up. "I'm sorry."

"You're--" Stiles laughed. "You gotta give me more than that. You didn't growl at me like a pissed off puppy. You attacked me. You attacked Dean. What you said was worse than what you did. So you put your big boy pants on and tell me why."

Stiles could see Derek had every intention of shutting everyone out like he always did, but Stiles wasn't going to let him. He hit Derek's arm, keeping his eyes fixed on Derek's. Stiles had no intention of backing down and he actually managed to make Derek realize that.

"What do you want me to say? That I lost control? That I decided to run my mouth instead of tearing you all apart?"

"Yes!" Stiles said louder than he intended. He took a breath, looking around to make sure they were still alone on the road. "You're not perfect, I don't expect you to be, but when something is wrong, tell me. I can help."

"It's not your job."

"And it's not yours to protect me. You don't owe me anything."

"I'm not leaving you."

"Why not?"

"Because I've lost enough people."

Stiles stared at him, praying that his mouth wasn't hanging open. He heard the extra words. The ones that Derek didn't, maybe couldn't, say. Stiles stepped towards Derek, waiting for him to back up or shove him away, but Derek didn't move. Stiles continued until he was flush against Derek and wrapped his arms around the werewolf. Stiles felt him resist moving, refusing to both hug back or push Stiles away. Derek rested his head against Stiles and Stiles could just feel him relax.

"I don't want to lose you either," Stiles admitted, leaning against Derek as he tightened his grip.

Derek winced and Stiles pulled back out of instinct. He pushed Derek's shirt up, seeing that the burn spread onto his torso. Derek pushed him away, before fixing his collar and sliding his hands in his pockets to hide the burn marks.

"Why aren't you healing?"
"Wolfsbane on the fire; the bullet too." The way Derek shifted made Stiles wonder if he still had a bullet wound.

Stiles' eyes widened, panic returning.

"I'll be fine. It's a common species. It just slows things down."

"Was the shapeshifter ever you?"

"Must have been. It knew things." Derek looked at him. "What have you told them?"

"Anything I say about you, I've said in front of your face."

"Just drive back and tell them you're going home."

"Home? No. We can--"

"What? Tell Dean I'm immune to silver bullets? Hmm?" He advanced on Stiles, as if he hadn't already made his point. "We're out of stories."

"Fine. You go home then."

"I'm not leaving you with him."

"Why not? I've sustained the least amount of injuries."

"Stiles..."

"No. We're saving people. That shapeshifter? Cas said it caused over a hundred deaths and no one even knew to look for him."

"And all it took was killing me to figure it out."

Stiles huffed, scraping his fingers through his hair. "I can't walk away from this."

"But you can walk away from your family."

"My dad's fine."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know him."

"You won't talk to him. You're barely listening to his messages."

"I don't need you babysitting me!" Stiles snapped. "I'm not in danger. And now that Dean thinks you're dead, you'll never be either. You don't have to stay."

"I'm not leaving you."

"Why is it so hard to believe that I'd be okay?"

He just stared at Stiles, hoping Stiles would figure it out himself, but Stiles didn't get it.

"Tell me."

Derek's eyes dropped, unwilling to answer. Stiles exhaled, stepping away from the car.
"When Scott was first turned, he told me about how he could sense people's emotions. He knew when Allison's heart skipped a beat. He knew when I got nervous. If you were anywhere close to me, I'll bet you knew the hell I went through thinking you were dead."

"You hated that you killed me. Not that I was dead."

"Think about everything we've been through. You really think I don't care? You did more for Scott than I ever could. You saved my dad when Jackson went off the rails. You piss me off and I still save your life. I was willing to drown for you. I have your back. And I don't know what else I can do to prove that to you." Stiles took a deep breath, knowing he'd already crossed the line of soap opera melodrama; hell, he'd thrown himself over the line. "I don't need you. I never needed you. I want you."

Derek's face changed and Stiles regretted his final words. He cleared his throat, trying to salvage some of his dignity with a manlier stance.

"Around," Stiles clarified. "I want you around."

Derek smiled a little. "What story you got planned then?"

"What?"

"I told you. I'm not leaving you."

"And why was that again?"

Derek didn't answer. He only made his way to the passenger seat. Stiles resisted the urge to smile, but he didn't last long. The moment Derek was in the car, Stiles arms shot into the air. He had gotten through to Derek freaking Hale. The fact that there wasn't a standing ovation was proof that they were in the middle of nowhere.

He was amazing.

"I can feel you freaking out," Derek said as Stiles claimed the driver's seat.

"I get excited by men in tight pants."

Thirty Minutes Later

"Two shapeshifters?" Dean repeated, eyes flicking back and forth between Stiles and Derek.

"Yeah. We must have intervened on a turf war or something," Stiles reasoned.

Derek held back, reading Dean. The hunter wasn't convinced. Shapeshifters rivaled demons; they were bloodthirsty, but there was no cause for it. They had the same diets as humans. They didn't need blood to survive like vampires or crave hearts like the werewolves Dean hunted. They were the devil's jesters. Twisted and corrupt. They had no need to turn on each other. There were plenty of victims to go around.

"I've never heard of two shapeshifters in the same state, let alone the same town," Dean countered.

"The one that took me confessed to travelling," Castiel said, backing Stiles' story. "It wouldn't be surprising that all shapeshifters would want to kill you. You have developed a reputation."
"How'd you survive?"

"Cas got the smarter shapeshifter clearly," Stiles answered. "The one that took Derek's place got himself shot."

"It looked like Cas when it got the drop on me. I figured it out too late. I waited. I know how to play dead. I waited for my chance and killed it"

"Clearly."

"Look." Derek took the silver blade and dragged it across his forearm. "Happy?"

Dean looked back at Cas. "You can still see demons, right?"

"It's Derek," Castiel assured.

"So when did it grab you?"

Derek recognized the dangerous edge to Dean's voice as Dean turned to face him again.

"Was it before or after you talked the kid to tears?"

"Oh come on. He did not--"

Dean's eyes flicked up at Stiles. It was a lie Stiles would not get away with. Stiles was good. Only a few people saw past the barrage of jokes, smart-aleck remarks and spastic actions. He knew how to have a good time, but that didn't mean his smile was never forced. Derek and Dean recognized it all too clearly. They had enough experience covering up emotions to spot Stiles' work.

"After," Derek admitted. "Everything I said to you about Sam, I meant it."

Dean was silent, the glint in his eye telling Derek he was deciding which way to best kill him.

"I lost most of my family and you two have no interest in being with yours."

"All my best memories are from when Sammy and I were on the road together, but he wanted out."

"And you didn't go with him."

"We'd be dead if he did," Stiles defended. "Those arachnes would have killed us both."

"I tried not hunting. First time, something found me. Second time, I couldn't get past all the cases I saw in the papers. This is what I do. If I don't, more people die. I can't live with that when I can stop it."

Derek looked at Stiles. This was the reason Stiles idolized Dean. He was more self-sacrificing than most of the superheroes he quoted daily. Already, he was set to be a martyr. He understood how much it hurt to lose someone close, but Stiles never did realize just how many people cared about him. There were plenty of people that would suffer if he didn't come home. Scott put on a brave face, but Derek could sense how much it hurt when Stiles said he wasn't coming home. The sheriff was miserable. Everyone in town knew how close the Stilinskies were.

"I get why you're doing it, but I don't agree. It's not your job. You're not responsible for everyone."

"I'm responsible for doing what I can. I--" Dean cut himself off when his phone rang. He dug through his coat, finding the cell and answering it. "H--"
"Dean? Dean Winchester?"

Everyone listening into the conversation, which was everyone, could hear the distress in her voice.

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"You hunt things, right? You kill them."

"Yeah. Just tell me who--"

"Kate. We never actually met, but you let me go and you shouldn't have."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow down. What are you talking about?"

"Two years ago. You were at Washtenaw Community College, right?"

"I've been to a lot--"

"Werewolves."

Derek's eyes went wide. He couldn't help himself. He was on his feet, forcing himself not to crowd Dean. Derek had been waiting for a werewolf case since the beginning.

"I left you a video. And someone who knows has to have found it because it never made the news."

Realization spread over Dean's face. "I remember you."

Derek heard a near sob of relief come through the phone. He backed away, hiding how closely he was listening.

"I don't have control anymore. I tried, but once you get a taste, you-- you can't stop."

Dean froze, moving away from everyone else. It left Stiles out of earshot, but Derek could tell Castiel could hear as well as he could if not better. Of course, Stiles wasn't about to be pushed out. Stiles moved closer to Dean, who shot him a glare, but he didn't care. He wanted to hear just as much as the rest of them.

"I didn't want to. It wasn't my fault. The first time, I mean. But since then, I can't stop."

"Where are you?"

"Nevada."

"Get yourself arrested. Don't tell them anything. Just use your one phone call on me and tell me where you are then stay in the cell."

"What if they see?"

"Full moon was yesterday. It should be easier for you from here on out."

"Doesn't feel that way."

Derek heard a low growl, one he wasn't sure Dean heard. She was already threatening to shift. He pulled the phone from Dean, taking over.

"It's Kate, right?"
"Yes."

"What was the defining moment of your life? When you close your eyes and let go, what do you see?"

"What-- I don't--" She cried out, losing control.

"This is important. This is how you keep control."

Dean looked at Derek, but he didn't have time to offer answers.

"What you need is something to hold on to. Something that keeps you human. An anchor."

"I don't have anything left to hold on to."

"Then anger, resentment, anything. Happy or not. It's the emotions that make us human, keep us human."

"But I don't--"

"Someone bit you. They ruined your life. Focus on that. Think about how much they took from you. Hold onto that anger. Anchor yourself to one thing and don't let go. Don't think about anything else. Focus on it until the urge passes."

"Okay."

"We'll be there as soon as we can." Derek hung up, turning to Cas. "I can help her. I can talk her down. I can stop her from hurting anyone. You just-- Get me to her. Please."

Castiel shifted his weight. He wasn't strong enough. Derek could see it, but he had been waiting for signs of a werewolf. He refused to believe they couldn't control it. Derek headed out the door, going for his Camaro. Stiles hurried to follow, but he didn't unlock the door.

"Oh no. You are not going without me," Stiles said.

But Derek knew he'd drive faster without anyone else in the car. Dean came out as well, still not moving fast. Derek rolled down his window and Stiles hurried to it.

"Slow them down," Derek ordered, shooting backwards before Stiles could touch his car.

"Derek!"

But he didn't stop, he took off out of the parking lot.

Nevada Stateline

"Can he trace the number or not?" Dean asked.

Stiles waved at him to shut up. "I know I said the last was the last time, Danny, but the last time was the last time and now this time is a new last time," Stiles said into his phone.

Dean rolled his eyes. He was speeding south, but they still hadn't caught up to Derek.

"He's hot!" Stiles insisted. "Don't you want to help out a hot guy?"
Dean's eyes flicked over at him. This kid was not pimping him out.

"Do this and I'll send you a picture of him and blue-eyed cutie in the backseat."

Cas perked up at the compliment.

"Yeah. Fine. I'll get a shot of them together." Stiles finally looked over at Dean, freezing for a moment once he saw the hunter's death glare. "I take it shirtless isn't an option..."

"No."

"No dice. Derek hasn't gotten them to join the tops off party yet." Stiles leant against the door, nodding pointlessly at whatever Danny was saying. "Okay. Just text me the location when you get it. Thanks." Stiles hung up, dropping his phone. "You should let us handle this one," Stiles said to Dean.

"Not a chance," Dean responded. "I'm the professional."

"Your injuries limit both your mobility and your speed," Castiel reasoned.

"I killed my first werewolf when I was fifteen. I could do this in my sleep."

"You're not even going to try and talk to her?"

"Sam and I agreed. If she ganks anyone, we end her. She knew not to go after humans."

"You heard her. She didn't want to."

"Doesn't change the fact that she did. Werewolves are junkies. The only way to control their urges is to never get them in the first place."

"But she called you. That has to count for something."

"Yeah. I'm glad I don't have track her."

Aldershot, Nevada

Derek double checked his coordinates with the ones Stiles had texted him. According to Stiles, and Danny, he was in the right spot. He looked up at the phone booth. It was probably the closest thing to tourist attraction in the minuscule town. The population sign capped the town at under five hundred people. He turned off his car and got out.

The town was quiet, empty. The sun hadn't been down long, but already there was no one on the streets. He listened for Kate. Werewolf or not, he had never envisioned himself going anywhere near someone with that name again, but fate never did seem to have his best interests.

Derek walked the main street, every sense he had on high alert. He heard families finishing dinner, saw the dogs coming to the fences to see him and smelt fresh blood. Derek sped towards the scent and saw a broken window on the second floor of a house. He climbed up easily enough and went through the window without hesitation.

There was a dead body. It was a woman with a gaping hole in her chest. Derek touched the single patch of clean skin. The body still had some warmth to it. This was a fresh kill. He heard a low snarl from upstairs and the sound of blood hitting the floor. Derek sprinted in search of the stairs
only to find a second body covering the hallway in pieces. He crossed the head as he found the staircase, leaping over the steps.

A louder growl came beside him. Derek turned to see who he could only guess was Kate. She was hunched over her third victim. A teenage girl, younger than Stiles. Her chest was ripped open and her heart was in Kate's mouth. She ate it quickly, never taking her eyes off him.

She looked different than Derek expected. He knew the list of differences Stiles had spouted off between the things Dean called werewolves and those Derek had in his pack. Every tooth he could see was different, angled oddly and sharp. Her claws seemed longer than his and her eyes weren't the same as any beta or alpha Derek had come across.

"Kate. I'm Derek. We talked."

He kept his palms extended to her, attempting not to look like a threat, but he could tell she wasn't buying it. He stepped closer anyways and she snarled loudly, nose wrinkling and teeth bared. She was going to force him to do things the hard way.

His fangs lengthened and his eyes went red. He growled loudly, but it wasn't enough. She wasn't effected in the slightest.

It was probably a good thing Stiles wasn't around to see that.

Derek prepped for a second attempt, but it was too late. His claws barely slid free when she attacked. It was savage and stronger than his betas had ever been against him. Her teeth snapped, aiming for his jugular and her claws dug into him any chance she could, tearing his flesh. She was wild enough that he had plenty of chances to kill her, but that was his last resort.

He fought back hard, knowing there was plenty damage he could do to her and she'd heal like nothing ever happened. But she never weakened or withdrew. She was stronger than he'd expected. Derek managed to get a decent grip on her arm and threw her hard enough that she broke through a wall. She bounced back to her feet, clearly fighting her instincts to run.

She wanted to die.

She attacked again and Derek shifted completely, letting go of everything he had repressed since they met Dean. He caught her throat and slammed her into the floor, pinning her down. She kicked and swung at him, cutting up his forearm. He pressed down, trying to force her to stop, but her instincts kicked him, clawing his arm up to the point where he wasn't sure he could hold her down.

Derek fixed his grip on her, using every ounce of strength he had to hold her down as he growled again. It worked, shaking the entire house. The wolf in Kate submitted and she looked human again. She was panting hard, her entire body heaving as she stared at him. Derek felt his wolf settle behind his human façade, his eyes the last to change back.

"Why did you stop?" she asked.

Derek released her, standing as he watched her skin close. She wasn't bound by the same rules as the wolves he knew. Injuries from an alpha should have taken longer to heal, but she was healing faster than he was.

"That's your first question?" Derek asked, keeping her in the corner of his eye line as he gave her some space.

"I'm easier to kill like this so you might want to hurry up." Her eyes went inhuman and her body
jerked; she was already on the verge of shifting again.

"Calm down. No one has to die."

"I didn't call you to be saved!" The monster inside her crept into her voice, making her shy away in search of control. "I can't be saved."

"I can help."

"You mean like that little anger tip?" Kate got to her feet, heart rate rising as Derek caught a glimpse of her fangs. "Didn't work. It fueled me."

"Anger isn't everyone's anchor."

"I'm not a boat."

"You also don't have to be a monster."

"It's too late for that." Kate advanced on him, seething with pure aggression. "I killed seven people since you hung up. Seven. What more of a reason do you need?"

"If I was faster, they wouldn't be dead."

"This isn't your mess. I killed those people. You stopped me from moving on to house number three. But I'm going to soon if you don't kill me. Her little brother's over there. A sleepover. I can hear them pretending to be asleep. And the younger the heart, the better it tastes."

Derek wasn't sure how to react. He recognized the signs, she was saying everything that would make a person snap, but Derek knew that method. He knew all about pushing the right buttons to hide the truth, to make people walk away. Kate didn't want to be a killer. She could be saved and Derek needed to prove that werewolves weren't evil.

"Let me help you."

"There is no helping me. I want a quick death, but I'll take whatever you give me." She moved forward again, crowding him, but Derek didn't move an inch. "You better get those claws out, before mine cut you up again. I won't stop. I took it easy on you, but one way or another, I'm dying tonight. I'll make you do it."

"I've faced things stronger than you. So calm down and work with me."

Kate rolled her eyes and turned her back on him. Her claws slipped free as she strolled towards the front door.

"Turn around."

"You're going to have to make me."

Derek moved fast, getting a fistful of her shirt and pinning her face first into the wall. Her teeth changed and she snapped at him, but Derek kept her arms twisted, weight unbalanced and trapped against the wall.

"I heard you. You said this wasn't your fault."

Kate didn't answer. She was too concerned with getting free. She pushed off the wall with more strength than Derek could handle, but he took her feet out and forced her higher so all she could do
was squirm in his grip.

She was worse than Scott.

"I can do this all night."

Kate exhaled sharply, fighting a while longer, before stilling. "I was clean. I made it through twenty full moons. I shifted a few times before things got overwhelming and stayed far away from humans. I went after animals. But they found me."

"Who found you?"

"I only heard one name. Navid. He has followers, a pack, I don't know. There were at least dozen of them. All I know is one snap of his fingers and I'm pinned down. They just shoved it into my mouth." Kate paused, her heart racing. "I didn't even get to see it. I smelt the blood and, then all of the sudden... I felt complete. It was like finding out I was starving myself. And I was so thankful. I stopped fighting to get free and instead was just so desperate for another taste."

"So they let you go?"

Kate laughed. "No. They brought me to the feast. A hundred people locked in a warehouse. A hundred hearts for us all to fight over. I got ten of them. There was so much screaming, but I just needed more. I always need more. Full moons are the hardest. It's like a reminder that I'm not human anymore."

Derek heard the Impala. Dean was close. He had ten minutes if he was lucky. He dropped her, spinning Kate around and pressing her back against the wall. She heard it too.

"That's him isn't it?" She looked up at him. "He'll do it if you don't."

Derek met her eyes, releasing his grip as he backed away. She wasn't going to run.

"I meant what I said. I can help."

"He doesn't know about you," she realized.

Derek didn't answer, but he didn't have to. Kate knew she was right.

"That's why you're doing this." A smile twitched across her face as she pushed off the wall. "You don't care about me at all. This is all about you. You want him to accept you."

"No. I know werewolves aren't killers by nature."

Kate laughed. "Did you not hear me? Or maybe you think we're the same." She shifted, teeth and eyes changing. "I don't know what kind of freak you are, but you're on your own. If you don't kill people, he'll let you live."

"There's more than one kind of werewolf in the world. And were not born killers, we're made killers. Hunters turn us into killers. They corner us into the only option we have is fight or die."

"Hunters didn't do this to me. I wouldn't be this way if I reached out sooner. Werewolves turned me from something that could kill into something that has to kill. I can't control it when the moon is full. I get a taste and I keep hunting for days until it takes too long to find my next victim. I get glimpses of humanity, but I can't stop myself. I can't get far enough away. This is my chance to end things my way."
Dean skidded to a stop behind Derek's car and Stiles jumped out before Dean even shut off the engine. Dean shouted at him, but Stiles didn't care. He knew Dean was slow and there was still a decent chance Derek was wolfed out. He scanned the houses, spotting the one with a broken window and made a beeline for it.

The door was unlocked and he pushed it open. Derek had slumped into one of the chairs, hands were so bloody that they were dripping. A girl, Stiles had to guess it was Kate, lay dead at his feet. There was a silver carving knife buried in her chest.

Dean burst in behind him, gun raised, but he lowered it when he saw what Stiles saw. Dean put away his gun, approaching Derek.

"You did good," Dean said, squeezing Derek's shoulder.

Stiles looked around. There was blood dripping on the stairs and a dead body in the other room, chest ripped open.

"They turned her into a monster," Derek muttered.

Dean glanced back at Stiles and Cas, but neither of them had any idea what he was talking about. "They who?"

Derek looked up at Dean. He was trying to hide it, but he was a wreck. Stiles really wished he had gone with him. He'd been waiting for a werewolf they could help since the beginning. If Dean could just see what Stiles and Cas saw, he could accept Derek. He could see that Derek wasn't a threat and they wouldn't need to keep lying.

"She didn't know."

"What did it sound like?" Dean asked.

Derek shook his head, dropping his gaze. He wasn't telling them everything. Stiles watched Dean's hand squeeze Derek's shoulder again. He cared. After everything, Stiles hadn't really been able to tell. Half the time, he was convinced they hated each other, but other times he saw the comradeship they'd formed. It wasn't because they liked it each other, but because of everything in them that was the same. They worked through problems the same way, throwing themselves into the situation and thinking through it after. They'd do whatever it took without any regards to themselves.

"Guess there's just no escaping it," Dean said. "Werewolves are monsters."

"Not all of them," Cas countered, before Stiles had the chance to say it.

Dean stood behind Derek, eyes narrowing at Cas. "Things that go after humans get put down. I don't wanna know how many people she killed before tonight," Dean's hands tightened on the back of Derek's chair. "They'd be alive if I didn't let her go free. So, from here on out, all werewolves die."

"Dean," Cas scolded.

"No. I'm done giving things a chance."
Maxwell, Nevada

"This could be a commercial," Stiles grumbled, shuffling backwards as he dragged a garbage bag of human remains. "Are you tired of your garbage bags failing you when you're trying to dispose of a dead body? Try Mega Trash. The garbage bag that has your back. Even after you stuck a knife in someone else's."

Derek picked up Stiles's share of the dead bodies. He barely noticed the weight and knew Stiles was getting tired. Dean was still in the car. He'd torn one of his stitches and Cas refused to let him injure himself further.

"Oh come on that was funny."

Derek didn't say anything. It wasn't that funny and he wasn't in the mood to laugh. Derek dumped out the husband's remains along with his wife and daughter's, before adding Kate's on top.

"I hate this part," Stiles complained, growing squeamish again. "Doesn't this gross you out?"

"No. Lighter," Derek ordered, looking back at Stiles.

But Stiles was off in his own world, probably coming up with as many answers as he could on his own. Derek stepped towards Stiles, repeating his order, but Stiles still hadn't come back to earth.

"Stiles."

Stiles snapped out of his headspace and Derek extended a hand for the lighter, before noticing an arm had rolled away from the pile. He pushed it back in place with his foot, before feeling Stiles' hand close around his, squeezing his reassuringly. Derek raised an eyebrow and looked back at Stiles. He glanced quickly at their hands, before his eyes returned to Stiles'.

"That's not a lighter."

Stiles forced a laugh, but Derek knew all Stiles wanted to do was rip off his eyebrows. Not that Derek would ever allow that. His eyebrows were perfect. Stiles chewed on the inside of his cheek and Derek could feel him break.

"You know I gotta ask," Stiles finally blurted out, handing Derek the lighter.

"She asked to die," Derek answered, hoping to keep the discussion short.

"And that was enough?"
"Can't help someone that doesn't want to be helped."

"Hasn't stopped me from trying. Never used to stop you. Not with Scott. Or me. Or anyone really."

"She's dead. I killed her. You don't need to know any more," Derek insisted.

"Or!" Stiles got in front of him, making sure he had Derek's full attention. "Or we can keep Stiles in the loop."

Derek ignored the request, clicking open the zippo and igniting the bodies.

"You're about to be stuck in a car with me for who knows how long. If you don't tell me now, you'll get to hear hours of 'Can you tell me now?'"

Derek rolled his eyes, starting back to the others.

"I was the kid on car rides that asked 'are we there yet?' for hours straight," Stiles said, right on his heels. "We didn't make it out of the state very often.

"You were right. I killed her to protect myself."

Stiles went silent. He tried to cover up his surprise, but his mouth wouldn't stay closed and no words were coming out. Derek scoffed, pushing on.

He shouldn't have said anything.

"Wait. Like. How? Was she stronger?" Stiles managed to ask.

Derek held his ground, turning back. "No. She figured out what she had to say to make me kill her. She couldn't convince me that she could overpower me so she offered a different threat."

Stiles tried to put the pieces together, but Derek could see how tired and frazzled he was. It had been a long couple of days. Even he was feeling it.

"I showed her who I was. If she was still breathing when Dean walked through the door, he'd know too."

Stiles face changed. He hadn't expected that. To Derek's benefit, he also didn't seem to notice the rest Derek hadn't shared. He heard Castiel approach. The angel was near silent, even without his powers, but he couldn't hide a beating heart and Derek was always most defensive when he was tired. Castiel had already met Derek's eyes before Stiles found him with a flashlight.

"Dean is restless," Castiel said, squinting from the light.

"Well, the old man never did get his dinner," Stiles remarked, lowering the beam of light and following it through the trees. "Let's go feed him."

Stiles trudged on and Derek followed. Castiel walked at his side, moving slower than Stiles. He wasn't injured. It was deliberate. Derek matched the angel's speed, trying to get any reading off of Castiel, but he couldn't. He never could. He hadn't understood that the Castiel in the woods with him was a shapeshifter, but even with his wolfsbane-addled brain, he knew something was wrong. The shapeshifter's heartbeat was faster and Derek could sense its anticipation and excitement.

"Why didn't you tell him everything?" Castiel asked softly once Stiles was out of earshot.

Derek let out a breath. Castiel just had to know more than Derek liked. He was turning out to be
"worse than Deaton."

"I can handle it."

"Not alone."

"He's not strong enough for this and involving Dean will only make him hate my kind more."

"He hasn't met any of your kind."

"And he's not going to."

Picklore, Texas

Stiles had past the point of wanting to roll up a newspaper and hit Derek with it, repeatedly. Cas had been powerless for two weeks now and, for the past six cases, that meant that Stiles safety suddenly shot to priority number one. Derek had always been protective, Dean too, but they had reached new levels. Dean was more than happy to ditch Stiles when it came to dealing with the latest big bad monster and Derek had no problems joining in.

Cas didn't approve of their actions, but there wasn't a whole lot he could do to stop them. He got the choice of staying behind with Stiles or having Dean and Derek's backs. Stiles couldn't blame him for choosing the later. Stiles knew why they did it. He was the weakest one. Without him, they could take bigger risks.

There was a good side to it, at least. Fighting monsters alone with Dean seemed to make Derek remember that Dean wasn't the enemy. He even came back smiling once when he and Dean ended the latest zombie apocalypse, while Stiles was stuck handcuffed to a radiator without anything to pick the lock. And when Stiles showed up at the end of a fight against a wendigo, they were laughing and admiring each others' techniques.

It was a reminder of how close they could be if they weren't so stubborn and closed off.

Stiles rolled his shoulder, massaging the forming bruise. He'd hurt it breaking out of the motel bathroom. He couldn't compete with them, but that didn't mean he would stop trying. They were after a demon. The town had all the signs of a hellhound picking up victims and Cas had picked out another four people that had sold their souls.

They caught a lead in the morning newspaper, hoping to trap the demon before they had to use a civilian as bait. Stiles had only overheard half the conversation, but Dean had missed that Stiles turned the GPS back on in one of his back up phones. They were stationary and he was only six blocks out. Stiles turned down an alley, determined to catch up before the excitement was over, when his phone rung. He slowed to a walk once he saw Dean's name flash on the screen and answered it.

"Everyone alive?" Stiles asked.

"Yeah. We didn't find anything," Dean answered. "We're heading back."

"If you do that again, your baby is in jeopardy."

"You touch my baby and we're through."
Stiles rolled his eyes.

"You need us to pick you up?"

"No. I can handle myself." Stiles hung up, putting his phone away.

He turned around, cutting through a café, when he walked right into someone. Stiles stepped back, eyes wide and hands stretched out. He had just spilt coffee over someone hotter than every Victoria Secret model rolled into one. She gave him the stink eye, trying to wipe off some of the foam.

"I am so sorry," Stiles proclaimed, reaching for as many napkins as he could grab and wiping her down.

She cleared her throat and Stiles realized he was staring right at her boobs and his hands were practically squeezing them. Stiles took his hands away, taking another step back. She let out a sigh, looking over the damage.

"I-- Can I--" Stiles made a noise that sounded as far from human as possible. It was like a kitten growling mixed with a monkey trying to swear. He sounded ridiculous.

"Yes," she said with a laugh.

He stared at her, blinking a couple times. Someone as hot as her couldn't possibly speak the language Stiles was making up and he couldn't understand himself.

"You were going to offer to buy me another coffee, right?"

"Yeah. Yeah! Yes!" Stiles scrambled for his wallet, pulling it out of his pocket and peeling it open. He'd never hated his Velcro wallet so much.

She laughed at him, but it wasn't cruel. "Accidents happen, cutie." She put a hand over both of his. "Grande skim milk mocha latte half sweet single shot at 140 degrees."

"Uh huh." Stiles didn't understand coffee language at all.

She smiled, turning to the barista. "Can I get another? And make sure he gets something too."

Stiles tried to form a coherent sentence, but every sound out of his mouth was a vowel.

"Okay. I'm gonna take this..." She helped herself to the plaid button shirt that Stiles was wearing over his 'FORGET SCIENCE! I'M DONATING MY BODY TO MAGIC'. "Get us a table and I'll be out in a minute." She patted his cheek and disappeared towards the bathroom, throwing him a wink.

With his shirt.

He was calm. Totally calm. One of the hottest chicks on the planet had just gone into the bathroom with his shirt. This was an every day occurrence. Meeting supermodels was part and par for the course for a Stilinski.

"What can I get you?" the barista asked.

Stiles looked at the chalk board menu. It was all gibberish to him.

"Sugar. Lots of sugar. Maybe some caffeine."
The barista rolled his eyes, setting to work. Stiles paid up and brought the two drinks to the table between a sofa and arm chair, before sitting down on the sofa. He repositioned himself a few times, struggling to make it look like he wasn't posing. He'd bulked up slightly being with Dean. Digging up graves and chasing monsters hardened his muscles. He was no where near Derek levels and Dean could still knock him over in an arm wrestle like he was a kitten. But Stiles noticed and that was all the mattered.

"That's better," she said, sitting down next to him.

On the same couch.

And his shirt looked so much better on her.

Stiles smiled. It was the only way to stop his mouth from hanging open. The entire English language disappeared from his brain as he watched her reach for the drinks, trying desperately not to stare at her cleavage, but it was a fight he couldn't win without seeing her eyes. She put Stiles' in his hands, before turning to face him better. She made it about two sips, before smiling again, but Stiles noticed the change.

It was no longer sweet.

"Oh, hon. You haven't figured it out have you? I'm Ava."

That name didn't mean anything to Stiles. Or his eyebrows, which posed the question his mouth couldn't. She patted his knee, setting down her drink.

"You're here to kill me." Her smile turned purely diabolical as her eyes turned completely red.

Stiles moved to get up, but her grip tightened on his knee, giving him the choice between staying still or dealing with a broken bone. She blinked, her eyes looking human again.

"Relax. I don't want to hurt you. Drink that sweet monstrosity you got and let's talk."

"I'm armed."

Ava giggled. "Lying to a demon doesn't work, sugar. I know that wretched jug of holy water is locked up in that patchwork of metal Dean calls a car along with every weapon he's attempted to train you in." She weakened her grip, but crossed her legs, boxing him in. "Now, let's start over." She smiled, teeth shining like a predator. "Nice to meet you, Stiles. I'm Ava."

"What do you want?" Stiles asked, trying to shift backwards, but he was already cornered on the couch.

"To help you."

"Oh, no. I'm not making a deal. I'm not an idiot."

"You're an idiot if you don't. I can give you anything you want, everything. Yes, it ends with hellhounds, but you're so young that I'll offer you twenty-five years. You'll live into your forties."

"Thanks, but I plan on hanging out in a rocking chair until I'm a hundred."

"You won't be getting to a hundred if you keep drinking things like that."

Stiles forced a smile, trying to hide how hard his brain was working to come up with a way out. She patted his cheek, just hard enough to rattle his head, but not hard enough to hurt.
"Keep your mind on me, cutie. Tell me what you want. Strength? You done hiding behind the big boys?"

"I'm good the way I am."

"In this business, brains only get you so far. Most hunters make it a decade, fifteen if they're good. Dean's a clever boy, but he wouldn't be here without those instincts and strength that came from a lifetime of this. His daddy made it just north of twenty. The smart ones stay out of the game and send the grunts to do the fighting. Like Dean's second daddy. He got his hands dirty when he had to, but most of the time he was squirreled away with a bottle of whiskey, barking out orders and trying not to notice when friends stopped calling. So you can either be a feisty little bookworm and get yourself killed or someone the likes of Dean Winchester would actually respect."

"He respects me."

"Oh yes. Locking you in a bathroom is very respectful. Wouldn't you like to win one of those fist fights he springs on you to see how you're coming along? Or maybe put him on his ass when he catches you in a headlock. You could be better than him. If you do it the 'right way', you'll only be better because he's getting old. And that's just gonna be sad."

"There's always gonna be someone better."

"Not with my help. You'd be best in show."

Stiles shook his head. "No. I'm not falling for this."

"Let me sweeten the pot." She reached into Stiles' pocket, pulling out his cellphone. "Of course you have Batman comic books on here. That's cute." Her smile returned. "I'll let you be the hunter you've dreamed of being. You can compete with the Winchesters for most lives saved and monsters killed. And, when you need a weekend off, you can go home to your daddy and..." she turned his phone back to him, letting Stiles see the screen, "to your mommy."

Stiles felt his mouth go dry and his throat close up. Ava had found the picture of his mom Stiles had stashed on his phone. He reached for his cell, but Ava didn't give it up. Stiles forced himself to breath, hearing every shaky reverberation.

Stiles shook his head, taking his eyes off the picture of his mom. She caught his chin, forcing his eyes back to hers.

"I don't think you realize what I'm offering you here. Twenty-five years. That's unheard of."

"I-I can survive that long myself."

"That's included for your mommy too. Guaranteed. She'd make it into her seventies. Maybe longer."

"What's dead should stay dead," Stiles croaked.

"I know. Dean's probably fed you the line: 'what's dead should stay dead'. But Winchesters don't believe that. Not when it comes to family."

"I-I need air."

Ava rolled her eyes. "Bathroom only. Don't need you running off on me."
Stiles didn't say a word. He just shot off the couch the moment Ava backed off. He barely resisted sprinting for the door. Stiles locked himself in the single unisex room. He forced himself to breathe. His mother was dead.

It had to stay that way.

He yanked the soap dispenser off the wall and began drawing a pink devil's trap on the floor. His hands were shaky, but he managed to make it. Hopefully the sigil worked the same if the lines were a bit wobbly.

"She's here, Dean. I found her," Stiles said, making sure he was loud enough to be heard.

The door rattled in its frame.

Someone was eavesdropping.

"Hurry!"

The door flew open and Stiles backed up, trying to look scared, but Ava didn't fall for it. She glanced down at the devil's trap, before smirking.

"Nice try, cutie. But you're gonna have to try harder than that."

"Okay."

Stiles charged her and Ava wasn't ready for that. He targeted her legs, forcing her off balance before she kicked him away. He hit the wall hard, but achieved what he wanted to. She was lying in the soap-drawn devil's trap. Stiles smiled widely; he had just trapped a demon. On his own.

"Before you go giving yourself a Scooby Treat, what now Boy Wonder?"

"I exorcise your a--" Stiles' hand ghosted over his jeans pocket.

Empty.

Ava revealed his phone, waving it at him, before whipping it at the toilet. It broke into a lot of pieces, before falling into the bowl. She smiled, standing. He had a recording of Dean reading out an exorcism and a back up PDF, but all that was gone now. Including the phone he'd spent a month convincing his dad was worth buying.

"Well, now you're definitely going to Hell," Stiles announced.

"Good luck with that, cutie. Smeared sigils only hold up so long."

Stiles sighed. She had a point, but Stiles had more than one brilliant idea up his sleeve.

**Fifteen Minutes Later**

"I'm starting to rethink this... whatever this is," Dean commented, touching up the salt lines after Stiles' escape. "With Cas out of commission, I can't guarantee that either of you will go home the way you are." He came back into the bedroom, finding Derek at the window. "Hell, I can't even promise you'll get to go home at all if you stick around."

"You never had to convince me of that," Derek replied.
Derek's focus was outside as he watched for Stiles. Cas had gone for a walk. There was a beekeeper with a honey shop in town and the old man was all too happy to show off his bees and Cas was always happy to listen to a story.

"I never wanted to stick around," Derek admitted.

Dean scoffed, helping himself to a beer as he sat down at the table. "So after all this, you still hate hunters."

"Hate you less if it makes you feel any better," Derek offered without sympathy.

"Don't care what you think of me," Dean laughed, knocking back a drink.

"Good." Derek tilted his head, trying to see farther.

Dean fidgeted. Death liked Dean. The Death. Things that didn't like Dean were either evil or had attractive daughters.

"Not that I care..."

Derek looked back, one of his eyebrows rising eloquently.

"Why?" Dean asked.

"Because you kill for fun."

Dean scoffed. "Killing people and killing monsters are two different things. I'm a hunter, not a murderer."

"You telling me you've never crossed that line?"

Dean went quiet. He'd never done it on purpose, but mistakes happen. They'd left town before a case was over. He'd led people into a battle they couldn't win. He had made mistakes, but he never enjoyed them.

"Monsters I get," Derek continued. "The instinct to kill is a part of them. They don't have a choice. You. You choose to kill."

"Yeah, well, sometimes the only way to beat a monster is to become one."

"And how do you ever trust a person like that?"

"Because you ain't a monster."

Derek scoffed. "No. I'm not. But if I ever turned into one, you'd be right there to kill me." Derek smiled, getting up. "You're a killer. At the end of the day, all hunters are."

"We save lives. We're heroes."

"Depends who you ask."

Ten Minutes Later

"Stiles isn't answering," Castiel said, handing his cell to Dean. "It's unlike him to ignore so many
calls."

"How many times did you try?" Dean asked.

"Eleven."

Derek took out his phone, trying Stiles himself. It went straight to voicemail. He didn't leave a message, only hung up.

"His phone wasn't off earlier," Derek stated, shaking his head.

The idiot went after the demon alone. Dean came to the same conclusion, picking up a knife and getting up.

"He gets it from you," Derek remarked, heading for the door with Dean.

"What are we married?" Dean reacted.

Derek rolled his eyes at Dean, when the door opened. Stiles kicked a break through the salt line, before shoving a woman inside. She reeked of sulfur. Derek hid his reaction, watching Stiles close the line of salt again. Castiel stood, puffing up as disgust creased his face.

"Castiel." The young woman beamed, looking the angel over.

"Ava," Castiel responded, his disgust shifting into a proper glare.

"I was hoping you were still alive." She blinked, her eyes turning wholly red. Her attention turned to Derek and her playful smile shifted into that of a predator.

"How did you get her here?" Dean asked, circling her.

Stiles tugged up her sleeve, revealing a toilet paper tube taped to her wrist that was covered in sigils. "She broke and drowned my phone. Please kill her."

"Yeah, Dean. Please kill me." She put her hands together, mocking a prayer stance.

This was too easy. Dean agreed. He was on edge. There were smarter things to do than stand around, but no one was willing to take their eyes off the demon. Derek gave in, willing to do what others weren't. He picked up the spray can and crouched down, painting a devil's trap on the floor.

"She did not do you justice," Ava remarked, her focus fixated on Derek. "Of course, it's been a few years. More time to bulk up. Not that you needed it."

"You know him?" Stiles asked.

"Not personally, but we have a mutual acquaintance."

Derek ignored her. He had not interest in playing mind games with a demon.

"Sweetie, you should be thanking me. I did some of my best work on that bitch."

Derek kept working, finishing the star and beginning on the sigils.

"Well, if you're not going to play nice..."

Derek was suddenly thrown into the television. It was an old bulb television, sending electricity
coursing through him. He jolted, his vision blurring, but he saw enough motion to know he wasn't the only one flung off his feet. Derek struggled to crawl away from the sparking television still pumping currents through his body.

When the room stopped spinning, he saw Stiles unconscious with a bruise already forming on his temple. Dean got to his feet faster than he should have, knife in hand and ready to attack, but the demon wasn't interested in a knife fight. Ava moved quickly, landing a punch hard enough to leave Dean a bleeding mess on the floor. Castiel raised his hand, once again putting himself between Dean and Ava as he tried to fight the demon with whatever angelic abilities he had left, but it wasn't enough.

The cabinetry ripped free of the wall, hitting Cas hard enough that he rolled across the room. Ava smiled, stepping over Stiles and Castiel's bodies. Derek tried to get up, but his muscles were still suffering from the shock, spasming beneath his skin. Ava stalked towards him, but Derek could barely see her. His vision was blurring and he heard something break, before another bolt of electricity forced him into oblivion.

One Hour Later

Stiles came to, his head throbbing and his fingers tingling from numbness. His wrists were tied tightly behind his back. Stiles squirmed and struggled, but he couldn't get away from the base of the bed.

"Oh good," Ava cooed.

Stiles jolted. He suddenly had a lap full of a demonically possessed underwear model.

"I was beginning to wonder if I hit you too hard." Ava tapped on the already-formed bump on Stiles head, pointing out his injury.

"Let him go," Derek growled, voice shaking and weak.

Stiles looked around. Derek was barely a few feet away. Shirtless. That was new. He had a shirt before. The world seemed to be as much against Derek wearing a shirt as much as it was against letting Derek have a pack. Derek's arms were drawn around the back of a chair and his wrists handcuffed together. It took Stiles a moment to figure out why Derek had broken into a full body sweat and looked like he would have face planted if the chair wasn't holding him up. There was a wire tangled around one of the chain links that went directly into a power socket. The wire sparked and Stiles struggled harder to get free, but got nowhere.

Ava gripped Stile's jaw, pressing her mouth to his ear. "I know what he is. I'm not stupid." She threw his head back and left Stiles' lap. "We're going to play a game."

Her manicured nails danced over Derek's shoulder. Derek tried to bite her. His teeth and eyes forced to remain human, but his expression was wild. He did not take being tied up very well. Stiles couldn't blame him. Things rarely went well for Derek when he was restrained. Ava backhanded him for his efforts, before strolling away.

"There will be one winner, one loser and three survivors," she announced.

Dean had been given the other chair and was across the room. Ropes wound tightly across his chest and arms and his wrists were bound to the chair arms, leaving his hands on display. Unlike Derek, he wasn't suffering, though he did looked utterly unimpressed by the scenario. It shouldn't
have surprised Stiles; he had heard plenty of stories that left Dean tied up. He usually had a way out, but judging by the small knives spread out on the table, Ava had already searched Dean for his usual means of escape.

Stiles looked for Cas, but he didn't see him. Ava passed the bathroom door, hitting it hard twice with an open hand.

"Still with us, Castiel?"

There was no answer.

Ava sighed, using her nail to carve a sigil deep into the door Stiles had never seen before. Stiles looked to Dean and the slight change in his expression told Stiles he didn't recognize it either. It couldn't be good. The demons were wise to Dean's plans just like Dean was used to theirs. Ava cut her palm and pressed it to the marked wood.

Cas screamed. Stiles had never heard him scream before. Cas had called out to Dean several times, even shouted to Stiles. But this was a cry of pain. Cas was in pain. Throughout all their time together, powerful and powerless, Cas had never seen affected by any injury. Stiles had reached the conclusion that angels couldn't feel pain.

He was wrong.

So very wrong.

The light bulbs in the room exploded, glass shards raining down. There was still enough light outside that it didn't make much difference. The curtains were open and no one was around for miles. The motel hadn't had a guest in over a year. The motel manager was working his way through a bottle of whiskey when Stiles left and was barely conscious when Stiles returned with the demon.

"Stop it!" Stiles shouted, reeling against his restraints, but Stiles didn't walk around with more knives tucked into his clothing than he could possibly remember or possess superhuman strength.

Ava waited a second longer, before removing her hand. The screaming ended, but Cas didn't make a noise. Stiles was caught off guard by wood creaking. Dean was fighting hard against the chair, but nothing would give.

"It's a pity I had to put him in a box," Ava said, strolling to the middle of the room. "It would be such a good visual if you could see his body react to such a level of pure pain."

"Cas!" Dean called out again now that the room was quiet.

"I'm all right," Cas answered.

But no one believed him.

"This is exactly why I'm here." Ava walked behind Dean. "I'm sick of everyone that gets pulled in by this face." Her fingers played on his jaw; it was a threat, but Dean didn't flinch. "The winner is the one that gets past the self sacrificing ideology that the Winchesters are so famous for."

She smacked the side of his face. It wasn't the harsh blow she had given Derek. It was demeaning.

"The game is simple. First person that tells me to kill someone else wins; one person dies and the rest of you go free." She turned to Derek with a wicked smile. "You're already considering it." She
walked carefully towards the werewolf, not letting their eye contact break. "You like Dean. You've been around him long enough that you'd miss his charming smile and stupid laugh. But you'd rather see him die than the boy maimed."

Derek didn't answer. But he didn't have to. Ava was right and everyone knew so.

She laughed, her teeth flashing like the predator she was. "The problem is, that would make things too easy. I bet, you'd kill them both with your bare hands if I let him go."

"Don't you dare," Stiles snapped.

Ava's hand flew out, backhanding him hard enough that Stiles' vision blurred for a moment. But Stiles didn't give into threats, of any sort. He opened his mouth, snarky remark on the tip of his tongue, but Ava pressed a finger to his lips.

"Don't worry. Derek doesn't have to kill them for you. But he would. He'd risk his own life for you and he has. You see, Derek has so little left in his life that he would give anything to keep what's there. Even the spastic, frail clump of bones he can't even stand. Of course, that's why he keeps you around. Because the only thing he trusts you to do is be weak. That when he's on the brink of death, he can still force you to do what he wants. It's that weakness that lets you float under the radar."

Ava patted his cheek, mimicking the demeaning nature she had bestowed upon Dean. She straightened up, leaving Stiles to once again fight against his restraints. He couldn't be as stoic as Dean. Certainly not with Derek suffering just out of reach.

"Now, as I'm sure you've figured out. There's a tiny little catch. I think each of you could rationalize killing one person to save the others. Knowing that you're willing to kill Dean has probably made him rethink his determination to make sure you walk out that door next to him. So, here's where things get fun. Once we have a winner, I pick the loser."

Stiles swallowed. As much as he wanted to believe they were all best friends. They really hadn't known each other that long. Dean told him what Hell was like. He went through a lot down there and Stiles couldn't imagine him going through that again. Especially if his best friend sounded like he might be better off dead.

It was easy to save someone. Guilt played a part. The idea of having any responsibility in someone's death was enough to make any decent human being willing to save a life. But there were limitations. Dean put himself in harm's way, but he wouldn't take a bullet for a president. He was smart enough to know that his life did have a purpose. He was better off alive than dead, but that didn't mean he regretted a single scar on his body. If he did, Cas would have gotten rid of them, but Dean wore every mark on his skin with pride.

Derek was willing to give up his life for his pack. He put up a good front, but Stiles knew the question that Derek couldn't get past. Why did he get to live? His body always stitched itself back together. He had seen so many people around him die. People he cared about, people he hated and people he didn't even know.

Stiles stopped fighting. He didn't know what to do. Ava sat down on the other bed, reaching into the duffle and searching through the stash of weapons Dean had.

"I'll break the salt line right now if you just go," Stiles offered.

"I don't need your help to get out of here. You were lazy. A few more screams from the pigeon in
the other room and that window will break and mother nature will do the rest. She loves helping
the monsters."

Stiles tried to come up with a solution, but it just made his head hurt even more.

"Now." She drew a sizeable dagger, looking over it fondly. "Anyone strong enough to end this
before I begin?"

No one answered.

There was nothing to say. The unsaid rule was obvious. The person that decided to save their own
ass would lose the one he cared about most in the room. Stiles wasn't willing to lose anyone here.
Derek was able to keep people at a distance, but Stiles couldn't. Cas listened to his long-winded
rants about things four people in the world cared about. Dean geeked out about superheroes and
taught him how to throw a punch that could give Scott a bloody nose, even if it only lasted a few
minutes.

Stiles didn't want to lose anyone.

Two Hours Later

No one broke.

The demon was resourceful and creative. Dean had to give her credit for that, but mostly he hated
her for it. She'd made use of the floor lamp, smearing the broken light blub into Dean's shoulders,
using the stand to beat Stiles' legs until he couldn't scream anymore and whipping Derek's back
with the power cord until blood dripped steadily to the floor.

Dean was sure Stiles would crack by the third go around. The kid wasn't doing well, but he made it
five rounds just like the rest of them. There was still blood dripping off Stiles' left elbow from the
large gash on his upper arm. His right eye was swollen shut. He was having trouble breathing after
Ava used his torso as a punching bag.

Ruby's knife was sitting embedded in his calve, pinning him to the floor. It had been the first
wound Ava had given him and had gotten worse every time she put him in a position that he
struggled, writhed or fought back out of instinct, leaving a smeared puddle of blood beneath him.

Derek's face hadn't looked like it belonged to a male model since the third round when Ava
decided to test out the ash tray to replace the brass knuckles lost somewhere in the Impala. She had
played with his hand so long that Derek couldn't help but cry out and the multiple cracking noises
made Dean wonder if Derek would ever get to use his hand again. She'd sampled every knife in
Dean's duffle on his chest and crushed his knee with her bare hands.

Dean couldn't make a case for Cas. He didn't know if the angel was getting off easy or if what Ava
was doing was worse than everything they had gone through combined. At the end of round four,
she had kept whatever demonic spell the sigil caused going long enough that the window shattered.
There wasn't a lot of wind so the salt line was still intact, but there couldn't be more than a few
grains at its weakest point. Even then, Dean didn't know her plan. He didn't know if she'd kill them
the moment she could get out or keep going until there was nothing left of them.

Ava moved to start round six with Cas, but there was no scream this time. Dean stirred, worry
forming. His cries got louder and lasted every moment Ava's hand was on that carved sigil. Ava
took her hand away for a moment and retried it. But she got the same result.
"Cas!" Stiles called out first, panicked, desperate and voice broken from all the screams Ava had forced out of him. "Cas!"

Dean thrashed. Even with his injuries, he managed to work up enough momentum to tip over, but it got him nowhere. He was still tied to the chair and his arm would start hurting even more the moment his brain figured out he landed on every glass shard Ava left half buried in his arm. He kept fighting anyways. Cas couldn't be dead. Dean forbid it, but his brain needed to see it for himself.

Ava had other plans. She walked over to Dean, picked him up and put him back where he was without any effort.

"Cas, you son of a bitch. Do not make me march through heaven to bring you back," Dean ordered.

"Pipe down," Ava condemned, cuffing him on the side of his head again. "He's not dead."

Ava crossed the room and opened the bathroom door for the first time. It didn't have any windows so it was dark enough that Dean couldn't see a lot. But the once lime green bathroom was now black. Dean watched for any sign of movement, but there was none. At first, Dean wanted Cas to charge out and rip the demon apart, but now, he would settle just to see any proof that his friend was alive.

Ava rolled her eyes and stepped into the bathroom. She bent down, fingers curling in something in the shadows and dragged Cas out into the main room. His clothes were torn and stretched by what looked like Cas's own hand. His skin was unmarked and clean. Dean couldn't see anything that would leave Cas as utterly and completely limp as he was now.

Dean wasn't even convinced the angel was alive.

She tossed Cas to the ground, but it was still a few long seconds before Dean saw a single sign of life. And that was all he got. One. Cas's hand moved towards Dean, not even making it an inch before the angel went deathly still again.

"What did you do?" Dean snarled.

"Got creative." Ava drew a celestial sword from her leather jacket, looking it over. "You see, it's in an angel's DNA to keep its vessel repaired. They have to look pure and perfect. Castiel never cared much for the perfect. That frumpy trench coat was ridiculous." Ava turned the knife downwards, beginning to trace a pattern over Cas's shoulder blade. "Not that his current choices are much better."

Ava eased the blade through Cas's shoulder, pressing down until Dean heard the metal clink against the floor. Cas never made more than a soft whimper. He didn't fight it.

He couldn't fight it.

"Humans are weak. Especially the ones that don't spend nights digging ditches or days primping their muscles. Angels can wear any for a quick visit, but you saw Lucifer. It doesn't last. An angel can spend years looking for a human able to hold them in; someone that won't snap and break as their grace drowns them from within, engulfing every molecule of their vessel. Every speck of light has a place to sit. But when you start twisting an angel's grace. Forcing it into new places of the body. That exterior starts to crack. It can't hold the angel in.

"But when you take away an angels ability to leave their vessel during this..." Ava smiled, fingers splaying through Cas's damp hair. "It causes them such remarkable pain. Imagine being twisted
into a shape that no human could ever make. Castiel is trapped within this man and I am moving pieces of Castiel's essence around his vessel like furniture.

"Do you remember when you found Castiel's empty vessel in wreckage? This is what the angels did. I learned this from angels. When angels disobey, their superiors force them to leave their vessel. It was odd they left his vessel alive, but it was the only way you grew to trust this man."

Ava withdrew the blade, letting the light bleed out of Cas's back. Dean was going to kill her. He didn't know how yet, but he was going to kill her.

One Hour Later

Ava picked up the complimentary spray can of air freshener and Sam's lighter. "You like fire, don't you, Derek?" Ava gave a quick spritz over the lit lighter, demonstrating her skill at creating a flame thrower.

Derek leant back. He could handle a lot of things, but fire was not one of them. He'd lost his family to fire. When Derek woke up from being shot in the heart to have his own flesh burning, he didn't exactly take it well. He was glad Stiles wasn't around to see the wreck he was.

That didn't look like an option this time.

Derek forced a breath into his lungs, narrowing his eyes, but he doubted he was fooling anyone.

"Just kill him," Stiles panted.

The room got deathly silent. No one believed what they heard. Derek wanted Stiles to break. There was only one person in this room Derek was determined to protect and he seemed the most determined not to give in. Stiles was shaking almost as badly as Derek was. He'd lost a lot of blood and it was hard to find a patch of skin without blood or bruise. He'd fallen over after round six and not gotten up since.

Dean had taken just as much torture as Derek if not more and he wouldn't get the luxury of healing like Derek. He had to give Dean a lot of credit. He'd barely screamed. He kept up the cocky demeanor through every strike. Stiles mouthed off as often as he could, but his voice was shaky. He liked Dean a whole lot more since Ava couldn't get into the trunk of the Impala. She didn't need more weapons to fool around with.

But Stiles had given her a new reason not to need anymore weapons.

Ava stepped away from Derek and crouched in front of Stiles, forcing him upright. He could barely open his good eye and blood rolled out of his mouth. Ava had to hold him in place to keep him from falling over again and she cocked her head with a smile, stroking Stiles' most damaged cheek. She was being gentle and it made Derek's stomach churn.

"Say that again," she instructed.

"I want out," Stiles clarified.

"You heard him!" Derek snapped. "Kill me!"

But Ava ignored him.
"Kill me!"

She looked back at him, unimpressed. But Derek didn't care. Stiles had needed a hospital for hours.

"Anxious to join your family on the other side?" She let go of Stiles, letting him fall back to the floor. "I got a secret for you. A couple actually. One's good, one's bad. What do you want first?"

"I want you to kill me and get out of here."

Ava smiled, settling into Derek's lap. The electricity rolled off her every touch, not effecting her in the slightest.

"Kate talked so much about you. That you were her masterpiece. But you were also the one that got away."

Derek had to be hearing her wrong. Kate was dead. Ava tugged on his hair, forcing Derek's eyes to meet hers.

"Relax, sweetie. She's dead. Where do you think I met her?"

Derek stared at her.

Ava rolled her eyes. "I'm a demon, sweetie. Dean was on the path to being just like me. First you go to Hell and you get tortured. After a while, you get off the rack and get to torture others. That's where I met Kate. It was a joy torturing her. Sadistic with just a hint of sociopath. There wasn't a whole lot she was afraid of and nothing she regretted. Not what she did to you and not what she did with Dean."

Ava shifted, letting her and Derek both look at Dean. Dean had no idea what she was talking about.

"It would have been about ten years ago. Dear sweet Sammy was off at college, your daddy was sick of looking at you. He started sending you off on cases with other hunters. He wanted to you learn from other hunters, hoping you'd find a new partner so he didn't have to keep looking after you. There was a werewolf causing trouble in Tennessee and you almost got your ass beat before barely legal eighteen-year-old Kate Argent came and dropped the wolf in ten seconds flat, but I'm guessing you were hard in less than that."

"Because Argents are werewolf experts. Not that you learned anything you could put in your daddy's diary. You two finished up the case in record time and spent the rest of the week destroying a motel room." Ava pressed her mouth to Derek's ear. "Difference between you two is she slept with Dean 'cause she liked him; it was fun. No ulterior motives. Just the crazy sex that comes with fresh bloodshed. It wasn't until round two that they even made it to the bed."

Dean slept with Kate. Dean hunted with Kate. Dean killed with Kate. And the look on Dean's face told Derek that he remembered and enjoyed every minute of it. Derek let out a slow breath. He could enjoy the fact that Kate was in Hell. He'd heard enough stories from Dean and Castiel about how horrible it was down there. And she deserved everything she was getting.

Ava stood up, reaching for the machete on the bed. "I'm sure she'd be laughing if you knew you turned into a hunter's attack dog. I'll have to tell her when I see her. She's up to torturing souls now. She's good at it. A real up and comer. How I wish I could send you to her." Ava sighed happily at the thought, before laughing. "I almost forgot the bad news."

"That was good news?" Stiles snarked, before laughing. "Should have known a demon wouldn't
Stiles was turning delusional. The blood loss had to be getting to him.

Ava rolled her eyes, dismissing Stiles entirely. "I want you to die knowing something. Because I know there's a new shred of hope that hides behind your eye. You've lost so many people up here that you just want to end your life and join them. But Castiel didn't tell you the whole truth."

Derek's eyes snapped to the angel. Castiel's wide eyes confessed plenty. Derek felt sick. He'd finally given in. Castiel knew so much and still stood by him; he helped Laura. Or did he? How much did he lie about? Did he even meet her?

A sudden flash of movement took Derek by surprise. There was a burst of golden electricity and Ava was on the floor with a dagger in her chest and Stiles on top of her. Stiles pushed the knife in harder for good measure, but the demon was already dead.

The room went silent again as Stiles sagged to the floor. He crawled for Derek, managing to get close enough to pull the cord from the wall, before collapsing all together. Derek's wolf surged through him, every wound threatening to close, but Derek held it back, needing to shut his eyes and swallow hard not to let his wolf surface. His body was still shuddering, adjusting to its freedom. Derek tried to move, but he couldn't make his body cooperate.

"I'll-- I'll help more in a minute," Stiles panted.

"Take your time," Dean reassured, resuming his fight to get free now that he wasn't under the demon's scrutiny.

Derek's eyes settled on the ligature mark on Stiles' palm. He'd somehow got a shard of glass and cut himself free. He managed to do what neither Derek nor Dean could.

Castiel was moving, even if it was slowly. He struggled to sit up and struggled harder to untie the rope on Dean's wrist. Dean took care of the rest of his bindings after that, leaving Castiel to lean against his empty chair. Dean stood, but nearly fell over when he tried to walk.

"Stiles. Check on Stiles," Derek breathed.

"I'm okay. Get him free," Stiles responded, rolling to his back.

Dean picked up a gun and Derek froze.

Maybe he hadn't made it out alive.

Derek hardened his expression, his body going tense and preparing to fight. He strained the handcuffs, ready to snap them at a moment's notice. But Dean's emotions never changed. He limped behind Derek, needing to grab his shoulder to stay standing, before shooting the chain tethering his wrists together.

Dean slumped onto the bed, groaning once he made contact. Derek sunk to the floor and slid his hand to the curve between Stiles' neck and shoulder, drawing out as much pain as it could, but there was more than he could handle without letting his wolf out. Stiles still smiled, putting a hand over Derek's.

"Do that for the others," Stiles breathed, his smile turning droopy.

But Derek didn't want to help either of them. Dean had killed his kind with Kate and Castiel lied to
him about his own family.

"He needs a hospital," Derek decided.

"We all do," Dean agreed, reaching for his keys.

"Can you drive?"

"Hospital's not far." Dean got up, moving for Castiel. "There anything doctors can do for you?"

"No," Castiel managed to say, his voice broken and hoarse.

"Well, we're gonna let them try."

Dean reached a hand down to Castiel and the angel took it. Castiel couldn't stand, but Dean pulled one of his arms over his shoulder, needing the wall to keep them both upright. Derek got up, taking Stiles into his arms. Stiles whimpered, fingers clutching Derek wherever he could. He was still bleeding, but the only way to make things better was to get him to a doctor. Dean opened the door to the backseat and Derek got in with Stiles. Castiel collapsed in the front seat and Dean struggled to keep the car engaged long enough for the engine to start.

"So you slept with Kate too, huh?" Dean asked once they were driving down the highway. He laughed, memories flooding back to him and bring a smile to his face. "She's a wild one."

Derek scoffed, his jaw stiffening.

"Tell him," Stiles said.

"Tell me what? Were you the one that taught her that trick with her tongue?"

"She's the one that burned my family's house down with them still inside."

Dean stopped smiling. He stopped, staring at Derek through the rearview mirror.

"Watch the road," Derek scolded, looking out the window.

"Kate Argent? She's from a good family."

"And you wonder why I think you're such a good judge of character," Derek responded, his focus still outside.

"Kate didn't kill innocent people."

"Google it. She did," Stiles said, trying to shift, but every movement seemed to hurt him. "She just wasn't caught for six years."

Dean focused on driving, but Derek could tell he wasn't through asking questions. Dean was just smart enough to know that asking those questions now would get him thrown out of a moving car. Derek settled in, keeping his hand on Stiles to draw out whatever pain he could.

Four Hours Later

Castiel waited patiently for Derek to wake up.
It was remarkable.

Derek could spare Stiles so much pain through touch. He had fallen asleep at Stiles' side, his hand over Stiles' forearm and his head by the boy's hip. Stiles didn't need surgery, but he did need a blood transfusion and stitches to close several of his wounds. The doctors had offered him morphine but he didn't need it with Derek.

He sensed Dean's presence drawing near and Castiel stepped into the hallway, leaving the two in peace. Dean was swatting away a nurse as he limped forwards. His arm was in a sling and he had received some stitches as well, but the demon was considerate enough to only break the bones of the one that could repair himself.

Castiel wanted to soothe Dean's injuries. To close the cut on his forehead, to rid his ribs of the bruises Ava had caused, to massage the muscles Dean strained carrying him to the car, but Castiel didn't have the strength to fix a paper cut.

"How you doin', Cas?"

"Well."

"How they doin'?" Dean asked, nodding at Stiles' room.

"I managed to repair Derek's body."

Dean's eyebrows rose. "You healed him?"

Castiel nodded. "Broken bones take longer to heal than cuts and bruises. It was rational."

Dean smiled, but it wasn't natural. A laugh snuck out of his throat, but it wasn't happy. Dean rubbed his jaw and wet his lips, making it clear he was considering his words carefully.

"I went on more than one hunt with Kate. She was a damn good hunter. Better than I was at her age. Cold, calculated, lethal with a sniper riffle. But she followed the code. She only killed monsters."

"What are you implying, Dean?"

"You tell me."

"I believe you're implying Katherine had a reason to burn Derek's family alive."

"Did she?"

"No."

Dean's jaw tensed and he took a step closer to Cas. "Is there anything I'd want to know about him?"

"It would be helpful if I knew what information you were after."

"Hunters don't kill people, Cas. They don't burn down houses with people still inside."

"She did."

"Why?"

"I was not told who lit the fire. Only that there was one and many of Derek's family died. But I can
assure you that they are not lying."

"I'm not saying they are. I'm saying it doesn't make sense."

"From what I've seen in your past and what I've heard from Stiles, Katherine did not have a problem justifying actions. What mattered to her was the kill." Castiel stepped closer to Dean, his face closer than he knew Dean liked. "You are injured and you will rest. I am not to weak to ensure that."

Dean's chest inflated, nostrils flaring and green eyes narrowing. "Would Kate have had any reason to do what she did?"

"No."

Dean nodded. He believed Castiel, because it was the truth. Katherine had no right to hurt the Hales. They were not dangerous. They were not out of control. They were good. Dean began back to his room, but he paused at the door, fingers drumming for a moment on the frame before he turned back to Castiel.

"Was everyone that died in the fire human?"

"Yes."

Dean didn't say another word. He stepped into his room, closing the door behind him.

"Goodnight, Dean."

Castiel returned to Stiles' room. Derek was awake, eyes fixing on Castiel the moment his foot crossed the threshold.

"You're convincing," Derek said coldly, keeping his voice quiet enough that Stiles wouldn't be awoken.

"I only lie when forced to. Your secret is not mine to tell."

Derek scoffed, lips curling in a mockery of a smile. He was angry and rightly so. "I didn't force you to lie about my family."

"I did not lie to you."

"You told me you saved Laura," Derek snapped, his fangs flashing momentarily, before he regained control. "You said you got her to my family."

"I did not lie to you."

"You said we found them," Castiel clarified as walked around to the other side of the bed. He picked up the second chair and brought it back around to place in front of Derek. "And we did." Castiel sat down. He hoped to never tell this story. "But we weren't the first to find them."

It took Derek no more than a second to understand what Castiel meant.

Derek could already imagine what Castiel was implying. Castiel wanted to tell Derek that his mind was coming up with a more gruesome story than the truth, but he doubted as such. Derek swallowed, his hand falling away from Stiles. Castiel reached out to offer his condolences, but Derek recoiled.

"Tell me everything."
Castiel swallowed. Everything involved several things he wished Derek would never find out.

"I was with Laura for three weeks before she finally found your mother's scent. We moved quickly after that. It was a struggle to keep up with her once she became a wolf, but I was determined to make sure she found her family. I wanted her to have some happiness in that land of abominations. But that wasn't what we found."

Castiel paused, hoping Derek would tell him to stop, but that wasn't the case. Derek was staring at him, waiting for Castiel to continue. He needed answers. But he wouldn't get any that he wanted to hear.

"We found your family in pieces. Their bones were scattered around the clearing, picked clean. They had only been dead a week, maybe less. Laura didn't take it well. She screamed so loud the forest shook and she was gone a moment later."

"You let her go alone?"

"I couldn't catch her. I looked for her for a week. I eventually gave up." Castiel shifted, deciding it was best to tell Derek everything at once. "A few days before we found Talia's scent, we found a river. We agreed that if we ever got separated, we would meet there. I waited, but Laura never came. I was there so long that Dean found me and I left with him."

Derek straightened up, face drawing tight again. "Get out."

"Derek..."

"I said 'get out'."

Castiel nodded, getting up.

Derek had every right to despise him.

Four Hours Later

Dean couldn't sleep.

There was way too much crap going on to risk shutting off his brain. Dean climbed out of bed and left his room. Stiles' door was still closed and there was no sign of Cas. It was too late for most people to be awake and too early for the rest. It was the graveyard shift and those around were too busy dealing with a coma patient to notice him limping around.

It took Dean a while to find his car. Some attendant had to park it for him when they stumbled into the ER, but he got his keys back. He just hated that the twerp parked his car at the back of the parking lot. The cops were stupid enough to go along with their story.

Of course, who'd make up a story about four guys getting their asses handed to them by a girl.

Dean sat down in the passenger seat, going through the glove compartment. He took out his dad's journal and found Kate's number. Dean punched it into his phone and hit call. It rang. And rang. But there was no answer. There wasn't even a recording before the beep to leave a message.

Dean cleared his throat. "Kate, it's Dean Winchester. If you're still alive, call me back. It's important."
Derek walked into the motel to see Stiles sprawled out across the bed, covering as much of the mattress as he could. He had fallen asleep with his laptop open. Derek moved to close it, expecting to see the end credits to some superhero movie, but Stiles had been in the middle of a skype video call. It was still open, but no one was talking. Derek bent down for a closer look. Scott was asleep at his desk.

It made Derek smile.

He took Stiles' laptop, hanging up on Scott, before going to sit at the table. He had been trying to track the werewolf pack for the past three weeks, but hadn't gotten far. There had been a lot of disappearances a few days before the full moon. A tour bus had gone off the road, but there was never a body found. Six people disappeared during a baseball game. There were more, but every disappearance was in a different state. There was no pattern and he was running out of time.

People were going to start disappearing for the next lunar cycle any day now.

There was a knock. It wasn't loud enough to wake Stiles, but it was enough to make him roll over with a groan. Derek closed the windows he had open and lowered the screen. He unlocked the deadbolt and opened the door.

It was still dark out, but the room lit up Dean's face.

All he saw was a smile before a gunshot rang through his ears.

There was a sharp pain in his chest, before everything went numb. Derek was on the floor before he realized it, blood oozing from his chest. The sound of blood rushing through his system drowned out a lot of noise, before the sound of a second shot broke through. Stiles fell in front of him, eyes empty and chest soaked red.

"Either you can tell me how to kill you, or wait for me to figure it out myself."

Derek glared up at Dean, opening his mouth to tell the hunter off, but Dean was giving into his own monsters. He fired a second shot, splintering one of Derek's vertebrae. Derek's wolf came out, fangs long as he snarled from the pain.

"You lied to me for months. You're an abomination, a monster."

Dean kicked Derek onto his back, letting Derek see the blow torch he had with him.

"This seemed to scare you pretty good before. Let's see if fire will kill you."

Derek jolted awake, finding himself in the front seat of his Camaro. Stiles and Dean were sitting on the hood of the Impala, working through a box of donuts. Dean gave Derek a smile, raising a few of his fingers off the donut in his mouth in a lazy attempt to wave.

He was an idiot for sticking around.
Harleton, Texas

Derek was hiding something. Dean knew that from the start. But after Ava, Dean needed to know what. Kate hadn't answered, though Dean hadn't really expected her to. He found the news stories. Kate was dead and Derek's house was burned to a crisp.

Now, Dean couldn't concentrate on research. He had tried Kate's phone plenty of times over the past couple days. It went to voicemail every time, so someone was footing the bill. Dean was a good investigator, but this was the type of thing that Sam usually handled. He could con his way into anywhere, but he couldn't triangulate signals or hack.

He reached for his phone and called Charlie, but all he got was her voicemail.

"Charlie, it's Dean. I need you to get me in touch with a family of hunters. Their last name is Argent and they live in a town called Beacon Hills. It's in California. I want to talk to Kate, but I'll take family members. Anyways, call me when you can."

Dean left the police station an hour later. He was about to get into his car, when he saw Derek and Stiles across the street. They were fighting. They had been since Derek killed the werewolf, but it was worse since the demon. Dean never heard the argument start and he never heard it end. All he knew was Stiles wanted answers and he wasn't getting them.

Derek got into his car, leaving Stiles behind, and Dean climbed into his. If he was lucky, Dean could get some answers about Derek himself. Dean kept his distance, making sure there were a few cars between them. His baby wasn't exactly common.

Derek pulled up to a café across town and Dean parked across the street. Derek walked in without hesitation. He wasn't acting like he expected to be followed. Dean had planned to be talking with local law enforcement all day and he had left Stiles in front of the library so Derek probably believed he was alone.

He wasn't meeting anyone. He just picked out a table for himself and sat down. Dean waited for something to happen, but Derek finished off a couple cups of tea. The guy must have just needed a break from Stiles.

Three Hours Later

Dean was trying to listen in on Derek and Stiles' third argument of the day, but their television was playing too loudly. Dean's phone rang and he checked the screen, before answering.

"What'd you find?"

"Starting with a 'hi' or 'how are you?' goes a long way," Charlie countered

"Fine. Hey, Charlie. What'd you find?"

"Much better."

Dean rolled his eyes. He just needed answers.
"Kate Argent. Deceased. Guilty of arson and murdering a lot of people."

"I know what the papers say. Newspapers never get the whole story with hunters." Dean leant back, watching to make sure Derek hadn't moved. "She had family. A dad, Gerry, Albert, I don't know, and a brother with a daughter."

"Yeah. I looked them up too. Gerald Argent was her dad. He didn't seem to be anything special. He travelled a lot, but after Kate died he went back to Beacon Hills. He was there a few months and disappeared."

"Dead?"

"No. Just went off the radar. His bank account stayed active."

"Okay. And the brother?"

"Chris. Yeah. He got to Beacon Hills a couple months before Kate with his wife and daughter."

"They alive?"

"The daughter is."

"How'd the wife die?"

"Suicide. She stabbed herself."

"Stabbed herself?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Get me his number."

"I looked that up too. He's got himself completely blocked off from people that don't know him. He doesn't want to be found."

"I don't care. I need to talk to him."

"They keep to themselves. Chris hasn't moved towns in three years. I don't think he wants his daughter to be a hunter. You have to respect that."

"I do and I'm not asking her to be. I just need some answers from someone that actually knew Kate."

"Okay. I'll dig up his number tomorrow."

"Make it tonight."

"I have two elves waiting for me in my chambers. So unless this number is going to prevent an apocalypse, I'm out."

Dean scoffed. "Have fun."

---

Two Hours Later

"How many times do I need to tell you to stay out of it?" Derek snapped.
"Things never turn out well when I don't know the whole story," Stiles pushed.

"No."

Stiles wanted to scream. Things were supposed to get easier, not harder, but Cas and Derek were both keeping things from him. Cas hadn't said a word since dinner. He was standing against the wall, arms crossed and eyes downcast. He was listening, but not talking.

Reason had stopped working so Stiles had become down right annoying. He didn't like doing it, but it usually worked. This time, however it backfired. Derek had figured out how to use Dean. Worse, or better, Stiles couldn't tell, Derek was spending more time with Dean. The two of them could sit in a room for hours without saying a word while they drank beer or did research and Stiles couldn't say a word.

Derek was keeping things from him. It wasn't new. Stiles had never believed he knew Derek. Not really. Sure, he paid more attention than most, but Derek was a private person and most people that got even remotely close were dead: his family, his girlfriends, his pack. Fate was cruel.

What Stiles did know was Derek was more shut off than usual. He was pissed at Cas, but neither of them would say why. Cas wasn't taking it well. He looked like a kicked puppy any time Derek turned his back on him. Whatever did happen, they both seemed to agree Cas was in the wrong.

"I'm going for a run," Derek announced.

"Then I'm going with you," Stiles decided, following Derek to the door.

"No. You're not." Derek pushed Stiles backwards and walked out.

"Yes. I am!"

Stiles followed him. He wasn't exactly convinced he could keep up with Derek, but he was going to spend every second within earshot being as annoying as he could. Stiles jumped in front of him, blocking Derek from breaking into a run.

"Stiles!" Derek snapped, his eyes settling into a glare. "Enough."

Stiles tried to come up with a new argument, but his mind was blank. Derek didn't give him answers he could use. He couldn't twist Derek's words into a reason to tell him anything. A door opened behind him and Dean came out, pulling on his jacket and keys jingling in his hand.

"Need a break?" Dean asked.

Derek didn't break eye contact with Stiles, but his answer was still, "Yes."

Stiles watched as Derek got into the car with Dean and the two of them drove off. He should have been happy that they were getting closer, but it wasn't real. Dean didn't know about him. It was just another way for Derek to shut himself off.

He went back into the room, hoping to break Cas without Derek's presence, but the angel disappeared. It wasn't easy to piss Cas off, but Stiles had done it. Cas had gotten a bit better. He wasn't showing off like when Stiles first found out about his angel status, but he was pushing hard. Cas blipped around whenever he had the excuse to and pushed to finish healing Stiles' injuries. But Stiles and Dean both refused to let him do too much. Closing the cut on Stiles' leg exhausted him.

Stiles dropped onto the bed and pulled out his laptop. He opened up skype and called Scott. It was
a few rings before Scott answered, but Stiles was just relieved to see his friend's dopey smile. Scott's smile faded as his eyes focused on something. Stiles looked down to see the cut on his forearm was out in the open with his stitches visible for the world to see.

"It's not that bad," Stiles said, tugging his shirt sleeve down.

"Those are hospital stitches."

"They are n--"

"Dude, my mom's a nurse. I've visited her at work enough times to know the difference."

"I didn't break anything. Dean could have stitched me up himself."

"You're lying." Scott slumped backwards, crossing his arms.

"I lost a lot of blood. But I'm fine."

"You said if you wound up in a hospital you'd come home."

"Don't make me have this fight with you too."

Scott huffed, shifting in his seat. "We barely survived stuff like this together. And now I have to listen to Danny complain that you won't stop texting him, when I haven't heard from you in days."

"Okay. You can't be jealous of Danny. I only message him so much because it takes ten messages to get one answer. You know that. And I only do it because I need his help. You, I call and text because I like to."

"And the fact that you're calling less and less?"

Scott's puppy eyes were bad enough before he was bitten. Now? They were damn right heartbreaking. Stiles' immunity had plummeted since he left.

"It's been busy. I haven't been able to just talk."

"So. Talk. What did that to you?"

"A demon. She was a real bitch."

"And since then?"

"We're in Texas looking into a few disappearances. Dean thinks it's a djinn, but we haven't found anything yet. Apparently that's not that odd though. They don't leave a lot of--"

"And then what?" Scott cut off.

"We don't really look for new cases until the one we're working is over."

"Maybe you could come home."

Stiles stared at him. The last thing he wanted was another conversation that went in circles and left him feeling like an asshole.

"You're not protecting people. You're going out looking for fights," Scott continued.

"I'm saving people."
"No, you're hunting things. The saving is secondary. You like the crazy. You were excited when I turned into a werewolf and now you're bored. Nothing's come through town in months so you're looking some place else. That's what this is."

"I'm killing things that kill people. That saves people."

Scott went quiet, looking down.

"This doesn't change anything between us," Stiles insisted.

"How many werewolves have you killed?"

"None. Only one I've seen out here was dead when I got there. And she asked Derek to kill her. She couldn't control herself. She wasn't like you."

Scott's face turned unreadable.

"What?"

"Derek made it sound like more."

"Derek's talking to you? You're talking to Derek? I don't care. Talk to me."

"A couple days ago, he asked me and Isaac to look into a weird bank robbery that happened just outside of town."

"Tell me everything."

"Umm. It happened about a month ago. Security cameras caught a bunch of guys in black going into a bank, but they cut the feed right away. By the time the cops showed up, all the money was gone and there wasn't a single witness."

"Everyone died?"

"No. Maybe. I don't know. No one knows. There were no bodies."

"How does this not make the news?"

Scott shrugged.

"You said this happened a month ago?" Stiles asked.

"Three weeks?" Scott pushed through a few sheets of paper. "I think."

"Why am I just finding out about this now?"

"Because I figured I'd at least pretend to listen when Derek told me not to tell you."

Stiles smiled. There was a reason Scott was his best friend.

"Guess he knew I would anyways. Not that it mattered. He never called back to ask me what I found. I don't even know what I found."

"Don't tell him you told me. See if he'll talk to you."

"Oh yeah. Talking works wonders with Derek."
"He actually likes talking to you. You just don't usually like what he's got to say." Stiles ran a hand down his face. "I know he's keeping stuff from me. It shouldn't bug me, but it does. Something changed when he killed that werewolf."

"If you two just came home, things could go back to normal."

"I don't know if I can do normal anymore."

"You would be the only one that considered me normal."

"Scott--"

"Are we still even going to college together?"

"Yeah. Of course."

Scott shifted again. He didn't believe Stiles.

"Scott..."

But Scott still didn't say a word; he wasn't even looking at Stiles.

"Use your wolf powers. I'm telling the truth," Stiles promised.

"Doesn't work over webcam. Your mic doesn't pick up your heartbeat."

"Then trust me."

"I would. But you're talking to me like you used to talk to your dad. You know, back when you didn't want him to find out about werewolves."

"Scott, we are going to college together. We're going to be roommates and drive each other insane. You're gonna drink all my beer, because those werewolf powers stop you from getting drunk, and I'm going nag you about dirty dishes and we're going to flip a coin over bathroom cleaning duties and stay up late hyped up on Redbull to finish papers in time."

"I can't change the fact that my gut says you're not coming home. I just don't know if it's because you don't want to or because you're dead."

One Hour Later

"Thanks for this," Derek said, sitting on the hood of the Impala with Dean.

Well, Dean was half sitting, half leaning and Derek was barely leaning against the car. Derek had respect for his Impala. He realized that sitting on the Impala was like sitting on a member of Dean's family. Sam could do it. He grew up in the car, but anyone else? Dean had thrown punches at bikers for getting too close to her. His Impala was his baby.

The one thing that he could always fix.

"Don't mention it," Dean replied, unscrewing his flask of whiskey and handing it to Derek.

They drank in silence, pretending to watch the stars. It was a perfect night, cool and dry with a light breeze.
"What's it like up there?" Derek eventually asked.

So maybe Derek wasn't pretending.

"You mean heaven?"

Derek nodded, taking another sip.

"A dream. You get lost in memories. The good ones. The ones that made you proud of who you are. The ones you can't help but smile when you remember them."

"And what if you don't make it up there?"

"You planning on going somewhere else?"

"You wound up somewhere else."

"The other places suck. Hell's the nightmare that never ends. For decades, I got cut apart until there was nothing left of me. And then it started all over again. The only way it stops is if you start doing that to other people and I did. I carved people into pieces for ten years down there."

Derek held out the flask to Dean. There wasn't any judgement in his eyes. None. Dean looked forward again, downing a fresh swig of whiskey.

"Purgatory's the only real place. Heaven and Hell are infinite. You could go in circles for years and never know it. You lose yourself, but you never die. Purgatory, at least what's dead seemed to stay that way. Purgatory is just earth without man. No corruption, no rules, no nothing. It's pure."

"So finding your family after you've died... it doesn't happen, does it?"

"I found Sam."

Derek looked at him, confused.

"Hunters piss each other off plenty. Sam wasn't always 100% human. So I've been on the other side of the stick. Been used as bait against my dad and Sam. Got shot in the chest right after Sam. Only place off this earth I've been to by choice was Hell. Anyways, Cas found me in Hell and he did it again in Heaven. He got me to Sam."

Dean furrowed his eyebrows, putting the pieces together. "That what this is about?"

"Yeah."

Dean passed back the whiskey, not forcing Derek to elaborate.

"Most of my family died in the fire. My sister was killed six years later."

"And you want to know if they're together?"

Derek let out a breath, before swallowing down another few gulps of liquor. "He made me believe they were. That demon forced him to admit that wasn't true."

Dean didn't know what to say. He could make up reasons about why Cas did it, but family meant everything to Dean. He couldn't imagine someone telling him Sam was safe with family only to find out he was lost and alone.

Dean reached over to put a hand on Derek's shoulder, but he was already standing, pushing down
everything like Dean had done for years as he moved for the passenger seat.

**Twenty Minutes Later**

Derek walked into the motel to see Stiles sprawled out across the bed, covering as much of the mattress as he could. He had fallen asleep with his laptop open. Derek moved to close it, expecting to see the end credits to some superhero movie, but Stiles had been in the middle of a skype video call. It was still open, but no one was talking. Derek bent down for a closer look. Scott was asleep at his desk.

Derek froze at the familiarity of the scene.

It was unnerving.

He heard Dean's door shut. Derek put the laptop on the table and went to the window, pulling the curtain to the side. Dean went to his trunk, digging through his stuff. Derek never could ignore how dangerous Dean was. He didn't even pretend to have a code like the Argents. They were defensive and Dean was offensive. He didn't wait for blood to be spilt. He just killed.

Dean stepped back to close the trunk, his underwear between his teeth.

Derek rolled his eyes.

Dangerous may have been a generous statement.

**Twelve Hours Later**

"How are you so sure this is a djinn?" Derek asked after he and Dean finished clearing their sixth floor.

"Instinct. This feels like a djinn. I just don't know what kind."

"So you believe in differences within a species of monsters?"

"It's rare, but yeah. I don't know what causes it. Maybe there's monster orgies and out pops a super freak or basic evolution."

"And djinns? How many kinds do you know of?"

"So far, three. And none of them are real genies. It's all fake. There's ones that make your dreams come true, ones that make you hallucinate and ones that lock you in a nightmare and feed off your fear."

Derek paused, taking it in, before asking. "Ever meet something that bred with a human?"

"Few times. Hell, I slept with an amazon. Sam, with a werewolf, but neither of us knew it. A demon reproduced with a human to make an antichrist. I mean, there's even a few diseases that get spread down bloodlines." Dean pushed open the door to the seventh floor, his silver knife dipped in lamb's blood at the ready. "There's nothing monsters won't do to survive. They don't want stronger humans. They want chaos, pain and dominance. I'm all for the not to distant future with X-men, but monsters aren't humans evolving. They're not a science experiment gone wrong. They're
"evil and they're dangerous."

"Then why did you let Kate go in the first place?" Derek asked, shoving open a door to let Dean see inside.

"Because a part of me keeps hoping this job will be over."

"It can be."

Dean laughed, leaning his head through an open doorway. "Yeah. It can. And then everyone I would have saved, dies."

"You can't save everyone."

"No. But I've saved a lot of lives. And I'm gonna keep on saving them."

They finished off another floor, before Derek opened his mouth again.

"Why'd you let that werewolf go? Was she the first?"

"No, but she's the last. There's always something that makes them break. And I've tried to ignore that, but it's fact. It doesn't matter how hard they try, there's always something. And there's always going to be something."

"There has to be something that keeps you believing."

"Because sometimes you forget they aren't human. Cas rebelled against his own kind for me and Benny was like a brother to me."

Derek paused, not sure if he should ask. His eyes flicked over at Dean, his eyebrows making his curiosity clear. Those eyebrows could hold a conversation and who was Dean to deny the prim twin caterpillars.

"He was a vampire. The one guy that didn't break. The only one I really trusted to stay clean. And he'd still be here, if it wasn't for me."

"So you killed him too," Derek said.

"Didn't want to. It was supposed to be temporary. Sam was stuck in Purgatory and I couldn't get to him. I had the balls to ask him to go back there for me and he did it without hesitating. I got Sam back, but not Benny." "Figured after that speech you'd be happy to know he was dead."

"Benny and I went through a lot together. I met him in Purgatory looking for Cas. He saved my ass more than once. Only reason we survived is because we had each other's backs. I trusted him because he needed me. And when he didn't, he was still there for me. Benny is the reason Sam's got his life back."

"You mean you brought something back from Purgatory?"

Dean's phone rang and he slid it from his pocket. It was a blocked number.

"I gotta take this. Might be Sam."

Derek nodded. "Yeah. Sure." Derek pushed on, continuing to check rooms.
Dean answered the call, hanging back in an empty room. "Yeah?"

"I told Bobby Singer and now I'm telling you. We're done."

"Chris?"

"Leave my family alone."

"No, no. Wait. It's not about a case. It's about Kate."

The line didn't go dead, but Chris didn't say anything.

"I don't know if Kate told you about me. But my name's Dean."

"John Winchester's boy, right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Kate's dead."

"I know. I heard. What I want to know about is the fire. Did she do it?"

"She set it," Chris admitted

"But why? What was she hunting?"

"Why the interest?"

"Ran into a demon. She said Kate was in Hell. Kate was a little crazy, but she doesn't deserve to be there."

"She set the fire, Dean. There's not a problem here anymore. That's all you need to know."

"No, it's not."

"Kate thought she was doing the right thing. Even though it meant breaking the code."

"So the house, something was hiding in there?"

"Not hiding, living."

"The Hales weren't human," Dean deduced.

"Not all of them. Some of them were human, but Kate didn't care. She just wanted the pack dead."

"The ones that lived are they--"

"Off limits. I don't care what my father thought of you. This town survived a lot. It doesn't need the Winchesters. So, stay away from my family. Stay away from this town."

Chris hung up, leaving Dean with plenty of unanswered questions. He still didn't know what Kate was hunting. Only that it was worth killing. It was dangerous enough that humans in close proximity had to be a threat. It was the only logical answer.

Derek was a threat.

Dean checked the hall, but Derek had already moved up a floor. He could see the dust falling free
from the ceiling from Derek’s careful steps.

But Dean didn’t go after him.

He went to the Impala to prepare himself for whatever monster Derek was.

Ten Minutes Later

Castiel stood at the end of the hallway of the condemned apartment building, watching for reverberations in the dust that could not be claimed by his friends. Stiles was running through the floor above him, not believing that Castiel was able to investigate the building at the speed he was going. Castiel could not fault the boy for his disbelief.

His celestial powers were still greatly hindered. Traveling more than a mile could drain him and his ability to heal was almost non-existent. But his senses were still more heightened than human and more attuned than Derek’s. A djinn's poison caused a change in the air. It went unnoticed by most, because most had never suffered its effect. As an angel, Castiel could see the minute blue pigmentation that settled in the air where djinns lived. Judging by the tint, this djinn must have been here for a decade.

Castiel walked the floor. Though it looked the same as the others, it was not. Stiles was coming down the stairs behind him two at a time. Castiel raised a finger to his lips once the boy entered the hallway and Stiles slowed his steps, avoiding anything that would cause excess noise. Castiel pressed forward, when he sensed human souls. One was growing weak and two were freshly deceased.

He pushed open the door to see a row of six humans strung up by their wrists, each one more pale than the next. Stiles pushed past him, rushing to the body with the most colour. It was a girl. One that hadn't even finished puberty. Stiles checked for a pulse. But they were too late.

"It's too late for them," Castiel said.

"No. There's still a heartbeat," Stiles countered, fumbling to get the syringe that would counter the djinn's toxins.

"Stiles."

"We have to save someone I'm here to save people." He injected the body, shaking the young girl in hopes to wake her.

But Castiel watched the soul leave the body in search of peace. Stiles kept trying, but it wasn't long until her blood cooled and Stiles accepted her end.

Ten Minutes Later

Stiles' fingers twitched on his dagger. A part of him had begun to doubt this was a case. They had been in town for two days and found nothing. They had just missed the last disappearance and there hadn't been another since they had arrived. There was no pattern, which, apparently, was a red flag for djinns. But the dead bodies proved Dean was right.

So Stiles was on high alert.
"Where are they?" Stiles asked, eyes flicking between the two different staircases.

Cas had blipped himself and Stiles to the top floor so they could work their way down, while Dean and Derek went from the bottom up. They were supposed to meet in the middle. Stiles and Cas had made it down twenty floors out of thirty and they still hadn't crossed Dean and Derek.

"Did we miss them?"

"No."

"I know we were faster, but we should have run into them by now, right?"

Cas's eyebrows furrowed, scanning the area.

"Cas?"

"I'm going to go find Dean."

"Wait for m--"

But Cas was gone by the time Stiles' looked up.

"Damn it."

Stiles broke into a run, sprinting down another floor. He called out to Derek, keeping his voice quiet enough that only Derek should hear him. Djinns didn't have superhuman hearing at least according to the journal. Stiles moved quickly, glancing in to every room. He could take a better look later, but if Cas was going ahead that meant there had to be a reason.

There was a gentle clatter behind him and Stiles stopped instantly. He turned slowly, looking for the cause, but the hallway was empty. Another thud came from the same direction. His fingers flexed on the knife handle, ready to strike as he moved through.

Stiles heard a body dropped behind the door next to him. He pushed the loose wood gently, grateful that it didn't creak and moan. His heart was racing. This felt straight out of a horror movie and djinns were more dangerous than every supernatural thriller he had ever seen.

Worse, they were real.

But that wouldn't stop him.

"Derek?" Stiles breathed.

Stiles pushed on and his eyes darting to every inch of the room, looking for attack points. Dean had repeatedly warned him that djinns were sneaky bastards. Stiles swallowed creeping through the living room. He heard something move behind him and spun around again, but there was nothing. He checked the ceiling, watching every corner in the large room as he continued to the first bedroom. The door was hanging by a single hinge, but it didn't hide Derek's jean clad ass.

Stiles probably should have been concerned that he could recognize Derek by his ass, but he was far more concerned with the fact that said toned ass wasn't moving.

"Derek?" Stiles skidded to the werewolf's side, rolling him over. "Derek! Come on!"

He shook Derek hard, but it wasn't enough. Stiles pressed two fingers to his pulse point. His heart rate was erratic. Worst of all, there was a blue handprint on his forearm and Stiles had wasted his
antidote on a dead person. Blue handprints meant nightmare djinns and Derek didn't need a monster's help to have those.

"Derek, wake up." Stiles punched him, desperate. "So help me, I will rip out your eyebrows if you don't wake up!"

Stiles barely caught the subtle movement out of the corner of his eye before it was too late. Stiles scrambled backwards, barely missing the attacking djinn. Stiles kept backing up, trying to draw it away from Derek, but the djinn didn't cooperate. He was standing between Stiles and Derek, eyes glowing blue and tattoos spreading down his arms. Stiles glanced at the blade between the djinn and Derek. He didn't even remember putting it down. But he must have, when he was trying to wake Derek up.

"Now would be an awesome time to wake up, big guy," Stiles said, getting to his feet.

He looked around the room for a temporary weapon, but the room was bare. Dust and moldy trash was useless. Stiles took a final look at Derek, but the werewolf wasn't waking up and there was no sign of Dean or Cas showing up to save his ass. It was a good thing Stiles didn't want to be a damsel in distress.

"Well, here goes nothing."

Stiles removed his jacket slowly. The djinn was watching Stiles closely, confused as he unfurled the fabric with a flourish and a snap. Stiles smiled at the creature and then charged, covering as much of his skin as possible. He slammed the monster into the wall, before shooting away to avoid its hands. Stiles tried to pick up the blade as he backed up again, but the djinn's next attack was too quick.

Stiles jumped out of the way, barely avoiding its touch. It wasn't a fair fight by any means. Even if Stiles had the knife he wasn't convinced it would be a fair fight. The djinn had almost a foot on him and one weak spot. Stiles had plenty of weak spots.

"Dean!" Stiles shouted. "Cas!"

But he couldn't hear a single sign of them. All it did was piss the djinn off. The assholes liked to be stealthy, but that was not Stiles' top talent. He backed into the living room, still shouting his head off. He didn't like calling for help, but it was keeping the djinn's attention on him. Stiles kept watching for a weapon, but the place was picked clean. Stiles let out a frustrated noise, wracking his brain for another option.

"Dear Castiel, I hope praying still works. Now would be an awesome time to show up and smite this thing before it kills me."

The djinn snapped forward and Stiles dodged it, barely managing to stay out of its grasp. He ran for the bedroom and pushed the door shut, but it didn't close properly. Stiles pressed the wooden panel against the hole, watching a corner stick out over the top of the frame and a corner off to the side. The djinn pushed hard and Stiles struggled to keep the wood remotely in place.

Then, without warning, the force stopped. If the frame wasn't there, Stiles would have faceplanted in the living room. There was a flash of white light and Stiles heard a body drop. Stiles kept his weight against the door, pressing his ear to the door.

"Cas?"

"Yes," the angel answered gruffly.
"Buddy, you don't sound good, but you gotta be not good in here. Derek's unconscious."

Stiles dropped the door and it broke off its final hinge as he hurried back to Derek's side. Cas came into the room, staggering slightly.

"Did you find Dean? Does he have another dose of the antidote still on him?"

Cas shook his head.

"You didn't find Dean?"

"He wasn't in the building."

"Why would Dean leave Derek?"

Cas's head tweaked to the side, noticing something Stiles did not.

"What?"

"He's on the first floor now."

"I hate to ask, Cas. But he is not waking up."

Cas moved to help, but swayed, barely managing catch himself on the wall.

"I wouldn't ask, but I've seen and read all the X-men and--"

"And the angry man with long claws never wakes up from a nightmare peacefully," Cas concluded.

Stiles nodded. Cas moved forward again. He lost his balance, but Stiles was quick, catching the angel.

"Just a little jolt. Don't strain yourself any more than you have to, or already have," Stiles insisted, helping Cas the last couple steps.

Cas reached down to touch Derek and the werewolf jerked, surprising Stiles. He lost hold of Cas and went to help him again, when Derek cried out.

"Get out! Go!" Derek yelled, eyes screwed shut, fangs barred and claws shredding the floor.

"Derek?" Stiles cautiously moved closer.

"No. Leave me. Go. GO!"

Stiles reached out, but nearly lost his fingers after Derek lashed out. "Do you know what he's seeing?" Stiles asked, trying to figure out how to get close enough without losing a limb.

"Fire and..." Cas hesitated, before admitting, "family."

"Oh god. He's watching his family burn."

Stiles tugged at Derek's leg, trying to wake him without getting near his claws, but he just got kicked across the room. Stiles felt his ribs tighten. They weren't broken, but Stiles was going to be sporting huge bruise for days. He was mostly relieved that Derek didn't have Kali's stupid toe claws.

Stiles got up, looking for his opening, before jumping on Derek. Stiles pounded on the wolf's
chest, managing a hit to the face any chance he could. It was like riding a cross between a bull and a snake. Stiles was shouting, cries getting more and more desperate.

"Derek! Wake up!"

Stiles managed a hard punch to his face and Derek's eyes flew open, wide and scared. The red glow of his eyes faded fast and his fangs receded, but each of his claws were embedded in Stiles forearms. Stiles blinked, forcing himself not to look at the blood. Derek was unstable enough without him freaking out. Stiles knew the signs all too well.

"It's okay," Stiles said calmly, keeping his eyes on Derek's.

But Derek's eyes were darting around the room. He looked like a cornered animal. Stiles nudged Derek with his leg until Derek finally met his gaze.

"I got you. Well, you got me, but if you didn't, I still wouldn't be going anywhere."

Derek's claws retracted and Stiles let out a shaky breath.

"Okay. Good. Just don't try yellow spandex. Your pants are already tight enough."

"Dean," Cas said somewhere behind him.

"Yeah. We'll go look for him in a second."

"No need."

Stiles looked over his shoulder to see Dean standing in the doorway. Stiles hurried to hide the claw marks on his arms, but the look on Dean's face told him it was too late.

"What are you?" Dean's tone was low, dark and lethal.

"This wasn't--"

Dean's eyes snapped to Stiles', shutting him up instantly. Dean stepped forward slowly and Stiles had never felt so scared in his entire life. There was a gun gripped tight in Dean's hand and the safety was clicked off.

"Dean," Cas addressed, using his name to say more than Stiles could ever understand as he struggled to get up on Dean's right. "He's not dangerous."

"I can see that," Dean snarked, eyes trained on Derek as if he was like every other monster they had faced, and killed.

Derek stood, matching Dean's height, but held his ground.

"What are you?" Dean asked again.

Stiles hurried to his feet. He wanted to put himself between Dean and Derek, but Derek's hand was raised just enough to tell Stiles that he'd be flat on his ass if he tried anything. And that would not help Derek's case right now.

"Werewolf," Stiles answered. "But he's not like the one we killed."

"I'm the alpha," Derek said.
Any other time, Stiles would have rolled his eyes at the proclamation, but the tension was too high and he didn't dare take his eyes off Dean for even part of a second. Armed or not, Dean was still the thing monsters had nightmares about.

"You? The alpha? The original werewolf?"

"It's different for his kind. He has a pack and he's there alpha. An alpha," Stiles explained.

Derek dared to throw a quick glare at Stiles. But right now wasn't the time to flaunt his lethality like a peacock.

"Show me," Dean demanded.

"Put down the gun," Derek nearly snarled back.

Dean’s head cocked, a smile twitching at the corner of his mouth. He let the clip slide free and tossed the two pieces aside. "Now. Show me."

Derek took a breath and slowly shifted. He rolled his shoulders and Stiles could hear Derek's insides realigning. Muscles popped and bones creaked. The superhuman within surfaced. His claws slid out, his hair moved to the side of his face, his lip curled to show off a flash of fangs and his eyes burned red.

"You can see the difference, right?" Stiles asked.

Dean moved closer and Derek tensed, untrusting. The hunter raised his hands, letting Derek see his empty palms.

"He's not the bad guy," Stiles reminded.

Dean was silent, studying the werewolf closely. Stiles tried to stay still, but he was quickly transitioning between scared and anxious. He was practically bouncing by the time he snapped.

"Say something."

"He's not a werewolf," Dean responded after a moment.

"No. He's not the kind you've seen," Stiles countered. "Because his kind has control. He was born a werewolf. Cas thinks he's part skinwalker or something. But I just think he's another kind. Djinns have more than one breed. Why not werewolves?"

"You turn full mutt?" Dean asked, circling Derek tightly.

"No," Derek answered.

"Did I miss some Twilight breed of gorilla wolf prancing past my window?"

"I said, 'no'."

Dean laughed coldly. "So this is it? You're some freak show werewolf that looks like it crawled out of Sunnydale."

"He's not a vampire," Stiles pushed instantly. "No bloodlust."

"Werewolves always have a bloodlust." Dean tapped his heart. "Your kind all want this."
"You're not my type."

Dean scoffed. "No. Thought I was Cas's. But he ain't acting all that surprised by your new sideburns. So, how long have you known, Cas?"

"Dean--"

"How long?" Dean's voice grew louder and deeper.

Cas went silent, finally garnering Dean's attention.

"A week?"

Cas swallowed, but didn't move.

"A month?"

Still no response.

"You knew the whole time." Dean rubbed his jaw as he turned away from Cas, hurt and angry. He chuckled, the sound making Stiles' blood run cold. "You guys must have been laughing your asses off." Dean tried to laugh it off, when he suddenly snapped upright, eyes turning absolutely deadly as they focused on Cas again. "You let him near Sammy. You brought this son of a bitch right into his house."

"Derek would never hurt Sam," Cas said, voice quiet and weak.

"And I'm supposed to trust you? Trust him? Everyone in this room has been lying to me for months." Dean bent forward, bracing his hands on his knees. He wasn't calm. He was seething with rage and trying to contain it. "You know, somehow, there aren't a lot of things I've seen with red eyes. And, hell," Dean's eyes flicked up to meet Derek's again, "if Cas is already thinking you're some crossbreed, who am I to argue. But I think he's wrong about the skinwalker part. Skinwalkers wouldn't give you those red eyes."

"They weren't red when he was born," Stiles jumped to answer. "The red means he's an alpha."

"And how'd you become an alpha?"

Shit.

Derek's eyes narrowed. This wasn't the time to answer that question. Dean wasn't in the mood to hear why Derek killed Peter. Only that he killed his own kind, his own family, that his kind did kill people. Dean advanced, crowding Derek, testing his restraint.

"You killed for it, didn't you?"

Derek hesitated, but answered, "Yes."

"You hid the werewolf thing well, but I knew you were a killer right from the start."

There was a quick jerk of movement and Derek choked. Dean was knocked into the wall and Stiles saw the knife in Derek's chest. Derek's knees buckled and the werewolf was barely able to catch himself before the rest of his body hit the floor. Stiles ran for him, yanking out the silver blade and watching the inky black substance pour out of the hole in his chest.

A shot fired, hitting Derek in the arm and knocking him to the ground. He had completely forgot
about the bullet left in the chamber. Stiles turned, seeing Dean moving for his clip, and raced Dean
to the ammo. Dean got there first and elbowed Stiles hard in the head. Stiles rolled to his back,
everything spinning, but he still heard Derek growl defensively.

"Cas! Get him out! Go!" Stiles shouted, trying to focus, but his vision was still moving without his
body.

"No," Derek growled, his wolf creeping into his vocal cords. "Take, St--"

Stiles looked for them, but there was only one other pair of legs in the room and they were too
bowed to be Derek's. Stiles began to get up only to be knocked unconscious.

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Rural Michigan

Derek hit the ground hard. He fought with his body, desperately looking around for the angel. He
had to go back. Stiles wasn't safe.

Derek managed to stand, but his vision was still spinning. His insides were still churning,
struggling to settle back into their proper place. Derek lost it. Too much of his body was out of
whack. He kept hold of a tree and doubled over to vomit, retching his lunch and blackness. He was
in bad shape, but he had survived worse.

"Cas--" Derek's claws dug into the wood to keep himself on his feet. "Castiel?"

There was no response. Derek began walking unevenly, scouring the area. If that angel dumped
him off in some woods and disappeared-- Derek tripped over a body. He managed to get an arm
beneath him, lifting enough of his body off the floor to see Castiel. Derek reached out, shaking the
angel by his shirt, but he was still.

Derek shook him harder, but Castiel's body was as limp as a rag doll. Derek dragged claws deep
over Cas's shoulder, hoping the pain would do something, but Cas was out cold. Maybe even dead.
His blood was pounding in his ears so loud that he couldn't hear a heartbeat. Derek collapsed onto
his back, going through his pockets for his phone.

His hands were shaking, his entire body trembling as it struggled to heal. He found Stiles' number
and called, but the call wouldn't complete. He didn't have a signal.

Castiel shifted beside him and Derek crawled closer, roughly forcing the angel to meet his eyes.

"Get me back there, now," Derek ordered, eyes glowing red.

"Not possible." Castiel looked around. "We did not reach our destination."

"And where was that?"

"Home. I tried... tried to..." Castiel's eyes fell shut and he went limp in Derek's grasp.

"No, no, no." He shook Castiel.

The angel opened his eyes, but they were glassy and rolling in their sockets.

"The djinns--"

"Dead. I killed it."
There were four of them.

Beacon Hills, California

Stiles woke up. His head still throbbing. He sat up, keeping his eyes scrunched shut. He expected the rest of his body to be stiff. Dean left him knocked out on a floor, but his butt was well cushioned and the smell of piss and mold had been replaced with familiarity and waffles.

Stiles opened an eye.

He was in his room.

His room.

Stiles hurried out of bed, tripping over a lump on the floor that groaned. He fell against his desk, knocking over the lamp as his eyes darted around his room. He saw the pictures of him and Scott, his superhero memorabilia on the shelves, his games, his clothes, his mess. It was his room with his stuff. Dean must have dumped him off on his front doorstep and ditched him.

Stiles ran for his phone, when he remembered the groaning lump. Lumps didn't groan. People groaned. Monsters groaned. Stiles went to the side of his bed to see Scott reburying himself in blankets to avoid the sunlight streaming through the window.

"Scott?"

"If it's not noon, I'm not waking up," he grumbled, covering his eyes with his arm.

"It's noon," Stiles lied, his knees thunking on the floor as he dropped down next to Scott. "Need you to use that pretty head of yours. How'd I get here?"

"You mean that good hiding spot you found in Black Ops?"

"No. Here. This room."

Scott sat up, eyes barely open, because he wasn't ready for the sun. He looked Stiles over, confusion setting into his forehead. "Did you raid your dad's liquor cabinet without me?"

"No, I--"

"It's not noon!" Scott proclaimed, spotting Stiles' alarm clock. "Weekend rules. I am dead until noon." He shoved Stiles backwards and flopped back down to his cocoon of blankets and pillows.

Stiles got up, once again going for his phone. He scrolled through his contacts, looking for Dean's number, but it wasn't there. He began looking for the aliases he'd stored his back up phones under, but they were all gone. He scrolled back up to Derek's name and hit call. If he couldn't slow Dean down, maybe he could get to Derek first.

But Derek wasn't answering. Stiles got changed out of his pajamas, keeping his phone pinned against his ear as it rang and rang before finally going to voicemail. Stiles gathered his wallet and keys and headed for the door. He opened his mouth, ready for the beep with Derek's lack of an answering machine message, but that wasn't the case.

"You reached D-Dog's phone. He's off-- Hey! Ow!"
There was a clatter, giving Stiles a moment to be utterly stunned. That wasn't Isaac or Scott or him or Peter or anyone that should have ever gotten within a foot of Derek's phone. He heard the phone get picked up.

"How do I reset it?" Derek asked. "No. Keep your hands off. Just tell me how to undo this."

Derek laughed and Stiles actually walked into a wall in surprise, dropping his phone. Derek Hale just laughed. An honest to god, real, actual, happy laugh. Stiles swallowed, bending down to pick up his phone.

"Fine. I'll fix it later, idiot."

Stiles could hear his smile. He could hear each word dancing past his teeth.

"Leave a message or, if you know where to find me, just show up."

The phone clicked and the message sound beeped. Stiles hung up quickly, his heart racing.

What was going on?

"Stiles? Is that you?" his dad asked from downstairs.

"Yeah..." Stiles needed a moment before realizing he practically whispered his answer. "Yeah! I'm up!"

"Breakfast is on the table if you want some."

"Coming." Stiles walked down the stairs, still so confused.

Derek didn't do happy. Fate screwed Derek over every chance it got. Derek didn't laugh at Stiles jokes. He smirked, he smiled like a cocky asshole, he sneered, he laughed at those moments that made you want to punch him. But he didn't laugh because he was happy. He laughed to demean someone or hide something. This wasn't right.

His body took him straight into the kitchen, desperate for the waffles he hadn't had since he was a kid. His dad never made waffles. He had a lot of explaining to do and no time to do it, but at least there were waffles. Stiles let out a breath and put on a smile as he entered the kitchen.

Then froze.

Stiles couldn't move, couldn't breathe. His body overtaken by more anxiety than any panic attack he had ever suffered. He wasn't in agony, but he was losing his hold on reality, because this couldn't possibly be real. He could feel his eyes get wet and his body shake.

"Mom?" Stiles croaked.
Harleton, Texas

"Charlie, pick up the phone!" Dean nearly shouted at her voicemail, riffling through Derek's things.

Dean put his phone on the dresser and hit redial. He was looking for a sign of where Derek might run to. He was smart enough not to go home, but they had been to almost every state in the past two months. Derek didn't talk about his family. He didn't talk about himself. Dean had put a few pieces together, but nothing that would tell Dean where a werewolf would hide out.

He got Charlie's voicemail again and was about to redial for the twentieth time, when Charlie's name flashed on the screen.

"About time," Dean answered, dropping into the arm chair with his phone.

"Dean, it's August. You know what August means," Charlie responded.

"I need you to trace a number."

"No. Just because I'm the queen does not mean I get a laptop in my chambers."

"You hunted down that Argent guy."

"Yeah. That was yesterday. Yesterday, my biggest problem was which dress to wear. Today, I have to make sure we keep two enemy armies at bay. You're coming next week, right?"

"Depends."

"Depends? No. Dean. No. You swore to me. Every six months you join me in battle. I am dealing with orcs here."

"And I'm hunting a werewolf. Help me find him so I can put him down and I'll be there. Face paint and everything."

"I love that you still pretend that the face paint is for my benefit. We both know how much you love playing dress up."

Dean tried to deny it, but his heart wasn't in it.

He did love being a knight.

"Just trace the number for me."
Charlie sighed, but Dean could hear her moving. Dean read out Derek's number, before listening to Charlie type.

"How long is this going to take?"

"That's up to your werewolf," Charlie answered. "His phone is off or he's out of range."

"That's not gonna stop you, is it?"

"I can't will a cellphone to be found. If it's not transmitting a signal, I can't trace it. You're gonna have to go hunter on its ass."

"Yeah, that hasn't worked that well."

"A werewolf snuck past Dean Winchester? How'd that happen?"

"Bye," Dean reacted, prepared to hang up.

"Hey! Come on! We can pretend you called just to talk."

"If you want me there next week, I don't have time to talk."

"If you're not here, I will summon some big bad monster that'll kill everyone and then you'll have to come."

"Just keep trying to trace the number. If you get a hit, call me."

"I'll do what I can, but why is this one so interesting? It can't have killed anyone yet."

"It has."

"The lunar cycle doesn't start for two days. Are you telling me you've been sitting on a werewolf for weeks?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

Charlie laughed. "Oh my god. A werewolf got the drop on you. Did you sleep with one? Are you continuing Sam's tradition?"

"One accident is not a tradition."

"But two could be."

Dean rolled his eyes. "I didn't sleep with him."

"A him? You never mess up with guys. Except for that siren..."

Dean could practically hear Charlie's jaw drop.

"Did I miss out on a bromance? Did you and dreamy angel pick up a new side kick? Has team free will expanded? Can I meet him?" Charlie gasped. "Can you bring him? A werewolf would be an awesome knight."

"There's not going to be anyone to bring. The werewolf is a no one. Just something I have to kill."

Dean hung up, tossing his phone aside. He needed to deal with this as fast as possible and move on.
Beacon Hills, California

Stiles crossed the room in three strides and hugged his mom as tightly as he could. She laughed and Stiles could feel her smile on the side of his head. She returned his embrace, one of her hands settling on the back of his head and massaging the nerves there like she used to when Stiles crawled into his parents bed after a nightmare. She leant her head against his, her breath tickling his shoulder.

"Good morning to you too," his mom laughed.

He tightened his grip further, burying his face in his mom's neck. He could smell the shampoo in her hair and the perfume he and his dad bought her every year for Christmas. This was too real to be a dream. When he dreamt of her, Stiles saw flashes and memories. He remembered how she made him feel, but his senses didn't work in his dreams. In his dreams, he didn't care, but this. This had to be real.

"Honey, you can let me go now."

Stiles shook his head, grabbing his own wrist so not even Superman could separate him from his mom. She sighed, not fighting him. His heart fought hard to just enjoy the moment. But his brain was putting the pieces together.

This wasn't real.

*She* wasn't real.

He had been there when she died. He had gone to her funeral. He'd seen her in the casket. He had said goodbye to her. He did that because she was dead.

Stiles forced himself out of the room. His chest was tight and his throat was closing up. He wanted this to be real. He wanted to sit down and eat waffles with parents. *Both* his parents. He wanted the bottle of whiskey in his dad's liquor cabinet to stay closed. He wanted his mom to be healthy and alive. He wanted this.

But he couldn't have it.

His mother was dead and djinns didn't grant wishes. They kept people asleep and drank their blood. Stiles needed to wake up. It didn't matter what he wanted. He needed to not have what he wanted.

Stiles went for his dad's gun. Stiles knew where he kept it between shifts. He needed to do this quickly. He was poisoned and losing blood. He needed to wake up and save himself. But his dad's gun wasn't in its place. He had to have it with him. It was in the kitchen, with his parents and every other method of quick death. His dad didn't have a straight razor and Stiles' paintball gun wouldn't kill him. Stiles considered swan diving off the roof, but their house wasn't that tall. It should kill him, but it could also leave him paralyzed in a hospital bed and Stiles couldn't risk that.

Stiles needed something more reliable.

"Stiles?" his mom asked.

He spun around so fast it made him dizzy. Real or not, he still wasn't over the fact that she was in his house. She stepped in close, hands coming to cup his face again. Her knuckles grazing over his jaw bone in such a familiar motion.
"Honey, what's wrong?"

"Not-nothing." Stiles stepped back, wiping his face.

"You're shaking."

"I'm okay. I'm okay. Definitely okay."

He went back into the kitchen, picking up his dad's coat in search of his gun holster. Stiles could feel both of his parents staring at him, but he couldn't look at them. He found his dad's handgun and heard a yelp from his mother.

"Stiles!"

Her hand covered his, but Stiles jerked backwards, pressing the tip to his head. He couldn't let them stop him and the more they said, the more he would want to say.

"Honey, put down the gun," she begged.

"It's okay, Mom." Stiles smiled. "I love you."

He pulled the trigger.

Stiles didn't wake up with a jolt like he expected. He thought he'd wake up with a gasp and his body would be moving faster than his brain, but it didn't even feel like he was awake. It was like being in limbo. His entire body was asleep; every muscle felt full of pins and needles. He could barely open his eyes. And, when he did, the room was spinning and everything was blurry. His movements were sluggish. It took him a few seconds to figure out that he couldn't go anywhere even if he wanted to.

His wrists were tied above his head and his feet were planted on the floor, but that didn't help him in the slightest. Every inch of his body felt like sandbags. A hard slap to his face made his eyes roll and everything turn sideways. Stiles managed to lift his head and found himself looking at a pair of glowing blue eyes.

"Winchesters ruin everything," a voice said, but it wasn't coming from the face in front of him.

There was more than one djinn. Stiles tried to struggle, but there was nothing he could do.

"We're going to make you a deal, kid," a second voice, still not coming from the mouth he could see. Three djinns. "You fight us and the dreams stop. Our father fed off fear. We don't need it, but if you're going to make things difficult for us, you'll see just how badly your life could have turned out."

There was a flash of blue and reality vanished again.

Washburn, Michigan

Derek limped into town with Castiel slung over his shoulder. The angel passed in and out of consciousness, but remained useless. He dropped Castiel and almost followed the angel to the ground, but grabbed the phone booth for support.
His shirt was still wet and stained black and red. It was too humid to dry, leaving the fabric to stick to his body more than usual. He opened his jacket and lifted his shirt. The wound was nearly closed. Dean hadn't just stabbed him; he buried the blade as deep as possible and twisted it to leave a gaping hole in his chest.

It didn't help that he began walking before he had a chance to heal and it definitely didn't help that he had carried Castiel for over twenty miles.

He took out his wallet to get the little change he had and stepped into the phone booth. His phone had died before he could find a signal. All Derek wanted to hear was that Stiles was alive and well. He dialed Stiles' number, but there was no answer.

Desperate, he recalled one of Dean's phone numbers and dialed it. It took a couple rings, but the hunter answered.

"What'd you--"

"Is Stiles with you?" Derek cut off.

Dean didn't need to say anything for Derek to hear the change in his attitude. He wasn't expecting to hear from Derek. Dean was already hard at work hunting him down.

"Wasn't expecting to hear from you."

"Where's Stiles?" Derek asked.

He could handle Dean. He just needed to know Stiles was safe.

"Why don't you come back and find out?"

Derek knew what that meant. "You left him there, didn't you?"

"Decided he was better off waking up there than locked in my trunk."

"There's more than one djinn, idiot."

Dean didn't say a word.

Derek let out a slow breath, swallowing his anger. "If he dies, you're going to see exactly how dangerous I am."

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Beacon Hills, California

A week.

Stiles had been asleep for a week. Well, it felt like a week. Stiles was pretty sure he'd be dead if it was actually a week. He had cut himself off from everybody. It didn't quite work. He could only hide out at Scott's for so long, before Scott's mom drove him home and watched him walk through the front door.

He couldn't look at his mother; he couldn't handle even being in the same room as her. She was the one that reminded him this wasn't real, but also the one thing that made him desperately wish it was.
Now, he was walking through town, trying hard to stay focused. He hated waiting. Stiles didn't want to be saved; he wanted to save himself. But that wasn't an option. He considered waking up again, but it was illogical. There were at least three djinns waiting for him to try something. He couldn't win. He just needed to stay focused.

Heather and Danielle walked by, laughing. Heather threw him a small wave and a smile. He recognized that smile. It was the same one Dean got from a waitress, before she left her number on the bill. He wanted to talk to Heather, but remained planted on his bench.

This wasn't real.

And he needed to remember that.

Heather was dead.

A police car pulled up to the stoplight and the two officers waved at him. Stiles stared for a moment, before forcing himself to wave back. They were both supposed to be dead. One by the kanima and one by the darach. He knew them both. They kept him entertained and helped with homework whenever his dad had to work late.

It didn't make sense. Dean had told him about the time the djinn knocked him out. He had found the cost of his wish. That if demons had stayed out of his life, that they hadn't been there to protect other people. But Stiles was seeing plenty of people that should have been dead walking around.

He watched Boyd get off the bus and he sat down at a café, alone. Erica was shopping with her mom, but she didn't even look at Boyd. Stiles took out his phone to text Boyd. He couldn't imagine what Boyd could have done to piss Erica off. But Boyd wasn't in his phone. Stiles looked for Erica's number, but it wasn't there either.

Stiles got up and crossed the street, following them to a variety store. Erica's mom was going inside to pay, while Erica flipped through a gossip magazine.

"Hey," Stiles said.

Erica didn't react; she just continued reading.

"Erica?"

Erica lifted her head. She looked so confused that it confused Stiles.

"We don't talk, do we?" Stiles realized heavy-heartedly.

"No," Erica answered, her voice smaller than Stiles remembered.

Her hair was a mess and she had her arms crossed tightly as if she was trying to hide in her own skin. She didn't have that spark that being a werewolf gave her. She was just as pretty as she had always been, but there was no confidence behind it.

"Um, can I introduce you to someone?"

Erica looked inside, checking on her mom, before nodding. Stiles smiled and began leading her down the block.

"So how's the epilepsy?"

Erica jerked to a stop, jaw drawn tight and eyes set into a glare. "If you're hoping for a show, just
"No! No. I just-- Sorry. I don't know what to talk about."

Erica relaxed a bit, but her arms didn't uncross. "It sucks," she admitted bluntly. "And there's nothing anyone can do about it. I'm just going to be a freak for the rest of my life."

"Well, I like freaks, even if my best friend isn't one anymore."

"Scott used to be a freak?"

"You know Scott?"

Erica shrugged. "I know he's your best friend."

"Always thought you'd make an awesome friend."

"Really?"

"Yeah. You're really strong. I guess people aren't smart enough to see that. I mean, when you went to climb that rock wall? I couldn't believe it."

"You remember that?" Erica scoffed. "That was so stupid. I broke my arm in three spots."

"You did?"

"Yeah. Climbing without a rope or a spotter and a poorly timed seizure doesn't end well."

"Because no one caught you..."

Erica shrugged. "No one ever does. Gotta be my own hero."

Stiles smiled. "Like Catwoman."

"She always was my favourite."

Erica smiled. She was in still there and that just made Stiles smile more. They got to the café and Stiles pulled a second chair over to Boyd's table. He pushed Erica into it and left her face to face with Boyd.

"He could be your Batman," Stiles whispered. "Just be yourself."

Stiles' patted Erica's shoulder and walked off. He took out his phone and called his dad.

"Hi, Dad. I found out Isaac's getting beat up by his dad."

"Who?" his dad asked.

"Isaac Lahey. Hope you can do something about it."

"I'll take care of it. Now call your mother, she wants to know what to make for dinner."

"Sure." Stiles hung up.

But he didn't call his mom.

She was dead.
Then again, so were Erica and Boyd.

He looked back. The two of them were laughing and happy.

*Happy.*

Harleton, Texas

A crack of thunder woke Dean. He reached for the alarm clock and turned it towards him. It was a little before five, which meant Dean had been asleep for less than two hours. Dean sat up, pinching the bridge of his nose. He had been looking for Stiles for two days straight. Dean had retraced their steps and redone their research. He had scoured the entire apartment building. The djinns had moved on and Stiles was nowhere to be found. He found their previous victims, all dead, and Stiles' cellphone. There was no way to track the kid.

Dean had lost focus. He let a werewolf get away and left Stiles to die. He knew he should have put the kid on a plane back home first and called his father to make sure Stiles stayed out of the way for the right reasons. Dean had rechecked all the buildings they had singled out originally for djinns, but there wasn't a trace of them. If they were in town, they weren't hiding anywhere expected.

He had given in to sleep for the night in hopes that some new idea would hit him, while he recharged. It didn't work. Dean flicked on the coffeemaker and yawned.

He needed coffee.

There was a soft groan behind him and Dean whipped around, gun and knife at the ready. Cas was slowly sitting up in the second bed. Dean slowly moved for the light switch. Cas was a bloody mess, but he looked fine. He seemed sluggish and weakened, but was uninjured.

"Cas?" Dean asked, moving slowly towards the angel.

Cas's eyes rolled shut and he fell back against the pillows.

"Where is he?"

Dean whipped around.

Derek was right behind him.

He went for the kill, but Derek was ready this time. He caught Dean's wrists and slammed him against the wall. Dean struggled, but Derek's grip was stronger than humanly possible.

"Where is he?" Derek repeated, eyes turning red.

"I don't know," Dean admitted.

Derek stepped back, releasing his grip. "Are you going to help me find Stiles or do we have to have this out first?"

Dean straightened up, matching Derek's threat. "I can wait to kill you."

Derek scoffed. "This is why I hate your kind. We're both predators. You're just as dangerous as me. I choose not to be a killer. You? You like being a killer."
Dean's jaw tightened. He wasn't the monster.

"We find him and we put him on a plane," Dean proposed. "Just him. You're not leaving this town."

"Fine. But you come at me once before then and I will kill you. Stiles comes first."

"Done. But if you run, I will never stop hunting you."

"I don't run." Derek shoved past Dean. "Where have you looked?" Derek asked, leaning over the table, and focused on the map of the town.

Dean buried the instinct to kill Derek while his back was turned. There was no honour in killing monsters. It was just a job that needed to be done. It was strength, intellect and cunning that kept him alive. Not honour. Monsters and demons weren't honourable so neither was Dean.

He could end it right now.

But he couldn't find Stiles on his own.

Dean stepped next to Derek and they began work on a new plan.

Beacon Hills, California

Stiles stopped counting the days. His guard was still up, but he gave in and made the best of a bad situation. He had movie night with his parents and blushed bright red when his mom made him watch Game of Thrones with her. It was a cool story, but no teenager should be forced to watch that much nudity and sex while his mom calmly continued to sort bills beside him.

He spent time with people he couldn't anymore. Jackson was still a dick, but Lydia had him on a leash. And neither of them had any interest in him. Without all the chaos that Stiles remembered happening in Beacon Hills, no one seemed to know or care that she was a banshee. There weren't exactly a lot of dead bodies to test her with. Jackson was happy to admit Lydia was a screamer in bed and had used her claws on him plenty. He was still a first class douchebag.

Lydia had gone back to ignoring him completely, but Stiles could see she had found her own way to show off her intelligence. But what Stiles missed more than someone that could keep up with him when he talked about advanced chemistry was someone lurking in the shadows. It was like Derek never came back to town. Stiles had grown so accustomed to the sensation of someone watching him that he now missed it.

He missed Derek.

It was silly, but Stiles was afraid to call the werewolf. Things, for the most part, were good. Was that the result of life without Derek? Was fate so cruel to Derek that he screwed up everyone else's life? Was that what the djinns were trying to say? Honestly, Stiles brain couldn't handle a happy Derek. They must have just removed him from existence when he freaked out the first time.

Derek in this life, this dream. Stiles needed to remember it was a dream. He was slipping up and he knew it. He didn't want to admit it, but he got lost in the happiness. It was hard not to when his mom came into his room before she went to bed or when he got texts from Erica about how amazing Boyd was or when his parents bickered and laughed in the kitchen as they made dinner.
He could forget about how many people had died.

How many people he had lost.

"Stiles?"

He turned around. A young woman got out of her car with a smile. He didn't know her, but there was something familiar, like he should have known her. Instinct said she was trustworthy, but Stiles hadn't met her. She walked up to him and pulled him into a hug.

Or had he?

"You're still coming tonight, right?"

"Y-yes?"

She shoved him playfully. "You forgot."

"No! No."

Her eyebrows raised.

"Okay, maybe. What did I forget?"

She scoffed. "Just get in the car. You're not bailing."

Stiles considered saying no. He didn't know her. Not really, but he was curious. She dropped back into the driver's seat. She smiled, confident. He couldn't figure out. Dean said he had a girlfriend made off a beer commercial. He had had a mental image of her before, but he couldn't figure out why he had it. He didn't know her, but she was someone he wanted to talk to.

Now was his chance.

Stiles got in next to her and they drove off. He didn't know where to start, his brain had so many questions that he couldn't pick a single one of them to start with. Then he realized they were leaving the downtown and going towards the preserve. Stiles froze. He had done this drive plenty of times before. He expected to keep on driving; that maybe they were headed to another town, but she turned off the road.

It was as hidden as always. Anyone looking for it would have missed it; only those that had done it before knew where to turn. It was a near-hidden gap in the tree line. And Stiles gripped the door in preparation for the harsh bumps he knew were coming, but the path was smooth. Stiles looked around. He saw all the trees. From most angles, it looked like a forest, nothing but trees and wilderness, but when Stiles looked straight ahead, he saw a path framed by a row of trees on either side.

Stiles wasn't ready for this.

He could never have dreamt this.

Harleton, Texas

Derek stared at the broken window to his Camaro.
He wasn't happy.

"I keep telling you to leave it unlocked," Dean remarked with a smirk.

Derek exhaled slowly. "He's stabbed me, shot me, broke into my car again and left Stiles to be taken by djinns. I can't believe I'm not killing him," Derek muttered.

Castiel smiled. They might still hate each other, but they weren't fighting. They always had worked well together. Castiel leant against Dean's Impala. He was exhausted. It was an exaggeration to take Derek as far north as he had, but the panic in Stiles' voice told his instincts to travel as far as he could and keep going.

Derek had reciprocated. The werewolf may not have forgiven him, but he was grateful for the protection. Castiel had expected to find himself alone in the woods, but Derek had brought him back with him. It was because of Derek that he was standing here.

Derek put a hand on Castiel's shoulder.

"I'm still mending," Castiel explained.

Derek nodded, moving towards the apartment building.

Dean crossed his arms. "They're not here anymore," Dean said.

He wasn't happy with Derek's insistence to come back. Dean had admitted to coming back already. He had seen the evidence of four djinns that attacked Derek and the proof that Stiles had been taken by the remaining three.

Dean was blaming himself. He hid it by holding on to anger. He felt betrayed. He had been lied to by the three people he had come to trust. Once again, Castiel had made decisions for the hunter.

"There's three of them still alive," Dean explained, hoping to speed up the process. "They walked out the front door."

But Derek didn't go inside, he began walking down the street, following something Dean couldn't see.

"He knows Stiles' scent," Castiel explained.

"Then why does he need me?" Dean reacted, not taking his eyes off Derek.

"He likely doesn't. When the djinns captured Derek, he was unprepared."

"Then why aren't I dead?"

"I imagine a part of him hopes you'll change your mind."

"He's killed people."

"Perhaps you should ask him 'why?'."

Dean rolled his eyes and went after Derek, his hand resting near his weapons.

Beacon Hills, California
Stiles got out the moment the car stopped. He was staring and his mouth hung open, but he couldn't help it. He didn't dare blink. He had seen pictures, but none of them did the place justice. Standing in its full glory, undamaged and untouched by fire. It was grand but not ostentatious. It was just there. Like it belonged.

The Hale house.

Then he heard it. Something he had never heard within miles of this house. Something he couldn't even fathom hearing.

Laughter.

Stiles looked over to see a pack of Hales racing towards him. Derek was in the middle, grinning in a way Stiles had never seen before. He was honest to god happy. Laura was there too. He recognized her, but none of the others. An older brother, or possibly a cousin (Stiles didn't know), shoved past him, bolting ahead. Derek tried to catch up, but he wasn't the biggest one. Of guys his age, he was the smallest.

He wasn't bulked out to hulk proportions.

He hadn't had to.

A smile crept onto Stiles lips. He had never seen Derek happy before. He'd seen him pretend, but this wasn't faked. It was rare enough to see him relax, but this was so much more. This was sheer and utter happiness. They slowed to a fast walk, still laughing and shoving each other.

They spotted Stiles and a few of them waved. Specifically, the shirtless ones waved. Stiles didn't realize how much he was smiling until they were closing in on him. He was grinning from ear to ear as Derek walked up.

And right by Stiles.

Stiles turned in time to see Derek pull the girl into a hug, spinning her around to make her laugh and hit his shoulder.

"Stop it!" she scolded teasingly.

Derek lowered her, drawing her into a kiss without letting her feet touch the ground. The other Hales wolf whistled, but Derek ignored them, his attention was unreservedly focused on this girl.

"Jeez. All these years and it's still puppy love," Laura said, rolling her eyes.

She finally got her feet back on the ground, but Derek wouldn't let her go.

"Paige," Stiles realized.

"What?" Paige leant back from Derek's embrace.

Stiles was speechless. If anyone deserved happiness, it was Derek.

Paige kissed Derek's cheek and stepped free, going to get something out of the trunk.

Stiles wanted to ask how much of him was the same. Did Kate even try to burn down the house? Did he ever meet her? Did the Argents ever come to Beacon Hills? Was that why Allison wasn't in his phone? Was Derek even a werewolf? Did he still hate him? Did he know him? Did he know Paige? How did he know Paige?
Someone jostled Stiles while he was locked in his own head, bringing him back to reality.

Derek said something, probably 'hi', but Stiles was too busy staring and smiling. Derek had his rabbit teeth out, something Stiles never had the courage to tease him about to his face, but they were adorable, especially when Derek wasn't threatening to use them to rip off a part of Stiles' body.

"Think you broke the human, Sunshine," Laura teased, punching Derek's shoulder.

He shoved her aside. Sunshine. This was a place where Derek was called Sunshine, was sunshine. Not a grumpy cat or a sour wolf. He was sunshine. A smile so bright that it made everyone around him shine.

"Stiles?" Derek hit Stiles' arm, laughing at him. "You okay?"

"Y-yeah." Stiles cleared his throat; his voice was going high. "Yeah. I'm good."

Derek yanked Stiles into a hug. It was rough and Stiles thought his back might break after the flat of Derek's hand hit it. It was rough, aggressive. Real. Stiles crumbled, scrambling to hug back. He wanted this. He liked the world where Derek Hale hadn't been torn down and beaten at every possible turn. He loved having his mom alive.

He needed this to be real.

Harleton, Texas

The djinns were hiding out at a school. It made sense. Schools didn't need to be abandoned to be empty. It was summer and the school was too small to run camps or offer summer classes. Dean crouched down to pick a lock, but Derek wasn't that patient. He kicked open the door. The hinges snapped and the door bounced across the hallway.

"He's still alive," Castiel tried to assure.

"I need you not to say that," Derek said.

"Stiles is strong," Castiel went on to say.

Derek turned, glaring down at the angel.

Dean knew Cas was just trying to comfort Derek, but Derek hated sympathy. He'd figured out the same facts as Dean. Stiles was the smallest of the three of them. That meant he had the least amount of blood. A single djinn typically drained a victim in a week. Stiles had three djinn feeding off him. There hadn't been any more disappearances, which meant he was their only meal ticket and he was running out of time.

Derek was calm. It was a façade, but it kept him functioning logically. He knew better than to run through the school. Cas was along for the ride. He didn't have much juice, but was determined to help. It meant Dean and Derek were going to do most of the heavy lifting. Going after one djinn alone was hard enough. Whether Derek believed it or not, he was going to need help.

Dean pulled Derek back. He felt Derek's muscles under his hand tighten. It was like flesh stretched over rock. Dean released him and took out a pair of silver knives, dipping them in lamb's blood.
"Here." Dean handed one to Derek. "Your claws may hurt them, but only this is going to kill them."

Derek took the blade and shoved past Dean. Dean nodded at Cas to follow and they headed inside.

B

eacon Hills, California

Talia Hale was regal. Stiles couldn't pick a better word to describe Derek's mother. She didn't think herself better than others, but she was an alpha and she knew what that meant. Stiles could see the power in how she held herself and in how the other Hales treated her. No one was afraid of her. Talia wasn't ruthless. She was a leader, trusted and loved.

Stiles wouldn't have expected any less.

What he didn't expect was his parents. He thought they'd never be in the same room as a werewolf. Well, not socially. His dad had arrested Derek and interrogated him, but not this. He and his mom were both making dinner with Derek's parents.

And that was weird.

Stiles had watched Cora help one of the youngest Hales after he had shifted by mistake. The Hales were definitely werewolves. Well, most of them. Derek had three cousins that were human and two aunts. But they fit right in, just like Paige. And Stiles. They were right there to tease him about his superhero worship and he'd already wound up on the bottom of a dog pile.

Derek was head-over-heels in love. He and Paige were setting the table, laughing and flirting like they were in a romantic comedy. Derek wasn't whipped. He was still a cocky asshole, but Paige stood up to him. She was strong, confident and smart. They both knew how lucky they were and weren't going anywhere. They were happy.

Stiles turned away from the happy couple to spy on the parents again. His dad had to find it weird that the Hales lived in the woods. Maybe he knew. He couldn't know. When his dad found out about Scott, he was stunned. His dad didn't believe in things like this. His mom would, but it's not like any of the Hales were flaunting what they were.

So did they know?

"Yes."

Stiles flailed, falling off his spot on the stairs and landing on his ass. Peter descended the stairs like a proper creeper. He couldn't decide whether it was soothing or terrifying. His family alive didn't change the person he was.

"Yes, what?" Stiles asked.

"I don't know." Peter strolled down the last couple steps. "You just looked like you had a question on your mind. I vote that the answer is yes."

Peter reached a hand down to Stiles. But Stiles backed away out of instinct. Peter's lips curled and one of his eyebrows arched.

"You don't trust me," Peter quickly figured out. "Am I acting like a psychopath again?"

"Do you ever not?" Stiles reacted, getting up by himself.
"Good point." Peter moved for the dining room, but turned around with a shudder at the sight of Derek and Paige. "I don't understand it."

"What? Love?" Stiles chided.

"No. Perfect combinations are rare. They should be nourished, protected. They're foolish for not doing everything possible to preserve it. Anyone that turns down power is an idiot."

"You didn't force the bite on her..."

Peter turned, his face doing that thing Stiles hated. "I'm a beta. A bite from me wouldn't do anything."

"You and I both know you don't like doing your own dirty work."

Peter smiled, sly as ever. Stiles never trusted Peter. Peter knew a lot, but half of what he said was a lie.

"I never understood why you turned down the bite."

"Because I like breathing. And if you try to turn her, you'll have to deal with me."

Peter laughed. He shoved Stiles backwards, his wolf coming out enough to remind Stiles that he was infinitely weaker than Peter. He slammed against the wall and Peter pinned him there.

"She's healthy. Only way to make a girl like that stronger is to turn her."

"Not everyone survives the bite," Stiles responded, glaring back.

"Hey!" Stiles' dad bellowed. "Step away from my son."

Peter lifted his hands and backed away with a smirk.

He was definitely still a psychopath.

Everyone in the house had gathered. Derek gave Peter a warning look, his eyes flashing gold, gold, but the older werewolf just shrugged, studying Paige with curiosity. It was like he was looking for something. Stiles looked at his dad, trying to figure out if he noticed Derek's threat, but his dad was focused on Stiles.

"Dinner," Talia announced, regaining control. "Peter, you'll sit by me."

"Yes, sister."

"And you're with me, idiot," Derek decided, his hand pounding the knob of Stiles' spine, before his arm hooked around Stiles' neck.

Derek kept Stiles in the loose headlock, drawing him into the dining room. He pushed Stiles into a seat and went to go get food. Paige was back before him, putting out a couple bowls of mashed potatoes. She sat down a chair away from him to make room for Derek, but Stiles moved next to her.

"Promise me you'll never take the bite," Stiles said, keeping his voice down.

"Excuse me?"
"The bite. You know, the thing that makes Derek..." Stiles growled and used his hands to mimic claws.

Paige laughed at him. "I like being human."

Derek carried Cora into the room under his arm while one of his younger cousins wrapped around his leg, but they didn't slow him down. Cora hit his chest, but Derek just dropped her in one of the chairs like she weighed nothing at all.

"Though it would be nice to keep up with them from time to time."

"You won't survive."

Paige turned to face him. "What?"

"The bite. It... it would kill you."

"Stiles, that isn't funny."

"I know. I just... please. Trust me."

Paige nodded. She shifted a chair back, making room for Derek to sit between them. She took a final worrisome look at Stiles, before focusing on Derek.

**Harleton, Texas**

It didn't take long to find the djinns. There weren't many rooms to look through. They were circled around Stiles, sharing the tube stuck in his arm like it was a drug. Stiles looked white. He had always been pale, but now, he was white.

Derek focused on Stiles' heartbeat. It was steady, but weak. He didn't have long.

"Can you get him out?" Derek asked, turning to the angel.

"I can bring him here or replenish his blood. I can't do both," Castiel answered.

"So I get you to him and you can save him."

Castiel nodded in confirmation.

Derek looked at Dean. The hunter was ready for the fight.

"You make sure he gets to Stiles."

"What about you?" Dean asked.

"I'll do a better job holding off the djinns than you," Derek countered. "Just get Stiles out."

Derek shifted, his human side swallowed by muscle and bone, and broke down the door.

**Beacon Hills, California**

Stiles watched the food get passed around. Stiles' mom was fussing to get his dad to eat vegetables,
while his dad insisted that mashed potatoes were better than carrots and peas. Cora was handling
the youngest cousins, trying to load up their plates, but they all decided her food looked so much
better than theirs. She began using her spoon to play whack-a-mole against their hands.

Laura eventually stepped in, moving the youngest writhing pile of limbs to her old seat so they
could team up against the little terrors.

It was perfect. He had never been happier. Werewolves were meant to smile. Cora had this
adorable grin every time she managed to nail someone's knuckles with her spoon. Her cousins just
giggled and decided to join forces, disappearing under the table with a wicked smile. Stiles' dad's
jokes worked wonders on Derek's parents. They almost howled with laughter. And Stiles couldn't
admit what Derek's smile did to him. It was obvious why Laura called her brother 'Sunshine'.

Stiles heard voices in the distance. He looked for a cause, but no one else seemed to hear it.

He tried to get back into the conversations, but they felt further away. It was like there was
somewhere else he was supposed to be. Stiles buried the instinct, turning to steal a sip of his mom's
wine. But he could hear people moving outside.

"What?" Derek asked, claiming Stiles' last piece of steak.

"I thought I heard something," Stiles admitted, staring out the enormous window.

Derek wiped his hands and turned around, looking out the window. "I don't see anything."

"Guess it was nothing."

Harleton, Texas

Dean couldn't believe that anyone could contain or control the beast Derek had turned into. Derek
was wild, fangs out and eyes burning red. The first djinn lost its head within seconds and Derek
instantly charged the remaining two djinns, tackling one and forcing them away from Stiles. Dean
got Cas to Stiles, before rushing to help Derek.

It was like something out of Purgatory. The djinns were determined to take Derek down. Dean
could see their hands glowing blue as the pressed against his skin. But Derek was vicious, his
claws drawing blood on every swing.

Dean stabbed the first djinn in the back, shoving his knife in hard enough that the blade pieced its
heart. The final djinn lashed out, grabbing Dean by the front of his shirt and slamming him into the
floor. Its hand smoked blue as it reached for Dean's face. Dean tried to get free, but all he could see
was the bright blue.

The djinn jerked suddenly and its eyes released a burst of blue smoke. Derek shoved the djinn to
the side and tossed its heart on top of its body. Dean stared at him, watching Derek shift back into
human, before running for Stiles. Dean got up, his head throbbing and spine aching, and pinned
the heart to the floor with his knife for good measure, before picking up Derek's knife to stab the
headless one.

Dean did not need to find out djinns could survive dismemberment.

"Why isn't he awake?" Derek asked.
Dean spun around, watching Derek carefully remove the tubing from Stiles' arm. It didn't make sense. Stiles was still limp and unconscious. There was no blue handprint. He shouldn't be locked in his mind. And Dean hadn't had time to restock on African dream root.

"I don't know."

"He should have woken up. The djinns are dead," Dean reasoned, joining them.

"You said you could save him," Derek snapped, grabbing Cas by his jacket and hauling him forward.

Dean pulled the angel free and Derek forced himself to turn human again.

"I thought I could," Cas said.

"So wake him up."

"I can't."

"You woke me up."

Cas shook his head. "I removed the toxins from his body, which is what I did to you."

"How'd you wake up?" Dean asked.

"I-- I don't..." Derek took a moment to think. "I died. In the dream. I wouldn't leave my family so I died with them. So how do we kill him?"

Dean was speechless.

"Well?" Derek pushed.

Neither him nor Cas had any answers.

Derek broke Stiles' bindings, catching the limp body. "Stiles?" Derek shook him.

But it did no good.

"Stiles!"

**Beacon Hills, California**

Derek's laugh was directly inherited from his father. The two of them couldn't keep their eyes open when something funny happened. They got these crinkles around their nose and their mouths went wide with laughter. It was intoxicating. Stiles couldn't help but smile and laugh along with Derek. He definitely had to start calling Derek 'Sunshine' himself.

"Stiles!"

Stiles spun, but couldn't see the source of the voice.

Derek rested an arm over his shoulders, keeping Stiles close as they listened to Laura. The lights flickered, but no one cared. It must be a normal occurrence out in the woods. Stiles tried to focus, but his mind was wandering again. He shook his head and blinked a couple times. It didn't help
that Laura was talking about the delays with her renovations.

Then he saw someone walk by the window.

Stiles looked around the room. Everyone was here. All the Stilinskis and all the Hales. Stiles twisted out of Derek's grip and went to the window. He looked for the person, but the porch light didn't go very far into the foggy night. Stiles went to the front door, unlocking it.

"Honey?"

Stiles turned to see his mom approaching him.

"Where are you going?"

"I thought-- I thought I saw someone."

"Don't worry. No one comes out here." His mom smiled, reaching out to him.

Stiles nodded, going to her.

Harleton, Texas

Derek sunk to the floor as Dean took over trying to wake Stiles. He'd been in this position so many times in his life and he hated not being able to change it. Kali had dropped Boyd on his claws, Kate had burned his family alive, he had found Laura's body in the woods.

The body count felt endless.

He didn't want to add Stiles to the list. Stiles was the kid that always bounced back. He stood up to people twice his size and never regretted it. He saved Derek's life; kept him alive. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Stiles was supposed to live.

Beacon Hills, California

The door slammed open and instinct took over instantly. He went to his mom, determined to protect her. She tried to push him back, but Stiles wouldn't let her. He tried to see through the fog, but it was like black smoke at this hour.

Gerard stepped into view, but he didn't cross the threshold. His family came to stand at his side, each one heavily armed. Stiles knew Allison, Chris, Victoria and Kate, but not the others. He recognized that face on Allison. She was on a mission and nothing would stop her. It was like every ounce of heart had been stripped from her being. Kate had her usual twisted smile and Victoria was as terrifying as always. Chris looked strong, but Stiles could tell he had lost an argument.

It was safe to say the code wasn't about to apply.

Talia crossed in front of him, elegant and calm. Stiles tried to form a sentence. If Gerard was in charge, they couldn't be trusted. But the other Hales blocked him, standing dutifully behind their alpha. Stiles tried to go forward, but Derek and Stiles' mom held him back.
"Sheriff, bring your family and come with us," Chris said. "You're not safe."

"You are trespassing, breaking and entering," Stiles' dad reminded. "Do you have a permit for those weapons?"

"We were concerned for your safety. And the safety of your family," Gerard continued, his eyes settling on Stiles. "Come with me."

Stiles shook his head. "No. I won't leave."

**Harleton, Texas**

Desperate, he pushed Dean aside and let his wolf out, roaring at Stiles, but he was human. It was nothing more than noise to him. Derek could hear Stiles' heartbeat. It was slow and becoming slower and slower no matter how hard he shook Stiles or how desperately he called out to him.

"Come back," Derek begged, turning Stiles' face to meet his.

But the moment he took his hand away, it fell to the side again.

"Stiles, please."

Derek forced Stiles' eyes open, but it did no good. Stiles wouldn't wake up.

"Come on!" Derek shouted. He hit Stiles as hard as he could without breaking bones, but Stiles didn't even have enough blood to let his cheek redden. "I won't lose you too."

**Beacon Hills, California**

"They were invited here. You were not," Talia said. "I will protect everyone in this house, just like they would protect me. I suggest you leave."

Stiles felt the world shift. He felt dizzy and couldn't focus. Gerard moved suddenly, shouting at him. Stiles found himself between the Argents and his family. Gerard was shaking him now, his face inches from Stiles. Stiles flailed, unable to understand what was happening.

He got free, but Gerard wouldn't let him get away. His body blurred as he stood over Stiles, fist raised to hit him. His eyes glowed red and he wasn't Gerard. He was Derek. Stiles kicked the old man off him and crawled backwards towards the Hales and his parents.

"No! No! This is real!" Stiles shouted. "Mom?" Stiles turned around.

They weren't there.

Stiles looked back at the Argents, but they were gone too. All of them. Derek stood over him, hand reached out. Stiles shook his head. This Derek wasn't happy. He was covered in muscles that he needed and face hardened by misery. He wasn't sunshine. He was the darkness. He was the clouds that hid the sun.

"No. You're happy here. I'm happy here."

Stiles was crying. He didn't want to lose this. He didn't want to lose them.
"Then stay with us," his mom said.

Stiles looked back. They had moved to the top of the stairs. His mom looked about ready to cry and Talia was barely able to hold Derek back. Stiles wanted to be with that Derek. Sunshine. He wanted Sunshine.

"It's not real," Derek said above him, ignoring his family.

How could any Derek ignore his family? Stiles stared at his mom, tears coming down his cheeks.

"Mom?"

She walked down the stairs, crouching beside him. "You have to make a choice. He's trying to make it for you, but you can stay." She stroked his face, her knuckles moving lightly over his jaw bone.

Stiles eyes shut, leaning into the touch.


"They need me. They die without me."

"They're already dead," Derek reminded. "I'm not."

Stiles stared at Derek, trying to remember, when he felt his mom take his hand.

"I love you," she said softly.

Stiles tried to look back, but Derek grabbed his face, keeping Stile's eyes on his, until Stiles couldn't feel his mom's hand anymore.

"No!" Stiles thrashed, trying to get away, trying to find his mother again. "NO! STOP!"

Stiles finally got free, but it was too late. He wasn't in Beacon Hills, he wasn't in the Hale house and his mother wasn't there.

She was gone, dead.

Because what's dead should stay dead.

--

Stiles was a mess. His heart was racing and he was shaking all over. He was crying and reached out, scrambling for something to hold on to. Derek offered his hand, but Stiles needed more. He latched himself around Derek's body, every ounce of him breaking. Not knowing what else to do, Derek let him.

But it didn't stop.

He looked up at Dean for guidance, but the hunter didn't know what to do either. Derek stood up, but that didn't change the fact that he had a teenager wrapped around his torso. Dean mimed a hug. Derek stared at him. He had to be joking. Derek didn't hug people. Dean repeated the action and Derek shook his head.
'No,' he mouthed.

'Yes,' Dean responded, not making a noise.

'No.'

Stiles' grip slipped, but Derek didn't let him fall. He caught Stiles, holding Stiles up. Stiles moved his arms, squeezing tighter. He needed to hold on to something and he needed someone to make sure he held on.

"I got you," Derek said, tightened his grip on Stiles. "Well, you got me, but if you didn't, I still wouldn't be going anywhere."

Stiles choked out a small laugh, shaking in Derek's arms.

"Let's get out of here," Dean said.

One Hour Later

Dean was pacing.

He finally had a minute to think and didn't know what to do.

Cas emerged from the motel room, closing the door gently behind him. Stiles had passed out from exhaustion after Cas fixed him up and, now, Derek was keeping an eye on him. Cas stole a quick look at Dean, but it didn't last. Cas was keeping his distance. Dean had spent years lecturing the angel on personal space, but now it just felt weird.

"Why'd you lie to me?" Dean finally asked.

Cas wasn't looking at him and that hurt more. Most of what they said to each other didn't involve talking. They hadn't needed words, but that had to have changed. He couldn't understand how Cas could do this to him.

"Derek's secret wasn't mine to tell," Cas finally answered.

Dean exhaled slowly. He couldn't swallow his anger. He and Cas were friends, family, and the angel had betrayed him. Again.

"I get them not telling me. I would have let him die if I knew what he was. But you had me risk my ass for him."

"I asked you to save a good person."

"A werewolf! It's not the same," Dean snapped, advancing on the angel.

Cas shifted further away. He didn't want to fight.

"We're family, Cas," Dean pushed. "You don't lie to your family."

"We weren't family when I led you to them."

Dean shifted. He couldn't figure out what Cas was trying to say. Cas raised his head, meeting Dean's confused gaze, and Dean knew instantly that he had screwed up.
"Your family has always been Sam. 'Sammy first and then everyone else.' That's what you said and I respect that. I've always known that. I thought that might change once you knew he was safe, but you didn't want me after what I did."

"Cas--"

"I was so desperate when I led you to them. You had lost the will to live. I could see it. You were begging for a monster to free you." Cas swallowed, considering his words. He wasn't telling half truths; he was just desperate to explain himself. "I couldn't let you die. I wouldn't know where to go. I don't know how to sever our bond, but if you want me to go back to the shadows. I will, but I won't stop watching over you. I thought if you had someone that carried guilt as you do, you might stop hating me for what I did to Sam."

Dean exhaled slowly. He didn't know where to start. Dean stared at him, hoping Cas would just figure out the words for him. Cas's eyes were wide. Stares and silence wouldn't cut it. Dean was struggling with every word. He had been selfish. It wasn't just him that lost Sam. Sam wasn't just Dean's family, he was Cas's too, and Dean had left the guy to deal with it alone and treated him like shit.

"We're family, Cas. I screwed up, but that's never changed." Dean breathed out again. He didn't know how to fix this. "Yeah, I put Sammy first. That's what I've been doing my whole life. But you, I'd die for you. A thousand times over. I don't say it enough, but, buddy, I need you. Without Sam... I'm crap without him and I don't know how to change that."

"I have one idea." Cas's eyes darted to the window.

Dean looked in. Stiles was sleeping peacefully and Derek was sitting on the floor next to him, his forearm clutched in Stiles' hand.

"Would it be inappropriate to ask for a hug?" Cas questioned.

Dean scoffed, wrapping an arm around Cas. "As long as there isn't something trying to kill us in the room, it's not inappropriate."

Cas turned, pulling Dean into a proper hug. Dean couldn't help but laugh, hugging the angel back.

"I understand why humans do this. It's very warm. I imagine it's comforting to feel such a hard body pressed against your own."

"You're making this inappropriate, Cas."

"Sorry." Cas released Dean, a smile pulling at the corner of his mouth.

"He's a good guy, right?" Dean asked, nodding towards Derek.

"Yes."

"Then I guess I should talk to him."

Dean twisted the doorknob and opened the door. Derek's head rose, his eyes glowing red in the dim room. He was sitting on the floor next to Stiles, his head barely visible out over the bed. Dean wasn't looking for a fight, but he couldn't expect Derek to believe that.

He stopped at the table, pulling out the weapons he had tucked all over his body and putting them on the surface. Dean stepped forward again, but Derek's eye was on his boot. Dean paused, pulling
the last knife free.

He always forgot about that one.

Derek's eyes faded, but he remained tense. Dean couldn't blame him. He'd tried to kill Derek, more than once, and, by staying at Stiles' side, Derek was literally cornered.

"We should talk," Dean said, giving Derek plenty of space.

"What's the point?" Derek responded, face still hard and untrusting.

"Most people would have let him die," Dean continued.

"Good thing I'm not human then."

"Look, I was... I was an asshole."

"Asshole, that's the best you got?"

"I don't want to kill you."

"Why? I'm the same person I was when you stuck a knife in my chest."

Dean deserved that.

"There's nothing to say," Derek reiterated, pushing himself to his feet. "I've met every hunter's code since I was a teenager, some since I was born." He approached Dean, each step a display of aggression. "You've been here before. There's only two ways it ends."

"Yeah or we try to work this out where no one dies."

Derek scoffed, teeth flashing. "Are you forgetting I'm not human already?" Derek let his eyes glow red. "I'm not your brother. You don't owe me anything."

"No, but that doesn't mean I'm going to kill you." Dean turned his back on Derek, walking further away from his weapons.

Derek laughed. "I'm not running. We're dealing with this now."

"Nah," Dean said, sitting down in the arm chair.

"Nah?" Derek reacted, pissed.

"Nah," Dean repeated with a smile. "If you wanted me dead, you would have tried already; you've had plenty of chances, which puts us in the same boat. You don't want to kill me; I don't wanna kill you. But, like me, if I come at you, you'll fight back."

Derek exhaled sharply. "You don't trust me. You can't. You never could and now you never will. I don't want to wait around for you to figure that out."

"I got an angel that'll knock you on your ass if you decide to kill me. I'll trust him until I decide if I can trust you."

"And you expect me to stick around? Your angel couldn't stop me from killing you."

"You said something earlier. You said, being a predator doesn't make you a killer. You proved
that. I'm asking for a chance to do the same thing. What do you say?"

Derek glanced back at Stiles. The kid was still his priority.

"If we wind up duking this out, it's just us," Dean offered. "You don't come at my family and I
don't come at yours."

"Why should I believe you?"

"Because you know where Sammy lives. Not killing you says I trust you not to go after him. Way I
see it, you've got the advantage. Isn't that how you like it?"

Derek shifted, his human side overpowering his hard exterior. "There's a pack of werewolves
taking people," Derek confessed.

"What?"

"Your kind, not mine. They're the ones that forced Kate to break."

"You said she didn't know."

"She knew they were werewolves. She made it sound like a cult. Hundreds of people gone each
month. It's so spread out that there's no pattern for hunters to track."

"How could you not tell me?"

"I thought I could fix it myself, but I can't."

Dean exhaled slowly, getting up. "Show me what you've found." He shoved his weapons aside,
giving them space to work on the table.
Bait

Chapter Notes

**Chapter Warnings:**
This chapter contains a panic attack. Please contact me [here](#) if you need more information.

**Texas Stateline**

Derek looked over at Stiles. He was still staring out the window. Just like he had been doing for the past five hours. He was quiet, still. His leg wasn't bouncing and he hadn't asked to pull over and pee six times. When they had pulled up to the gas station, Stiles didn't get out and load up on junk food. He didn't come back struggling to balance enough candy, chips and soda to put himself into a coma. Dean had even tried to offer up a couple *Snickers* bars, but Stiles just shook his head.

Derek wasn't exactly sure why they were moving. They still didn't know where they were going and, for all they knew, they'd have to go back south, but Dean had a plan and Stiles needed a change of scenery. He still hadn't recovered from the djinn attack.

Not emotionally.

"Did you want to ride with them a while?" Derek offered after another hour of silence.

"No," Stiles answered softly. He looked over at him for the first time that day, but his eye contact didn't last.

Derek sighed, putting his focus back on the road. "It wasn't real."

"I know."

"Then what?" He glanced back at Stiles.

But all the boy did was shrug.

Derek twisted the steering wheel and careened off the road suddenly. Stiles tensed, arms flying out to hold himself in place as Derek slammed on the breaks, jerking to a stop. Dean found a spot to pull off ahead and waited.

"What'd you see?" Derek pushed

"I don't want to talk about it."

"You saw your mother, didn't you?"

Stiles shifted. "I said I didn't want to talk about it."

Derek shut off the engine. "Those djinns made me watch my family burn. What did they show
you?"

Stiles swallowed, his arms wrapping around himself. He wanted somewhere to hide, but there was nowhere he could go. He looked at Derek again, desperate for a way out, but Derek wasn't going to let him run.

Running was never worthwhile.

"Was it me?" Derek guessed "Did you see life without me and think it was better? I can put you on a plane home and you can have that life. If you want to be done with this, with me, that's fine. You can go home."

Stiles dropped his gaze. "It felt like I was there for weeks," Stiles finally admitted. "I knew it wasn't real and then a switch went off in my head and I stopped caring that it wasn't real and all that mattered was how badly I needed it to be real. My mom wasn't the only one alive. Everyone was."

"Erica and Boyd?"

"Yeah." Stiles' leg bounced nervously. "And Heather and all the cops Matt killed and..." Stiles chewed on his lip, trying to force himself to continue, "...and your family." Stiles looked over at Derek. "You were happy. If I didn't know your face, I don't know if I would have recognized you. I mean, Laura even called you 'Sunshine', because you smiled so much. I wanted to call you that. But I didn't get a chance. I didn't even get to say goodbye to my mom."

Stiles' eyes went wide. He was shaking. He wanted to believe his dream was a statement of what would have been had circumstances been different. But Castiel told him about djinns on their drive back. They grant a wish and make up the life that would come from that wish.

But Stiles' mother had nothing to do with Derek's family.

And Derek refused to believe that anything else Stiles saw could have been true. Stiles needed to believe that.

"Laura never called me 'Sunshine'," Derek lied.

Stiles sniffed, struggling to keep a straight face. "Paige was there too."

Derek swallowed. He looked forward again. He had pushed his memories of Paige so far to the back of his mind that he was never ready to talk about her. He still hated Peter for telling people about her.

"You guys were still together," Stiles continued. "She was still human."

Derek tried to convince himself not to pry, but he couldn't resist. "What did she look like?"

"Long dark hair, brown eyes and a mole, here." Stiles tapped beneath is left eye.

"I came up with an image when Peter told me about her. I don't know if it's right, but--"

"You were right," Derek cut off. "There's no point in talking about it." He started the engine and pulled back onto the road.

Scottsville, New Mexico
"How much longer do I have to pretend you two aren't acting like a couple of chicks?" Dean asked once he saw Stiles ignoring his dessert.

Derek looked at Stiles, but he just pushed his plate away.
"He won't move on," Derek explained when Stiles didn't.
"Maybe I'm not ready to let it go," Stiles responded.
"It wasn't real," Derek snapped.
"But maybe it could have been. I wanted it to be and I don't understand why it wasn't. I didn't get to ask why it was different."
"It shouldn't matter."
"Yeah, but it does. When Dean had his dream, he knew why things changed. I want to know what the hell needed to be changed so that we both got to keep our families."
"They're gone, Stiles. Dead. Nothing is going to change that."
"I know, but it felt so real."
"It wasn't."

Stiles bit his tongue. He was worked up and Derek wasn't helping.
"What'd you see exactly?" Dean asked.
"A lot. I saw all the people that got killed because of all the shit that came through town. I saw my mom like she never got sick. I saw Derek like the world hadn't kicked the crap out of him. People that never should have died were alive."

"Interesting," Castiel said, gaining everyone's attention.
"What?" Stiles asked, running a hand down his face.
"Djinns are incapable of creating fictional people. They can create an alternate reality, but it's you must have filled in the people."
"I get that and that's my problem. They put in people that I didn't know."
"I believe they may have taken some from Derek's memories."

Stiles turned around, glaring. "You said--"
"I was trying to help you move on."
"Trying to-- I asked you to your face."
"It doesn't matter if it felt real, if it could have been real. It wasn't. It isn't. They're dead. All of them and I don't need to be talking about them."

Stiles' glare lasted a while longer, before he finally closed his laptop.
"I know you don't think people care. And yeah, I really hate you a lot of the time. But I give a shit and it was actually nice to know where you came from. It was nice to know that if you didn't need
me, we were still friends." Stiles got up. "I'll be in the car."

Manchester, Colorado

Castiel smiled at the scene. Dean was making burgers and Stiles was sitting at the table when Derek came back from the library. The last couple hours seemed to help Stiles. He wasn't making as many jokes as he used to, but he didn't seem to be mad at Derek anymore. Derek spotted Dean in the kitchenette and laughed.

"You know, if you were wearing an apron, this would be a perfect picture," Derek snarked.

Dean scoffed. "Laugh it up. You'll be begging me for seconds soon enough."

He put down first pair of burgers and Castiel quickly claimed the biggest one. Burgers were the one thing that Castiel managed to eat without tasting every molecule.

"Dean is an excellent chef," Castiel said, licking his lips.

Dean sat down, putting a burger in front of Stiles, and Stiles was about to take a bite, but he got distracted by Derek's moan. The werewolf was already halfway through his burger.

"What?" Derek asked, after swallowing.

Dean raised an eyebrow at Derek.

"'Excellent' is a strong word," Derek grumbled, sucking burger juice off the knuckle of his thumb with a small noise of contentment.

Stiles laughed, sinking his teeth in and letting out a moan of his own. "I would," Stiles countered, rushing through a few more bites.

Dean smiled, picking up his own burger. He knew exactly how good a cook he was.

"So, when you found out about Derek..." Stiles trailed off, swallowing what was in his mouth. "You said Cas was wrong about him being part skinwalker." Stiles dove in to stuff his mouth again.

"And you wanted to know what I think he is?" Dean questioned.

"Yeah," Stiles muttered, cheeks puffed out like a chipmunk.

"Hellhound."

Stiles choked. "What? You mean the things that killed you?"

Dean glanced over at Derek. He was still working away at his own meal. Castiel expected a reaction, but Derek didn't let the accusation phase him.

"It's the black blood," Dean elaborated. "There aren't a lot of things that bleed black."

"Derek still bleeds red. The black guck is him healing. Well, struggling to heal," Stiles explained.

"My wolf bleeds black. I bleed red," Derek clarified. "But I'm not part anything. I'm a werewolf; nothing else."
"That alone makes you two things," Stiles argued. "Human and wolf...ish."

Dean shifted, curiosity picking at him. "So if you bite me..."

"Werewolf," Derek answered, getting up. He didn't go far, but he liked space between him and Dean when they talked about such things.

"You'd become a beta," Stiles clarified. "Those are the yellow eyes and, if you kill an innocent, they'd turn blue."

"And the red ones he's sporting?"

"Red means alpha. You become one by either inheriting it, killing an alpha or proving you're a true alpha. But that's not easy. Apparently Scott's the first one to do that in like a century."

"Your best friend is a werewolf?"

"Yeah. I'm thinking about writing a book. But the money is in Allison's story. Hunter that falls in love with a werewolf and changes the family into protectors instead."

"So the Argents don't hunt anymore?"

"Only defensively," Stiles answered.

Two Hours Later

"Kemundi," Derek realized.

"What?" Dean questioned.

"I never got a chance to go through your journal." He spun it around, sliding it towards Dean.

"It's my dad's journal," Dean corrected, turning the book so he could see what Derek was pointing at. "There's nothing here," Dean reacted, flicking the single word scribbled in the margin. "It's just a name."

"It's more than a name. Hunters don't keep records, but that doesn't mean other people don't make them. It's all about knowing where to look and what to look for. It's obvious when the Argents have their hands in things. They may not be a legend to you, but everyone of my kind knows who they are and what they're capable of."

"Get to the point," Dean pushed.

"Yeah, you're not going to like how I found out about this. Your brother said he found out about one of their old cases, I looked it up. It was them. A pack of werewolves took over a small town, they killed everything that wasn't human and nothing was killing them. The Argents cleared out the place; turned it into a ghost town."

Dean tensed up, barely containing himself. "How close is it to Sammy?"

"Kemundi isn't the one he was talking about. But it was on his list."

"His list? My brother has a list? Of what?"
"He may not remember he's a hunter, but he can still spot a case. Everything he saw was inactive, but one of them was Kemundi."

"That doesn't sound like the name of an American city," Stiles argued.

"Because the pack renamed it. Their alpha was Alberto Kemundi."

"Are you saying he's still alive?" Stiles questioned.

"Argents don't leave things alive. But it's a place to make a statement."

"Where is it?" Dean asked.

"Northern Utah."

"But what kind of werewolves are we dealing with?" Stiles wondered.

"The kind we kill," Derek answered.

"It's that simple?" Stiles looked between them both.

Derek nodded.

"There's no code among werewolves?" Dean pushed.

"Hunters have codes, because they have no honour."

"Because monsters have no honour and no code."

"And that's why we're doing this. What makes my kind different than the ones you hunt you can't put us in a box. We're not all the same. We're not all good, we're not all evil. I've killed my kind, I've buried my kind, I've saved my kind. We're only monsters if we choose to be. And there are plenty of us that want to be the monster. I don't defend what they do."

"But how do I know once we get there you're not gonna turn all buddy-buddy with these monsters?"

"The kind of werewolves you kill are the ones that spoiled it for the rest of us. The ones that made packs turn offensive. My kind has a choice, the ones you kill don't. Most of them never did, but all of them are a threat. All of them are going to make it so that my kind will never be trusted by the likes of you and I'm sick of seeing hunters chasing werewolves that don't deserve to die."

Stiles watched the two of them stare at each other. Dean's hunter instincts were going off. Stiles had seen it plenty of times in Chris's face. It was when Scott or Allison made him help more than his family. Chris Argent wasn't a bad man. He was raised to make the tough choices and was used to the results when he didn't make the alleged right one.

"We're on the same side," Stiles pushed. "Everyone seeing that?"

Dean nodded, arms folded tightly across his chest. "Let's go."

Rural Utah

"Pull over here," Derek ordered.
Dean complied, taking his Impala off the road and putting it in park. Stiles leant between the seats to get a better look at the area.

"I don't see anything," Stiles said, looking at the trees.

"We're still a few miles out."

"And am I allowed to ask plan yet?"

Dean looked over at Derek. Neither of them had one yet. Dean got out, the others followed suit.

"Seriously?" Stiles asked, coming around to Dean's side of the car. "I spend the last three hours trying to turn the conversation back to a plan and you guys shoot me down every time and neither of you have a plan?"

"The werewolves I hunt don't do packs."

"We also don't know how many there are."

"Or the layout of the town."

"Okay, how about what we do know?" Stiles asked.

"We are outnumbered at least ten to one. The town was small; at its prime, it only had a population of 638," Cas said, looking pleased with himself.

"God, I wish I had one of you my whole life," Stiles said.

Cas smiled more at the compliment.

"How fast did Kate figure out what you were?" Stiles asked.

"I showed up with my fangs out," Derek answered.

"The kid wants to know if you can get close enough to make a statement," Dean clarified.

"Werewolves that gather in these numbers are not trusting," Castiel warned. "They will not welcome Derek easily."

"So we give them a reason to believe he's a friend," Stiles reacted. "They've been gathering human sacrifices, right?"

"That won't be enough," Castiel explained. "They will want proof."

"In other words, they'll want to see him eat a heart in front of them," Stiles deduced.

"I could survive without mine," Castiel offered.

"I'm not eating a heart," Derek agreed.

"You're not dying," Dean fought. "I know you're in better shape, but let's not push it unless we have to, okay?"

"I wouldn't die," Castiel insisted.

"It would be convincing and Cas isn't human," Stiles said.
"But he's in a human body," Dean pushed and he knew Stiles figured out what he was actually worried about.

"I've seen werewolves like Derek do some freaky shit, but not one has been addicted to human hearts."

"One thing I've learned on this job, there's a first for everything."

"Their lunar cycle starts in tomorrow. That means we need to attack now," Stiles pressured. "We don't have time for you to figure out who's the bad guy. Either you're in or you're out."

Dean let out a slow breath. He went to the trunk and drew a line of rope. "I'll be bait," Dean decided.

"Half the monsters we've killed have recognized you. You really think that none of these things will?" Derek challenged.

"I think the kid doesn't have the reflexes if they turn on you and you'd actually eat Cas's heart to save your own ass."

"I'm not eating anyone's heart."

"I think you'll do what you what it takes to survive. As long as it's not risking his life," Dean reacted, his chin jutting out at Stiles.

"You're better back up than me," Stiles argued. "I'm a better shot thanks to you, but what am I going to do from the sidelines? I can't handle a sniper."

"And you want me behind a scope?" Dean turned his attention on Derek. "You're expecting me to stab you in the back. So put me in front of you."

"And what about those survival instincts of mine?" Derek questioned, advancing on Derek. "You don't think I'll serve you up to them to walk out alive?"

"I will intervene before that," Castiel decided. "I will be listening and we," he nodded towards Stiles, "will be watching. He'll stay with me and we'll follow from the roofs. They were unguarded."

"Okay. You kill him and then we all start fighting until we've made enough of a statement that we have to get out. Anyone can call bail and if no one does, it's Cas's call since he's probably the one that's going to have to do it."

"Just get us back to the car," Dean clarified. "I can drive faster than they can run."

"We can't go far. There's still all the people we need to get out," Stiles pushed.

"Did you see where they were stashed?"

"No. I can go look again."

"We'll figure it out later. Right now, let's just worry about the freaks."

Cas nodded.

"Good. Then tie me up." Dean threw the rope at Derek and held out his wrists.
"The knots have to be real," Derek said, winding the rope around Dean's wrists.

"I know."

"I can't make knots you can slip."

"Yeah. I got that." Dean met Derek's eyes.

Derek couldn't comprehend what Dean was failing to say, but Dean saw Cas smiling out of the corner of his eye.

Dean was trusting Derek.

"Shut up," Dean said.

But Cas just smiled more.

"I said shut up," Dean repeated.

"Perhaps we should gag him," Cas suggested.

"Nah, just cover his head," Stiles suggested, emptying out a burlap sack Dean used to store ammo.

"You're a cocky asshole. If you walk in there looking like you're going to kill everyone, they're going to want to kill you. They're going to want to do that anyways, but if Derek can get you thrown in with the other humans..."

"Just do it."

"With pleasure," Derek said, smirking as he pulled the bag Dean's head.

Kemundi, Utah

It had been a long time since Derek had seen this many werewolves in one place. There weren't the dozen Kate had warned them about. Already, Derek had seen twice that and they hadn't even reached the town yet. He was beginning to wonder if even Castiel had underestimated how many were present. It took unspeakable evil and desperate times to bring together this many packs.

But this was different.

They were different.

He wasn't passing packs. He was walking by followers, soldiers. None of these monsters were leaders. Wolfsbane was growing everywhere. It burned his nostrils. Any werewolf related to his breed would have destroyed it. But none of these monsters were affected.

They were eyeing Derek with curiosity and Dean like he was a meal. The bag over Dean's head was a good touch. Bound wrists kept Dean off balance and the lack of eyesight lowered Dean's confidence. He was as cocky as always, but his focus was on his senses, trying desperately to take in as much as he could of his surroundings.

Once the buildings were visible, monsters closed in on them. Derek had been given a single path to walk into the abandoned town and then funneled onto one street. Stiles and Castiel had found a rooftop to watch from. Stiles had a pair of binoculars glued to his eyes and Castiel was watching just as closely.
Derek tried to count the heartbeats around them, but there were so many it made him dizzy. He glanced over his shoulder. Turning back would lead to the same result as veering off the path: war. The creatures were getting closer, trying to catch Dean's scent. A couple even considered stealing a taste, but Derek kept Dean out of reach.

The route changed suddenly, when a pair of beasts blocked the road in front of them. Derek yanked Dean to a stop. Dean's elbow flew up, aiming for his face, but Derek knocked his arm away. One of the two nodded to the side and Derek's eyes darted across the street. The double doors to city hall were wide open.

This wasn't part of the plan.

They were trying to pull their leader into the open. Derek wanted to make a statement. If these soldiers were this loyal, they would fall along side their alpha. But that didn't work in a sealed room. And the last place Derek wanted to be was pinned down inside. Castiel had surprised Derek with his talents more than once, but this was not a time to test his skills.

Derek hesitated a moment longer, but turned towards the building. He let Dean walk into the side of the building, hoping Dean would figure out the question that wasn't safe to ask. Dean lashed out, but Derek just slammed him into the exterior, pinning him in place. He waited for Dean to back down, but the hunter simply stopped struggling. He wasn't backing down.

Derek shoved Dean inside, partly hoping someone would take him and throw him in with the other hostages, but no one touched him. Derek looked at the half dozen wolves watching them closely. He couldn't get a read on the situation. He still couldn't tell who was playing who. A door opened, but it wasn't to a room with windows. It was to the basement.

Where fire was the only source of light.

"It took me months to find this place. I looked everywhere. How much further are you going to make me go?" Derek bellowed.

But no one answered.

"Where's your leader? Was he really stupid enough to grab only cowards?"

Still silence.

"I've come far enough. You bring your alpha to me," Derek snarled.

Dean jerked, elbow flying for Derek's head, but Derek blocked the blow once again. Dean wanted to push on, but Derek's instincts said otherwise and Derek knew to trust his instincts. He had a bad track record with fire and enclosed spaces.

A group of creatures closed in behind them, pushing them to continue. Derek sighed, unhappy with the circumstances, but Castiel hadn't made the choice to pull them out so the angel knew something they didn't. Or, at least, Derek hoped he did.

Derek pushed Dean forwards and the hunter started walking again, but Dean wasn't prepared for stairs. He stumbled, trying to catch himself, but with his hands bound, he wound up rolling down the staircase. A better person probably wouldn't have enjoyed the groan Dean let out as he struggled to get up, but Derek wasn't faking his smile.

But Derek quickly regretted his smile. He knew he couldn't lose it after seeing what the room held. Metal barrels acted as torches, burning the ceilings above them, and dead bodies were scattered
across the ground. None were fresh. The most recently deceased body had to be a few weeks old; likely one from the last lunar cycle. But there were skeletons, signs of people that had died months if not years ago. It looked like they used to try burning the bodies, but bones needed a hot fire to burn properly; hotter than could safely be contained within a room.

Dean's shoulder crunched through a skull as he still struggled to get up. A piece of bone went skittering across the floor to the wall. And that's when things got worse. The bodies had distracted Derek. He hadn't noticed all the sigils that had been painted on the walls in blood. He didn't recognize them all, but he certainly recognized the one that repelled Castiel when Dean was in the hospital. It was right next to the one that made him as weak as a human (he could draw that one with his eyes closed).

More importantly, they were on their own.

"So that's it," Derek said, hauling Dean to his knees. "You think I'm working with the Winchesters." He yanked the sack off the hunter's head, making sure they all knew exactly who he had marched into their den.

Dean blinked a few times, unprepared for any level of light. But the number of growls brought back every single instinct. Derek could practically feel the adrenaline spread through Dean's body as he went tense, ready to leap up and start fighting. It would take an idiot not to see that Dean was here by choice. He was cocky and it was going to get them both killed.

Derek squeezed Dean's shoulder enough that he cringed, before circling him. He waited for Dean to see the sigils and felt the subtle pang of fear make his heartbeat speed up.

"Cas! Get out! Run!" Dean shouted.

But Derek punched him across the face, knocking Dean down entirely. It left him disorientated; he wasn't prepared for the strike. It was proof that Derek had been holding back in every fight they had. Dean tried to push himself up again, but he was too dizzy to get far. Derek nudged him lightly with his foot and Dean collapsed again.

"I still don't get why they're afraid," Derek continued. "I kept waiting for you to do something, anything really. But you are nothing."

"Untie me and I'll show you something," Dean spat, working to get his arms underneath him.

Derek saw the flash of silver as Dean cut himself free. He was hiding it well, but this wasn't the time for Dean to start a fight.

"Using your silver knife?" Derek pulled the blade from Dean's grasp before he could push it back into his boot.

Dean lashed out again, but Derek just laughed at him.

"Pathetic." He sighed, dragging the blade across his palm. "You think I'd let you walk in here with a silver blade." Derek raised his hand, letting Dean see the cut heal. "I can't believe killing you is going to be easier than your baby brother."

Derek watched Dean closely. The hunter was trying to figure out what was real, trying to decide whether or not Derek was lying. He knew he was straining Dean's trust. The hunter was so close to breaking. Derek needed him to break. It was the only way to get out alive. Derek tossed the knife aside and crouched down so Dean could see his eyes. Derek knew exactly how to tell a convincing lie.
"I'd say it was a quick death, but hearts taste better fresh. There's nothing better than biting into a strong heart while it's still beating in a chest."

"No."

Derek could feel the hate spreading through every single molecule of Dean's body. He was trying hard to give Derek the final chance to say he was lying, but Derek needed Dean to believe. He needed every creature here to know exactly how much Dean hated him.

"He didn't see it coming. Thanks to you, he invited me in," Derek pushed.

"You son of a bitch!"

Dean snapped, pure animal rage coming out. Derek heard more than one monster step back as Dean attacked him, but Derek just laughed again, knowing it would only piss Dean off more. He took the frenzy of punches, waiting for someone to pull Dean off. It took two of them, but Dean knocked them off, snapping one of their necks.

The other panicked, but Derek took the opening, closing a hand around Dean's throat. He pinned Dean to a support column and lifted him until his feet were off the floor. Derek kept squeezing until Dean's punches lost momentum and his eyes fluttered.

"If it makes you feel better, you're putting up a better fight than your precious Sammy."

Derek dropped him again, leaving Dean to cough as he hurried to gulp down as much air as possible. Four creatures came forward this time, each working together to hold Dean back this time.

"I'm going to kill you," Dean growled.

Derek smirked. "Too late, Winchester. I offered you a fight. A chance to die as a man, but you thought I'd be like all the idiots that you led off a cliff. It's time to finish off the Winchesters."

Derek patted the side of Dean's face.

Dean lost it, spitting at Derek. Derek laughed, wiping the gob off his cheek with the back of his hand. It was a better reaction than he could have hoped for.

"And you call me an animal. You're the rabid dog, not me."

Derek turned away from Dean, listening to him fighting hard to get free, but not even the sheer anger Derek brought out would give Dean the strength to throw off four of these monsters. He looked over the faces present, trying to pick out a leader, but he never saw one.

"As much as I love monologuing, I've come a long way. Who the hell is in charge here? Because if you guys don't start growing some balls, I'm taking over."

There was a low growl and a body emerged from the crowd. He was massive. He had at least fifty pounds on Derek. But Derek still didn't read leader from him. He was confident, strong. He certainly thought of himself as important and those surrounding him seemed to respect him. Of course, these creatures weren't smart enough to recognize an alpha. It was insulting to share a name with them.

"You?" Derek asked, unimpressed.

"He's my lieutenant."
Derek spun around at the introduction. He was their alpha. He remained at the top of the stairs, resting in the doorway. He was smaller than his so-called lieutenant, but taller. His arms were crossed elegantly over his chest and his fingers were long, a single one tapping precisely on his forearm. Derek could see the wolf thinking carefully. He was calculating and clever, reading Derek's movements.

And Derek was ready to play.

"I want in," Derek said bluntly, moving closer. "But don't think for one second that I'm common."

"Hard to imagine you are, when you bring a Winchester to my feet."

"Sorry, I brought the dumb one," Derek replied with a smirk, listening to Dean struggle again.

"You got a name, boy?" he asked, descending the stairs.

"Derek. You?"

"Navid, hand chosen by the alpha of all werewolves."

Peter would love this guy.

Derek held his ground as Navid examined him. He circled Derek once, before settling at Derek's front. Navid's hand combed through Derek's hair, before skimming down to his hip. Derek raised an eyebrow, challenging Navid's gaze, but the he didn't back down.

He was clearly someone that enjoyed getting too close to people. He truly believed he owned everything. That he had the right to stand wherever he wished and take what he wanted. Derek took pride in his human qualities, but Navid did his best to destroy everything that bound him to humanity. It was hard to imagine that all the monsters present would find him threatening.

He wasn't particularly tall or bulky. His clothing made him look larger and he held his head like his army was beneath him. He moved more like a snake than a wolf. His movements were fluid and sharp. They weren't overly harsh, but his smile was utterly sadistic. The way his lips curled made his mouth look bigger and his teeth look sharper.

"What about the angel?" Navid asked, managing to step even closer.

"Oh, he's outside," Derek admitted. "I wasn't expect you to prepare so well, but if you allow me, I can trap him. And, once he's trapped, I can kill him."

"Cas! You take your feathery ass out of here!" Dean bellowed again.

Derek rolled his eyes and stepped back, taking the scarf around Navid's neck with him. He balled up the fabric and shoved it into Dean's mouth. The hunter kicked, muscles straining to strangle and claw Derek, but the creatures held him back. Derek patted his cheek with a smile.

"The alphas are talking now." He tugged on Dean's hair, making sure the hunter was looking him right in the eye. "See, the reason you're hard to kill is the fact that you've got an angel watching over you. He hears every whiney thought that comes out of your mouth and he's always going to be faster than me. But I knew all I had to do was wait for some monster that's clever enough to help me get him.

"And you think your angel is going to save you, again, because they don't even know what they've written. That if you can just get away and break that sigil over there." Derek pointed to the
repelling sigil. "They're so close, but I can help them. I'm going to trap that bird brain in here and then I'm going to get that angel blade and run him through. Right in front of you."

Dean jerked hard, making the beasts holding him stumble forward. A part of Derek was impressed. If Derek wasn't lying, he might have to worry. Dean thrashed suddenly, managing to knock off one of the creatures, but the remaining ones forced him down, making him kneel.

At this rate, Derek would have to watch his back anyway.

Derek walked around Dean and along the wall, making sure to pay attention to each and every one of the markings. He had one shot at this, if he was lucky. Most were to ward off demons; only three were angelic sigils.

"You guys don't really know what any of this means." He turned back to Navid. "You got someone to sneak into one of the Winchesters' safe houses and copy everything they saw. Then, you just plastered it all over the walls and figured you made yourself a safe house of your own, am I right?"

Navid smiled in confirmation.

He settled in front of the angelic sigils. "These three. One stops them from listening in, one keeps them out and one makes sure they can't undo the sigils. It keeps them powerless." He looked to the leader. "You give me some spray paint and I'll catch you an angel."

Navid gave a nod and one of the scrawnier beasts came out, bringing Derek a can.

"Watch and learn." Derek altered the incapacitation sigil so that it was useless. "Now he can hear us. He knows his human is in trouble."

Dean screamed through his gag, but Derek ignored him.

"And then we change the repulsion to containment."

Derek broke the second sigil and heard the gasps as Castiel appeared in the middle of the room. It took less than a moment for the angel to see Dean and act. Dean shut his eyes and ducked his head at the first flash of light, but Derek was stupid enough to keep watching.

And it burned.

His arm flew up, blocking his eyes as he squeezed them shut. And as quickly as the light came, it cleared and monsters dropped all around him. He lowered his arm to see Dean shoving the dead beasts off him. Castiel helped him, pulling him free like he weighed nothing. Derek smirked, stars still burning into his vision.

"Had you going," Derek said, crossing the room.

"Had me..." Dean laughed, before throwing his fist hard in Derek's face.

Derek stumbled back a couple steps, nose dripping blood.

He deserved that.

"You wanted to make a statement." Derek motioned all the dead creatures. "Even I couldn't make this statement on my own."

Dean wanted to rip him a new one. He was still fuming. His hands expressed that better than his mouth. For a moment, Derek would have thought he was looking at Stiles.
"Wolf got your tongue?" Derek taunted.

Dean let out a slow breath, swallowing his rage. "You pull anything like that on me again and I will kill you."

"Need I remind you that there are still more werewolves?" Castiel announced.

Derek picked up Dean's blade and offered it back to the hunter. Dean snatched it out of his hands, marching towards the stairs. Castiel shook his head at Derek. Then, Derek noticed a missing body. Navid wasn't at the top of the stairs nor the bottom.

"We're not done," Derek realized. "Dean!"

But Dean wasn't the target.

Cas suddenly erupted in a flash of light, crying out, before vanishing entirely. Derek sprinted up the stairs only to run into Dean's arm, stopping him from going any further.

Navid was still alive.

He had another ten werewolves with him, each larger than his lieutenant. Navid stepped forward, taking his hand off the banishing sigil. Dean moved to attack, but Navid was faster. He shoved him back, knocking them both back down the stairs.

"See you two after the full moon," Navid said with a smile, before he shut the door and locked them inside.

An explosion went off, shaking the building. Derek pressed his ear to the door, making sure he could hear them.

"It's the other brother," Navid decided. "Find him and kill him. Kill anyone that isn't our own or in the cages. Maybe they weren't stupid enough to come here without back up."

"What about these two?" one of the other monsters asked.

"Burn down the building. It's served its purpose."

Derek backed away from the door, his heart racing.

"What?" Dean snapped.

"F-fire," Derek managed to say.

"Where?"

All Derek had to look at Dean to give him his answer.

"Cowards!" Dean shouted, throwing his shoulder into the door, trying to break it down, but it was thick and pure steel. "Now would be the time for wolf mojo."

Derek could feel his breathing speeding up and he tried to slow it down, but it only seemed to make matters worse. He could feel air rushing out of his lungs, but it wasn't going in. It was like he couldn't breathe and it made him dizzy.

"Get it together, Zoolander!" Dean barked. "Break down the door."
Derek flailed, hitting the ground with a growl. He tried to calm down, but he was hyperventilating. No matter how desperately he gasped for air, it wasn't coming. It was like his chest was already filled with smoke and was drawn tight, but that wasn't possible.

He suddenly saw the hunter in front of him. He could see Dean's mouth moving, but nothing came out. Of course, Derek couldn't hear anything over his own blood pounding in his ears. He kept trying to breathe, but air never seemed to make it past his throat.

Dean gripped Derek's shirt and shook him hard. His mouth was still moving. He was angry, shouting, and Derek couldn't hear him, didn't want to hear him. He wanted to shift. He wanted to get out, but he felt so weak, so useless. His wolf wouldn't come out.

This was punishment.

Punishment for failing his family.

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Stiles waited for a group of werewolves to run past before setting off another nail bomb. They howled, unprepared. It wasn't enough to kill them, but they weren't going to be a threat any time soon. If the plan worked, he would have seen the other three by now. Cas gave him a deadline and there was no sign of him, Dean or Derek.

Which meant Stiles had taken matters into his own hands.

After Cas left him, Stiles had snuck down the fire escape and into a hardware store. It had everything he needed to make these werewolves regret laying a hand on his friends.

Stiles rigged another charge, setting up a tripwire and attaching it to the hairpin trigger. He circled the building carefully and quietly. He looked around, making sure he was alone, before setting up a proper distraction. Stiles took out a SMG from the bag of weapons Dean had given him and pulled the string from his hoodie. Stiles tied it around the trigger, making the gun go off and flung the weapon down the street.

Several werewolves followed the noise and Stiles prepared to go in for the kill when he smelt smoke. He looked over to see city hall was on fire.

"Oh my god."

Stiles sprinted across the street, leaping over the flames at the front door.

"Derek!"

A small explosion sounded in the building and a beam crashed down. Stiles hurried to get his bag off, needing to get rid of all of his homemade bombs. That was a worse death wish than running into a burning building. He threw the bag out the door and more werewolves saw him. Stiles reached for a burning piece of wood and whipped it at the bag, setting off all the bombs and killing a couple werewolves.

"Derek!" Stiles shouted again, pushing deeper. "Dean?" He stepped back as fire erupted in front of him. "Cas!"

Another part of the ceiling collapsed.
"Someone freaking answer me!" Stiles screeched.

The heat was unbearable and Stiles could feel smoke going into his lungs every time he breathed. He pushed towards the center of the building. Cas had gone around to every rooftop and not been able to see them which meant there couldn't be any more windows.

Then Stiles saw it.

A banishment sigil.

He hurried towards it and found another door. He'd missed it on the first look because it was pushed behind a wardrobe. Stiles struggled to push aside the heavy piece of furniture, still screaming out to the others. He managed to knock over the wooden fixture and turned the deadbolt only to see the handle had been broken off.

"Fuck. Dean!" He pounded on the door. "Derek!" He slapped his hand against the metal "I can't open it! Come on! Someone answer me!"

Stiles kicked at the hard surface, scrambling at the corners of it. He was desperate for any grip to pull it open, but he couldn't manage it and the door was getting hot under his touch. He was sweating and everything burned.

"Derek!"

And then Stiles felt it. A hard bang from the other side of the door. Stiles stepped back and Dean shoved open the door.

"Derek? Where's Derek?"

But Dean didn't answer. He was running back down the stairs and Stiles followed him. Derek had pinned himself against a support column, head clutched in his hands and shaking all over. The ceiling was dipped. They were moments away from getting buried by the fire.

"Derek?" Stiles skidded to his knees. "Derek, we gotta go."

He tried to make Derek lift his head, but he was a rock. Stiles hit him, trying to get his attention, but he was hyperventilating. He was having a panic attack. Stiles knew all too well what that was like.

"Derek, I need you to let me in."

But Derek didn't budge. Stiles tried to pull him, tried to make him move, but Derek's center of gravity was too low. It was like trying to move a two hundred pound boulder with no help.

"You can't move him. I tried," Dean said.

"Go, get out," Stiles ordered.

"I leave and you two are dead. Just get him up."

"Fine. Keep an eye on the door. We're dead if it closes."

Dean nodded and got up, leaving Stiles to focus on Derek.

"Derek, buddy," Stiles begged, still pulling at every part of Derek he could reach. "We're going to die down here if you don't let me help you."
There was another loud crash and part of the ceiling gave in beside them, spitting out embers that burned Stiles' arm.

"Sunshine?" Stiles pleaded, tugging at Derek's wrist, but either Derek wasn't listening or he couldn't hear. "Fuck! Derek, come on!" Stiles hit him. "One time, man." Stiles smacked Derek's arm. "Just one time, don't make me hit you!"

But Derek still wasn't budging. Smoke was seeping in and Stiles could feel his head pounding from the carbon monoxide.

"We gotta go!" Dean called.

"I'm working on it!" Stiles shouted back.

He scanned the room, coughing on the tainted air, but everything was on fire. Desperate, Stiles took the gun from the back of his pants, pulling out a handgun. He clicked off the safety and held it next to Derek's ear, firing it into the flames.

Derek's eyes snapped open and he jolted. Stiles tossed the gun aside, grabbing Derek's face and keeping eye contact. Derek's eyes were still green, still human. Any time Scott had had trouble, he lost control. Derek was hyperventilating and showing every sign of a panic attack. His fingers curled around Stiles' wrists, squeezing tight. His eyes flicked in every direction, growing wider and wider as he saw the flames.

"Hey, hey, hey." Stiles shifted closer, trying to block out the fire. "Stay with me. We're going to get out of here."

"Get him up!" Dean ordered.

Stiles pulled back, trying to get Derek on his feet, but he wasn't budging. Stiles groaned, before a loud creak drew his attention up. It was seconds before they were going to get crushed.

"We need to go!" Dean yelled.

"Come on!" Stiles tugged harder, but he wasn't strong enough. "Okay. Listen to my heart, feel my pulse, hear me breathe. Something. I can't get you out on my own."

"Dude, you're going to kill us both if you don't get your ass into gear," Dean said, coming back to Stiles' side.

"Hey! Take it easy on him," Stiles barked, glancing up at Dean.

"Pussy footing around this clearly ain't working." Dean leant down, twisting Derek's head so that he looked at him. "You wanna kill him? Do it with your claws."

Stiles tried to shove Dean away, but he was getting weaker. There wasn't enough oxygen left and he had been screaming too long. Stiles' head was pounding and he felt nauseous.

"Don't let him die like your family," Dean pushed. "Fire ain't gonna be the thing that kills us, you hear? We lost enough in burning buildings, we ain't giving it our lives too."

Derek managed a shaky nod, his breathing finally slowing down.

Dean straightened up, extending a hand down to Derek. "Now, you got two seconds to get up before I punch you."
Derek released one of Stiles' wrists and took Dean's hand.

"Atta, boy."

He hauled Derek to his feet, catching him when the werewolf swayed. Derek almost dropped back down, but Dean yanked him aside as the roof caved in, leaving the place Derek had occupied buried beneath a pile of rubble.

"Game face on," Dean said, smacking the side of Derek's face to keep him focused. "There's a lot of werewolves that want us dead out there."

"Less than you think," Stiles said as Dean pulled him up too.

"And you thought you'd be no use on the side lines."

Another part of the ceiling broke, clouding them in smoke.

"We gotta move," Dean shouted over the fire.

Stiles coughed, his eyes burning as he tried to see. He felt around, trying to find Derek, but everything was fire. He tried to call out, but smoke just rushed into his lungs. Stiles couldn't breathe and his head was pounding. He wasn't getting enough oxygen. He stumbled, his hand flapping out to catch himself, but he just pressed it into fire. Stiles tried to scream, wanted to scream, but he didn't hear a single noise.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, hauling him upright again, before his arm was pulled over a hard body.

"Stay awake," Derek growled. "I'm not giving you mouth to mouth."

Stiles tried to respond, but he still couldn't find the air. He leant on Derek, knowing the werewolf could carry him, that he wouldn't let go. He tried to focus on staying conscious, but the room tilted more and more with every step. He just forced himself to keep walking, keep moving.

Air washed over him suddenly and Stiles coughed, hurrying to swallow down as much air as possible, when Derek's grip was suddenly gone. He hit the ground, still gasping as the world slowly stopped pulsating. He finally saw something other than smoke and fire. Stiles took a moment to find air, when he saw feet scramble. He recognized Dean's boots and looked higher up to see Derek's ass next to Dean's.

Stiles pushed himself up. He didn't make it far before he felt hands on him. But it wasn't nails digging into him, it was claws. Stiles rushed to get away, but his arms were twisted behind his back and he was slammed onto his knees, pinned in place by two strong hands on his shoulders, claws tearing through his sweater and resting on his skin.

"I don't know whether to be disappointed or impressed."

Stiles looked up at the smooth voice. He didn't recognize the man, but he knew the expression. It was like Peter, Deucalion and Gerard all over again. Another man that thought he held all the cards, had all the power, and that he deserved it. Stiles rolled his eyes.

"I don't care. You'll be dead soon enough."

"Is that so?"
"Yeah."

"Hm." He crouched down in front of him, cocky smirk splayed on his lips.

Derek growled and Stiles heard feet drag across the ground. He looked over to see Derek throw off a couple werewolves, before they shoved him to the street, pinning him down on flat his stomach. He was wolfed out, struggling to get free, but heavily outnumbered.

A hand slipped under Stiles' chin and gripped his jaw firmly, tilting Stiles' head up. "How are you not afraid?"

Stiles laughed. "If a werewolf was going to kill me, it'd be that idiot." Stiles nodded at Derek, making the werewolf's claws break his skin. "Besides, you're not even the scariest thing I've seen this week."

"Stiles," Dean snapped warningly.

But Stiles had dealt with plenty werewolves. He knew better than to let them get away with anything. They needed to be put in their place.

"You're nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Yeah. Nothing. You need a definition?"

He chuckled, the tiniest hint of fang flashing as he released Stiles' face. "I am Navid. I was hand chosen by the one true alpha of all werewolves."

Stiles rolled his eyes, Navid unbuttoned his shirt. Stiles tried harder to get away. He did not sign up for this. But Navid didn't take off any clothing, he put his hand to his chest and slid his claws into his own flesh. Stiles looked away, working hard to keep control over his gag reflex. Navid took his time, before withdrawing his hand. It was disgusting.

"Nice party trick," Stiles snarked.

"It's proof of strength. It's our initiation."

His claws danced over Stiles' torso and Derek roared.

"He's not like you!" Derek shouted.

Stiles struggled, trying to get away from the talons threatening to break his skin, but he couldn't do anything more than squirm.

"He's killed our brethren. Clearly, he thinks he's special. Let's find out if he is."

And that was it.

Stiles wouldn't believe it if he didn't see it. There was a hand going into his chest. That wasn't right. It couldn't be right. He would be screaming, but Stiles couldn't manage to do anything. He could hear the sicken squelch coming from within him and a small squeak past his lips. He was a mouse, useless and dead at the hands of a beast.

Every sense started leaving him. Every noise sounded like it was coming halfway around the world, but he recognized Derek's roar and Dean's voice. But all he heard was his heartbeat and
blood rushing. His stomach was wet and all he saw when he looked down was red. He felt Navid's hand moving inside him, his claws dragging over his organs.

Navid removed his hand, letting Stiles see his own blood web between Navid's fingers and drip to the ground. The supporting hands on him disappeared and Stiles sagged, falling to his side. He whimpered, trying to keep pressure on the wound, but blood seeped through his fingers. His hands were drenched, slipping. Stiles choked out a swear, gripping his chest tighter, but he was losing feeling all over his body.

Something was wrong.

Really wrong.

Stiles could feel himself panicking. Blood was rushing out and he couldn't stop it.

"D-Derek..."

He looked at Derek for help, but Derek was still pinned to the ground. Dean couldn't get free either. They couldn't help him.

This was the end.
Chapter Notes

Chapter Warnings:
This chapter contains disturbing content, including extreme gore, sexual coercion and desecration of human remains. Please contact me here if you need more information. This chapter is the furthest I've gone so if you are squeamish or have triggers that might even remotely link to these, please contact me and I will gently explain what transpires.

Kemundi, Utah

It had taken six werewolves to keep Derek down, but after Stiles’ eyes turned empty, he turned limp. Dean thrashed, trying to get to Stiles’ body, but they dragged him and Derek away. They were taken to the jail, each put in their own cell. Dean fought back, but it didn't make a difference; he was still left locked in a cell. Dean kicked the bars and checked the lock, but he was stuck. A pair of werewolves were on guard and Dean had nothing to take them down with.

"You sons of bitches are dead!"

They laughed at him, convinced they had the upper hand.

"I'll rip your throats out with my teeth if I have to."

But they just laughed again, moving into the hallway. Dean turned to look at Derek. He looked catatonic. It was like he was as dead as Stiles. They'd dropped him against the wall and he hadn't moved.

"Get up," Dean ordered.

But Derek didn't move.

"Come on! Get up!" Dean smacked the bars, trying to make enough noise to jolt the werewolf out of his paralyzed state. "We have revenge to take and people to save. So get your ass moving and bust us out of here."

"What's the point?"

"Point is we're going to kill that bastard for what he did to Stiles and there are a hundred people about to be slaughtered. So if you can bust us out, do it. Now."

"I should have let you kill me."

"Let me-- No. If I killed you, we wouldn't know about this place. Everyone waiting to be saved right now would be dead. You have a second chance at life, make it count and get us out of here."

Derek looked up at Dean. "Every time I get a second chance, people around me die. My family, my pack, my friends. I can never save them." Derek's eyes were wide, broken.
Dean crouched down, reaching through the bars to put a hand on Derek's leg. "You can't save everyone."

"You don't get it." Derek shifted forward. "I can't save anyone. And the harder I try, the more they suffer."

"Look, I've been right where you're sitting. I can name every person that died at my side, everyone that died because I was too slow or because I made the wrong call. Stiles' death was my fault, not yours. I let him stick around. You tried to get him home, keep him safe and I let him stay. So get angry, get real angry. You get us out of here so we can kill these evil sons of bitches and show them why they don't mess with us."

Derek reached into Dean's cell and pulled at one of the bars until it snapped, giving Dean a big enough gap to squeeze through.

"That's what I'm talking about." Dean climbed out, but Derek just settled back in place. "Come on, big guy. You too."

"You're better off without me."

"Don't give me that crap."

"Everyone around me gets hurt. The ones that survive; it's not because of me. It's because someone else saved them."

"You think you're poison?"

"I just want people to stop dying."

"Then get up. Take the hand life dealt you and do something with it. You find a way to make your life mean something."

Dean crouched down in front of Derek again. Derek was so far gone. The idiot was smiling. Dean knew the look. He gave it to every guidance councilor that insisted he could go to college or therapist that got pulled in to tell him he could do whatever he wanted with life. Sure, he could, maybe even should, but that was never going to happen. Dean knew his place, his purpose.

And Derek was convinced death was his.

"Do you know what makes me dangerous? Why monsters run from me?"

"Because they're idiots."

"Because I don't care if I die. I keep coming, until the problem is solved. If it's my time, it's my time. I've always accepted that, but I am going to go down swinging. You and I are the same that way. You ain't gonna kill yourself, but you'd take a bullet without even thinking about it."

"Would you just go?"

"I can't do this alone."

"Yeah, well, you're going to have to."

Dean stared at him. Derek was serious.

"Screw you."
Derek smiled. He was trying hard to hide behind that cocky attitude, but Dean could see exactly how much he was hurting. That didn't mean Dean had time to fix him and right now he couldn't care.

He wasn't even sure he did care.

One Hour Later

Derek wiped his eyes. His hands were clean. There wasn't a drop of Stiles' blood on him, but it was taking over each and every one of his senses. He heard the final beat of Stiles' heart over and over again. He could smell the blood and it felt like it was dripping off him. He could see Stiles' empty eyes and the taste in his mouth was nauseating.

A part of him thought it would get easier, but it never did. He didn't want to know what kind of monster he'd be if he didn't regret the loss of people close to him. He just wanted people to stop dying.

He needed people to stop dying.

The door slammed open and Navid walked in. The werewolves' leader exhaled slowly. He was annoyed, but he wasn't threatened. Unlike every other werewolf here, he didn't seem intimidated by Dean.

Derek swallowed the pain, muscles clenching all over until he was a hard ball. He was ready for what came next. There wasn't anything these beasts could do to him that wasn't done already.

Navid crossed the room, fingers dancing over the plank of metal keeping the bars in place.

"You didn't go with him," Navid remarked, eyeing Dean's obvious escape route.

"I don't run."

"Good. Get him up."

Derek didn't fight them. He didn't move. He let the two monsters dragged him from his cell. They hauled him into the interrogation room and threw him into a chair. Derek looked at them. Their claws were out, he could hear his blood dripping to the floor, but he didn't feel the deep gashes in his forearms. Derek watched them strap his wrists down and then drew a thick leather band around his upper arms and chest.

He wasn't fighting them, but they were afraid of him; afraid of what he'd do.

He heard the haunting buzz of electricity and saw one of the creatures against the wall with a cattle prod. Derek let out a breath, relaxing into the chair. He deserved whatever torture was about to come. He didn't regret the beasts that lay dead in the streets. What he had done was worse; he had brought another child to death's door and dumped them there. They could tear him apart until he didn't heal and he wouldn't stop them.

Derek never stopped anyone that was willing to give him what he deserved.

What he had earned.

Navid entered, each step calculated and calm. "What did you hope to achieve by staying?"
Derek shifted, the leather creaking and straining over his muscles. He expected Navid to step back, to withdraw, but the self-proclaimed alpha only came closer. His hand still had red stains on it.
Derek could still smell Stiles' blood. It burned his nose. There were all but three splotches but it was like Stiles was still bleeding out in front of him. But Derek kept his face hard. Torture went better when he stayed strong. He was pushed harder. They hurt him more.

"Let's drop the façade, Mister Hale." Navid stepped in close. "We are not enemies."

The leather snapped as Derek's arm shot up, his hand burying itself deep into Navid's chest. He reached for Navid's heart, wanting to rip it out, but it wasn't there. Navid stepped back, admiring the hole in his torso.

"Dextrocardia," Navid explained, fixing his jacket. "I was very sick, when I was a boy. I spent more time in hospitals than I did at school. When I was saved, I was told the bite was a gift, but I didn't understand how remarkable the gift was until I had an entire week free of hospital visits. And then a month. And then a year. The bite cured me, but my heart..." Navid tapped the right side of his chest. "It's saved my life more than once."

"I'd be happy to stick it back on the other side."

Navid wagged a finger at Derek, smile pulling at his lips. "I like you."

"It's the tight pants," Derek retorted, not struggling when his wrist was forced back in place.

"They are appreciated." Navid's fingers danced over his thigh, scratching lightly. "Very appreciated." He smiled at Derek, before picking up a heavy chain. "Use this on him. I won't have him fighting me."

One of the monsters took it, winding the linked metal around Derek's arms and chest.

"Most that come in with your attitude, I would put down instantly." Navid's hands travelled higher, one of his fingers forcing its way between Derek's chest and the chain. "You think of yourself as a leader, an alpha. But you're a poor excuse for either."

"You felt the need for chains, didn't you?"

Navid chuckled. "I do have a fetish for tying up strong men. More importantly," he brushed Derek's hair back, "I love saving my kind."

"I don't need saving."

"Oh, but you do." Navid's fingers were on Derek's collarbone next, before following the line of Derek's throat. "You're clearly out of touch with your primal side." He tilted Derek's head up with a firm finger under his chin. "It's where our strength comes from and it needs to be nourished."

Navid snapped his fingers and another monster in walked, Stiles' corpse slung over his shoulder like it was nothing. Derek flinched as the body was slapped down on interrogation table like a piece of meat. Of course, that's all Stiles was to these beasts: food. Navid walked to the table, turning Stiles on his back.

"Don't touch him," Derek threatened, working hard to ignore the empty eyes staring at him.

But Navid ignored him. He slid his fingers into the gaping wound he'd left earlier and forced the hole wider. Derek roared, strained to get free, but the metal was too thick. The ringlets wouldn't snap. He growled, letting his wolf out. He was desperate to stop Navid, but Derek was left to watch
him pull Stiles' heart from his chest and his arteries snap one by one.

"You brought humans to my pack. You've earned the right to taste one of them."

Derek's eyes flicked back to Navid's. He was serious.

"No," Derek breathed out.

"I had planned to give you the hunter's heart, but we haven't found him yet," Navid said, looking over Stiles' heart hungrily. "I did want this heart for myself." Navid took a broad lick of the organ, before letting out a indecent moan and smiling at Derek. "We don't take such young hearts; they draw more attention. But I couldn't let this one go to waste."

"You're sick."

Navid sunk his teeth into the organ, tearing off a piece. Derek thrashed again. He didn't want this. He wanted pain. He wanted to be punished. He didn't want Stiles' body desecrated. His claws were out, every muscle pushing against the metal, but it got him nowhere. He needed to right this wrong, but he couldn't.

Derek was going to be sick. He was staring at Stiles' heart. Worse, there was now a piece missing from it. Every primal instinct drove him to attack. He needed to rip Navid apart. His predator side came out, but he couldn't sink his claws into the monster.

Navid finished chewing and swallowed with a satisfied sigh. He came closer to Derek, leaning over him. His free hand came forward and Derek tried to bite off his fingers, but a second hand surprised him, grabbing Derek by the jaw and squeezing hard enough to force Derek's mouth open.

"You'll love the taste," Navid assured, stroking Derek's hair. "It's pure power."

Derek tried to twist free, but Navid shoved the organ into his mouth. Derek screamed, but the noise barely made it out around the body part.

"I knew you'd be a screamer," Navid said affectionately.

Navid closed Derek's mouth, his fangs cutting through the heart easily. Derek tried to get away, tried to spit it out, but Navid's hand clamped over his mouth and jaw. Derek's eyes were wide, his mind racing with a solution, but he wasn't strong enough to get free.

"Swallow," Navid instructed.

But Derek was so much closer to throwing up than swallowing. Derek screamed, thrashing harder. He didn't want to do this. Stiles was dead and this monster ripped out his heart just to shove it down Derek's throat.

"I will have my way. If I have to, I will chew your food for you and shove it down your throat."

Derek could just feel himself breaking.

Navid sighed. "Get me the tube and the blender."

Derek was shaking. He needed this to stop. This was so wrong and he couldn't stop it. He waited for Navid to look at him again and let his eyes go wide, pleading for this to stop, but Navid just stroked his hair affectionately. The noises spilling out between Navid's fingers didn't sound remotely human. It was like he was wailing. He tried to mutter out a 'please', but nothing close to
any word came out.

"This is for your own good. Either you can be my good boy and swallow what's in your mouth or I will treat you like a fragile baby bird."

A blender was put on the table next to Stiles and he could see a thick rubber pipe. Desperation kicked in and Derek swallowed the lump in his mouth whole. Navid released his mouth and Derek broke, dry heaving barely able to breathe.

"Good boy." Navid stroked Derek's cheek.

Derek twisted away, disgusted with himself, but Navid wasn't finished with him yet. He brought the heart towards Derek's mouth.

"Again."

Derek was still shaking. He stared at the mutilated organ and his insides churned. He shook his head and Navid caught his jaw.

"I told you. We are going to share this. It's a honour you can accept gracefully or one I will force upon you."

"Please, no," Derek could hear his voice breaking, but he needed this to stop.

Navid got up, tearing off another bite of Stiles' heart with his teeth. Derek watched him savor the bite, but he didn't swallow. He just came closer and closer. Derek shied away, but Navid grabbed the back of his head, crashing their mouths together. Derek tried to pull back, but Navid's grip was solid and he could feel the bastard trying to force his lips apart. Derek refused him, but he felt a hand slide between his thighs, squeezing him until he screamed.

And Navid took complete advantage.

He pushed the organ and his tongue into Derek's mouth and pulled Derek's hair backwards so far and so hard that he couldn't close his mouth. He couldn't bite the bastard's tongue off and he couldn't stop him. Navid enjoyed himself, giving Derek a final squeeze, before pulling back just enough that he could whisper a single command against Derek's lips.

"Swallow or we'll be sharing the last bite too."

Derek forced himself to comply. Navid trailed his fingers down Derek's throat, following the lump, until it was in his chest. Derek was shaking. He never felt this violated.

"Knew you could be my good boy." Navid patted Derek's cheek.

He tossed the last bit of Stiles' heart to the hallway. One monster whined at the loss, but they all stared at Navid with pleading eyes. He gave a small nod and they bolted to the hallway, fighting over what was left of Stiles' heart like rabid dogs.

"See you again when the moon's full, big boy." Navid walked out, pulling the door shut behind him and leaving Derek alone with Stiles' body.

Derek broke down. He lost it, lurching sideways and emptying the contents of his stomach onto the floor. He stared at Stiles, desperately praying for a miracle, but nothing changed; Stiles didn't move.
He sniffed, jerking in his chair. They just left him on the table with no respect. There was no blanket over him, no care in how his body was laid out. He needed to do something, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't close the gap between them.

**One Hour Later**

Dean finally found the weapons cache he'd forced Cas to carry for him. He set to work piecing together his sniper rifle. He'd figured out where they were corralling the humans, but it wasn't safe to get them out yet. They'd get picked off in the woods like gazelles. The plan hadn't changed. When enough of the werewolves were dead, when Navid was dead, Dean could get the humans out.

There was a flutter of wings and Cas landed haphazardly behind him, dripping wet. Dean dropped his weapon, steadying Cas before he stumbled off the rooftop.

"It's been a long time since I had to cross the Atlantic Ocean," Cas said.

"Guess you didn't make it in one go."

"It was bigger than I remembered."

"Okay. You sit this one out," Dean ordered, lowering Cas until he was leaning against an industrial air conditioner.

"I'll be fine."

"Yeah. I need you better than fine, man."

"You're hurt," Cas noticed, spotting all the spots werewolves had grabbed him.

It was worse than Purgatory here. There was no one watching his back and every werewolf here was more than willing to work together. Dean had been lucky, but that didn't mean he hadn't a lot of blood. He'd tied off the worst injuries; he had had far worse. Cas reached for him and Dean knew the angel wanted to heal him, but Dean kept out of reach.

"Dean--" Cas prepared to lecture, but Dean couldn't be his priority.

"Stiles is dead," Dean explained.

Cas looked up at Dean, eyes wide. "I don't know if I can do that anymore."

Dean ran a hand down his face. There was a reason why he didn't tell Derek about all of Cas's abilities. It would have been cruel to give him hope.

"When we're done with this, I'm going to need you to try."

An explosion went off. Dean stood up, moving to the edge of the building. The police station went up in flames and the building crumbled, collapsing inwards. Dean scanned the streets, looking for a trace of Derek, but there was nothing but chaos. Werewolves were running scared and Dean wasn't the cause of this. He'd rigged a few more bombs, but he'd left the police station alone for obvious reasons.

"You should find Derek," Cas said. "I can't save them both."
"Rest up. The puppy needs a miracle."

Cas managed a nod, taking a gun as back up.

"Be careful."

"I'm an angel, Dean. Nothing here can kill me."

"Good. I don't want to walk out of here alone."

"We're not."

Dean pulled a smaller scoped rifle (it was lighter and better for close range), a handgun and his back up silver knife from his bag, leaving the remaining weapons for Cas. Dean ran for the fire escape and bounded down it, jumping every turn so that he reached the ground in record time. Another explosion went off, forcing Dean to jerk to a stop, arm flying up to shield his eyes.

Werewolves sprinted right past him. They were bailing. Dean knew a few hunters that would come out of retirement to gun down the strays before the next full moon. He looked down the street, waiting for any of them to attack, but Navid had turned these creatures into cowards. They couldn't get away fast enough.

He looked up the street and couldn't believe what he was seeing. Dean had to be hallucinating, because it wasn't possible. Dean stepped forward. It was like watching something out of an action movie.

Stiles was walking towards Dean and away from a building as it burst into flames behind him. Dean watched another explosion erupt. He had set a charge in that building, but the flames came out of the wrong window. Stiles smirked, proud of himself, when Dean realized this was the kid's handiwork. And it wasn't long until a stray flame triggered the bomb Dean had left. Stiles flailed, unprepared, and Dean couldn't help but smile. That action was all Stiles and it was so good to see.

Dean didn't move though. He didn't want to break the fantasy. It wasn't until Stiles was right in front of him that dared to reach out and yanked Stiles into a hug.

"I am going to drown you in holy water and cut you with every freaking knife I got."

"I'm counting on it," Stiles responded, hand clapping against Dean's back.

Dean stepped back, eyeing Stiles closely. His fingers flexed on his knife. Stiles shouldn't, couldn't, be breathing. Stiles smiled, goofy and innocent. Dean wanted to believe everything was fine, but he wasn't sure if he could risk waiting to figure out how Stiles was standing in front of him. His shirt still had a hole in it and was stained red. He stole a quick glance to where Stiles was lying, but the place was empty apart from a dried blood pool.

"Dean?" Stiles asked, eyes widening. "Where's Derek?"

Ten Minutes Later

A shock of electricity woke Derek.

He jolted, instincts kicking in. Derek scrambled back a few feet, watching one of the electrical lines snap back and forth along the floor. One of the walls of the room had collapsed and the glass
window was broken. He looked over at the table Stiles was once lying on, but it was empty. Derek stood up, shaking as he walked towards the smeared blood.

Stiles was gone.

Derek flinched as the electrical cord crackled, sparks flying. Derek stumbled into the hallway, trying to focus, trying to find Stiles' scent.

But he was lost.

Everything reeked and it just reminded him of everything he'd done.

He heard footsteps and Derek turned to see a pack of monsters running up behind him. Derek flicked out his claws, but they raced past him, shoving him into the wall on their way.

"Cowards!" Navid shouted.

Derek spun around at the voice, everything turning red. Navid's lips rose into a smile. Derek lost it. He charged Navid, but the werewolf was ready. He caught Derek by the jaw and slammed him into the wall, using his whole body to keep Derek pinned.

"How many times are we going to do this?" Navid growled. "I am the alpha."

Derek threw Navid off, knocking him down the hallway. "Not mine."

Navid laughed, rolling lazily to his feet. He stripped off his jacket, rolling his neck. "Let's see how tough my good boy is."

Derek rushed him again, sliding the moment he saw Navid's hand reach for him. He ripped the monster's legs out from beneath him, making him face plant. Derek went for a second shot, but Navid's leg locked around his throat, cutting off his air.

"You're acting like a irritating miniature puppy that think they're a match for the real dogs. You are no match for me. Your place is beneath me."

Derek twisted Navid's knee, dislocating it and freeing himself. Derek rolled to all fours, glaring at the beast.

"Did that hurt?" Derek smirked.

Navid snapped his leg back in place and charged at Derek with a growl. Derek braced himself, preparing to take Navid down. But Navid dropped lower, lifting Derek off his feet. Derek elbowed him in the spine, but it didn't get Derek's feet back on the ground. It wasn't until he went crashing through the window that Derek went rolling across the pavement.

Derek shook his head, regaining his senses, before getting up. Navid eloquently leapt through the window. Navid moved for Derek, when a shot fired. Navid's head jerked to the side, before he fell to the ground, blood pooling out of his skull. Derek looked over, prepared to tear Dean a new one; he wanted to be the one to kill Navid.

But Dean wasn't the one standing behind the smoking gun.

It was Stiles.

"Put one in the heart," Dean ordered, eyeing Stiles closely.
Stiles moved closer, standing over Navid to put a second bullet in his chest, and Derek just stared at him. It was Stiles. He smelt like blood, like everything Derek had endured against Navid, but his heart was beating steadily as he fired a few more shots, littering Navid's chest with bullets.

"Survive that, bitch."

Derek kept staring. He couldn't believe it. Stiles looked up at him, before hitting his arm playfully.

"You good?" Stiles asked.

"Cas, get that feathery ass of yours down here," Dean said, catching Derek's attention.

The angel landed roughly beside Dean, gripping Dean's shoulder to keep from falling over. He was just as confused as the rest of them. "I thought you said Stiles was dead," Castiel remarked after a pause.

"Thought he was."

"He appears to be alive."

"I can see that." Dean turned to Castiel. "Is he human?"

Castiel's head tilted to the side, looking at him closely.

"Cas?" Dean pushed, his need for an answer apparent.

"I'm trying," Castiel answered, blinking and squinting. He couldn't see what he was looking for.

"Hey, kid. Get over here. Make it easier for him."

Stiles moved to comply, but Derek pushed Stiles behind him, keeping him back. He wasn't going to lose Stiles again. This was Stiles.

"Down, boy. We just gotta make sure it's him."

Derek flinched at the command, losing focus for a moment, but he still kept Stiles at his back. "It's him," Derek insisted.

"Buddy, I wanna believe it's him as much as you, but last time I checked, there's plenty of things that'll crawl into dead bodies."

Derek kept Stiles tucked behind him, blocking him from both Dean and Castiel.

"Cas, can you tell from here?"

"Not for certain."

"You're not touching him," Derek said clearly.

Dean ground his teeth.

"Knock the wolf out and check," Dean ordered. "Do what you have to do."

Derek growled, but Castiel was clever enough not to take a frontal assault. He blipped down the street and, after a single touch, it all went black.

--
Dean watched Derek drop to the ground. He felt bad, but he knew things would only be worse if they didn't make sure Stiles was human.

Stiles backed away from Cas. He was trying to hide it, but the kid was scared. Of course, that didn't prove anything. Plenty of things that went bump in the night were afraid of Winchesters and angels.

Dean took out his silver knife. If Cas couldn't get a read on Stiles, there were enough tests he could do himself in the meantime.

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Lebanon, Kansas

Derek jerked awake. He was sprawled out on the back seat of the Impala. He sat up, looking around for Stiles, but he was alone. Derek got out, spotting his Camaro, before taking a moment to look around. He was in a garage. His car was the newest one by far, followed next by Dean's.

"Stiles?" Derek spun, trying to find his scent.

He saw Stiles alive. He felt him. Heard his heart beat. But every surface was hard. There was nothing to hold Stiles' scent.

"Stiles!" Derek shouted.

He spotted a staircase out of the garage and took it. He sprinted down the hallway, until he heard Stiles' muffled voice. Derek sped up, finding himself at an interior balcony. Dean was leaning back against a table, holding Stiles' head with one hand while the other helped him get a better look at Stiles' mouth, and Castiel was sitting weakly in the chair closest to him.

"I don't have fangs," Stiles said, his voice unclear with how Dean had his mouth stretched open.

"And he's got a soul?" Dean asked, looking back at Castiel.

"I haven't touched it, but he doesn't guard his as much as you do."

"So, I'm human, right? Like, thank you if you're lying to Dean for me, but please tell me if I'm dangerous. I couldn't go through that again."

"I see no trace that you died."

"Yeah, well, that's because you guys aren't perverts."

Stiles lifted his shirt, letting them see the large scar centered on his pale chest. Derek stared at the marred flesh. It was dark pink, sticking out from his normal skin, yet still pulled tight.

"Derek! Hey, buddy. Welcome back to the land of the living!" Stiles greeted, dropping his shirt.

Dean looked up, smug. "Sorry, princess, got tired of dragging your ass around."

"I drove your car!" Stiles boasted, grinning proudly.

Derek tried to say something, but he was just lost in the fact that Stiles was alive and breathing.

"Okay, I know you're probably pissed at me for doing that, but leaving your car behind in the past typically means we spend a few hours in some auto shop and--"
"You gonna come down?" Dean asked, cutting off Stiles' rambling and kicking out a chair for Derek.

"Dean's about to make dinner. Apparently, it's Winchester Law to get an awesome meal when you come back from the dead. And I am now officially as cool as Peter."

Dean's eyebrows furrowed, his arms crossing as he turned to look at Stiles. "You know someone else that came back from the dead?"

"Well, I don't know if he actually died or if it was like some kind of death-like hibernation. Either way, I'm alive. I want sex, I want alcohol and I want food."

"You're getting one of those things."

"Oh please let it be the first one."

Dean scoffed, rolling his eyes as he got up. "Hope you're hungry, Zoolander. Kid damn near bought out the grocery store on the way home."

"Coming back to life works up an appetite," Stiles responded, raising his voice so Dean could hear him from the kitchen.

Stiles was still smiling widely.

More importantly, he was alive.

"Dude, can you stop looking at me like I'm a ghost?" Stiles laughed, wandering closer to the bottom of the stairs. "I came back from the dead and I think that deserves a hug."

"Dean never hugged me when I came back from the dead," Castiel said.

"You've died too?" Stiles asked, spinning around.

"Yes. It's irritating."

"That's such an angel answer."

"I was human one of the times."

Stiles tried to respond, but Castiel rendered him mute.

Stiles shook his head and turned back to Derek. "Just get your ass down here and hug me. Don't make me come up there, Sunshine."

It wasn't until that nickname he even realized he was smiling. Derek scoffed, trying to hide it, but he couldn't. He looked down, seeing his hands clenched around the railing. He forced them loose, seeing a subtle indentation from his grip. He swallowed, straightening out his expression, and walked down the stairs.

"Sourwolf," Stiles teased, before jerking him into a hug.

Derek relaxed into it, breathing in Stiles' scent and fixating on his heart thumping against his chest.

"You pull a stunt like that again and I'll kill you myself," Derek growled against his ear.

"So I guess pretending to be a dead body wouldn't be funny to you."
Derek shoved him back, making Stiles laugh. "What is this place?"

"Home," Castiel answered with a smile.

Two Hours Later

Dean walked through the bunker.

"There's a freaking torture dungeon!" Stiles shouted from somewhere down the hall.

Dean smiled. Stiles was still exploring. It had been a long time since he brought anyone here, but they needed a place to breathe without having to worry about anything hunting them.

He heard a shower turn off and Dean pushed open the door. Derek came out of the ensuite bathroom with a towel wrapped around his hips.

"Good water pressure, huh?" Dean said.

Derek didn't respond.

"There's an extra deep claw foot tub down the hall and town's got a nice little chick shop with all sorts of pretty smelling things."

Derek reached into his duffel, taking out a clean set of clothes. "Thank you," Derek said, catching Dean off guard.

"Hey," Dean said, his hands raising defensively. "I just said I'd show you the tub. I ain't getting in there with you."

Derek rolled his eyes. "Doubt there'd be room for us both."

Dean laughed. It was a good come back.

"Look, you did a lot for me back there," Derek said. "I just wanted to say 'thank you' so we can move on."

"If you're talking about that burning building, don't make a big deal about it. You ain't that special."

"Then why didn't you let me burn?"

Dean shifted. There were plenty of convincing lies he could tell, but it wasn't worth it.

"Just because you're a freak, doesn't mean you don't have my back. There aren't a lot of people still breathing that I can say that about."

"You trying to say you trust me?"

"Probably still trust you as much as I did before. I know you don't plan to kill me. Hoping you figured out I don't have plans to kill you either."

"And?"

"I want to know how Stiles went from dead in the street to strutting through town like he owns the
Derek's eyebrows furrowed as he tossed the clothes he'd picked out on the bed. "I thought that some angel thing you didn't want me getting my hopes up about?"

"Angels don't leave scars."

"But Stiles is human..."

"Yeah. Any idea how?"

Derek shook his head. "No."

"So this ain't some werewolf thing?"

"No."

Dean wet his lips, shifting his weight and crossing his arms. "So you really don't know?"

"Good things don't happen to me. If your angel says he's healthy and human, it's good enough for me."

Dean shrugged. "I got one more problem."

"Just one?"

Dean scoffed, stepping closer to Derek. "I'm not gonna pretend I know what happened. But I want to know why you had so much blood on your face."

"I got a bit carried away trying to kill the guy."

Dean smirked. Derek was lying.

"I checked you after Cas put you down. There was blood in your teeth and there wasn't a bite mark on that asshole."

"Must have healed."

"Dude, just be straight with me."

Derek tensed up, backing away from Dean. "I'm about to get dressed. So unless you want to be here when the towel drops, I'd get out now."

Dean turned his back to Derek. He wasn't going to let this go.

"Seriously?" Derek asked.

"You got ten seconds before I turn around," Dean warned.

"I'm not exactly a quick dresser."

Derek tossed his damp towel next to Dean, making it clear he was naked. "Tight pants take time to get into."

"I did not need to know that. But remember. I got an angel that I've had to see naked more than once. Unless you've got some weird werewolf anatomy going on, you don't have nothing I never seen before."

"Triple negative, nice."
Dean smiled. "You're running out of time before I get tired of looking at a wall. You really want me knowing how many inches you got tucked in your pants?"

"I've got nothing to be ashamed of."

"Guess I shouldn't be surprised. You did tackle me buck ass naked when I found you in a bubble bath."

"How about you get out before there's a repeat."

"Right now, I'm assuming you don't want to talk me, because somehow that bastard convinced you to eat a human heart."

Derek unfurled his jeans with a heavy snap, making Dean flinch instinctively. "What if I did?"

"Did you like it?"

Derek scoffed. "No. Not that you'll believe me."

Dean turned around, ignoring the fact that Derek was still pulling up his pants. "No, you didn't? Or no, you didn't like the taste?"

"Would you believe either?"

"Today, I'm feeling generous. Try me."

Derek tugged up his pants the rest of the way, standing tall as he did up his fly. He took a moment, exhaling slowly. He was biding his time, hoping Dean would walk away, but Dean wasn't going anywhere. Derek tried hard to hide it, but the werewolf looked completely and utterly disgusted with himself. There was so much self-hate Dean could have sworn he was looking in a mirror.

"They made me," Derek admitted, trying hard to keep his voice steady, but it was cracking. "I hated it." He looked up at Dean, his eyes wide and wet.

Dean tried to say something. He asked for this truth, but he didn't expect for a second Derek would give it to him. Months of lies and he was staring at a boy in a man's body. A kid that forced to grow up too early and it made him hate himself.

Dean was definitely looking at a fucking mirror.

"Dean, Charlie has been calling your phone for minutes now," Cas said, appearing in the doorway with a buzzing phone.

"I got it!" Stiles shouted, grabbing the phone as he ran past, still hurrying to explore the bunker like tonight was his only chance to see everything.

Dean turned back to Derek, but the werewolf was already backing down, focusing on getting his shirt on. Dean looked at Cas. He couldn't think of anything people said to him when he was like this. He was too busy tuning them out, believing that they were wrong. It was always the assholes that told him what he knew, versions of himself. Derek wouldn't hear the uplifting crap. He didn't in the jail cell and he wouldn't here.

So Dean focused on the facts. The hard truths that could have spared Derek whatever they did to him. He moved closer to Derek, not crowding him, just trying to pretend that they were still alone.

"I'm sorry I left you," Dean said, not knowing what else to say.
Derek swallowed, burying everything. "They said if you were still there, it'd be your heart I was eating."

Stiles came running into the room. "Charlie needs back up. Why aren't we there?" Stiles asked excitedly.

"We'll talk about it later," Dean dismissed.

"But she's outnumbered and--"

"I said, 'later'," Dean insisted.

"No, now's good," Derek said. "Let's go."

"Do you even know what you're offering?" Dean asked.

"A fight, right?"

"No, she's a LARPer."

"I thought you killed all your monster friends."

Stiles laughed, smiling widely. "Oh please, can we show him?" Stiles was damn near bouncing with excitement. "Charlie really wants to meet Cas and, come on, the four of us are unbeatable, even if Derek and Cas don't cheat. And it'd be so much fun. And you can't tell me you don't want to see Derek in leather pants."

"I haven't worn leather in ages. I'm in."

Dean and Stiles both turned, utterly dumbfounded by Derek's answer, before everything made sense. Derek wasn't saying 'yes' to leather. He was saying 'yes' to Stiles. What he didn't know was Derek was telling Dean exactly what had happened.

Three Hours Later

Derek stared at Stiles, watching him laugh at the table with Castiel. The angel was listening to Stiles go on and on about Batman with the utmost intent. Derek smiled for a moment, before he flashed back to Kemundi. He let out a slow breath, steadying his nerves.

It was supposed to be easier now that Stiles was alive again. But Derek couldn't erase what had happened. Every time he looked at Stiles, he flashed back to Stiles' corpse. He saw Stiles lying dead in the street and torn open on that table. He could taste Stiles' heart in his mouth, feel the weight of it on his tongue before it slid down his throat. He could smell the blood and it made him nauseous.

But he'd never let Stiles know. He knew how to fake a smile, but he didn't have to this time. He could hear the clock ticking and he didn't care. Derek tuned it out, listening to the steady and strong beat of Stiles' heart instead and he knew.

He knew it was worth it.

"How long did you get?"

Derek whipped around, spotting Dean staring at him. "What?"
"Don't pretend you don't know exactly what I mean."

Derek glanced back at Stiles. He knew the kid was out of earshot, but he still moved away from the entryway. He wouldn't risk Stiles hearing this. He really didn't want anyone finding out, but that was the problem with hunters. They didn't know how to walk away.

"One year," Derek answered.

Dean tried not to react, but Derek could see the pity in his eyes. Dean scrubbed a hand down his face.

"You can't tell him," Derek ordered.

Dean laughed. "And what? You don't think he's going to figure it out when he finds you ripped to shreds one morning?"

Derek moved closer to Dean, not wanting to give Dean a reason to raise his voice. "There's a lot of things that hate me. It wouldn't be the first time I've been cut apart and I can just leave before the end. He doesn't need to find me."

"Knew I saw too much of me in you." Dean shook his head. "You don't regret it, do you?"

"No." Derek knew he was smiling. He was a dead man and he was smiling. "I finally saved someone," Derek said proudly.

Dean punched him, hard enough that Derek hit the ground.

Derek wasn't ready for that reaction.

He wiped the blood from his lip away with the back of his hand. He looked up at Dean and realized he'd read Dean's expression wrong. It wasn't pity. It was worse than pity. It was disappointment. He finally saved someone, really saved someone, and Dean was disappointed in him. Worse, it hurt. He could handle Dean hating him, being disgusted by him, thinking he was a freak. But disappointment always hurt worse.

Dean let out a shaky breath, reaching a hand down to Derek. Derek didn't take it, but apparently that wasn't an option for Dean. The hunter hauled him up and pulled him into a hug before Derek had the chance to avoid it. Derek tried to step back, but Dean wasn't letting go and, for once, Derek didn't mind. Dean clapped a hand hard against Derek's back, making sure he really felt it.

"Tonight, just this once, you're gonna listen to me." The flat of Dean's hand collided with Derek's back again, keep him close. "You hear me?"

Derek nodded.

"Good. Sit." Dean pointed at the wooden table tucked at back of the kitchen.

"I'm not a dog."

He knew Dean didn't mean it that way, but Derek hadn't moved past today. He needed more time to bury it. Derek wasn't some dog that people stronger than him could train. He wasn't a monster for anyone to use. And he couldn't explain that. He couldn't talk about what they did or what he did. He just needed Dean not to treat him like he was less than human.

Dean didn't bother repeating himself. He just waved haphazardly at the stool. Derek went, sitting
down and watching Dean dig out a bottle of whiskey. The hunter paused at a cupboard, pulling out a pair of glasses.

"Can werewolves get drunk?" Dean asked, filling both tumblers.

"Never stopped my uncle from trying," Derek responded, reaching for one of the glasses and downing it all in a single go.

Dean cuffed him on the side of the head. "Savor it," Dean reprimanded. "It's good stuff."

Derek shot to his feet, needing to remind himself he wasn't tied down.

"Easy," Dean snapped, not understanding Derek's reaction.

The command didn't help. It made him want to rebel. Prove to himself that he didn't have to listen, but he made himself remember that Dean wasn't trying to hurt him. Not now anyways. Derek reached for Dean's glass, swallowing it down, but it didn't help. The wolf in him wanted to break free and prove that he'd never do that again.

"You going to tell me what they did to you?"

"No."

"Look, I got a lecture about why we don't make deals with demons to give you or you can do the talking instead. We can talk."

"I can't."

Dean took a moment, before nodding. "Okay." He refilled Derek's glass and pushed it towards him.

Derek forced himself to sit. Dean raised his glass, swallowing some of his whiskey, and Derek did the same.

"I get why you did what you did. I've been where you are and I could tell you that what you did was wrong, but I know you'll never see it that way. You get to see him smiling and it feels worth it, but it'll hit a point where you realize you're also leaving him."

"He doesn't need me."

Stiles said it himself and Derek knew it was true.

No one needed him.

"No. It's people like us that need people. Because I bet you hate yourself. You try and pretend that's not true, but it is. You make all the choices yourself so that you're responsible for all the consequences, all the guilt. Because you deserve the guilt, you deserve having people hate you, you deserve to be hurt. And when you can do something meaningful, you get a glimpse of life outside of the hole of self-hate."

Dean downed another gulp of whiskey, eyeing his glass for a moment.

"I never regretted making the deal to get Sammy back. All the lengths I went to keep him safe, I never once regretted any of it. I regretted not being ready for consequences that came, but not that I saved him. When it comes to family, I am damn selfish. There's nothing I wouldn't do to keep them safe. When I lost my dad, it just made me work harder to keep my brother here. And there were times he hated me for it."
"We got locked in this need to die need to be the one to die before the other one. Neither of us could ever live with the guilt of killing the other one, but it's these deals that do that. I never fought harder with anyone more than I fought with my brother. We clobbered each other, we said the words we knew would hurt the most. But we always crawled back to each other because we were family.

"I'm mad as hell at you for doing this and I'm never going tell you this was right." Dean ran a hand down his face, frustrated. "But I get why you did it. And no, I won't tell him and neither will you. Demons would take his soul over yours in a heartbeat. Hell, I ain't ever heard of a demon making a deal with a werewolf."

Derek scoffed, a smile tugging at his lips.

"Told you there's a lot of things that hate me."

"What?"

"Kate Argent."

"What about her?"

"She's the one that offered me the deal."
"Is anyone going to tell me what's going on?" Stiles asked, leaning over the front bench.

"What do you mean?" Dean asked, unwilling to take his eyes off the road.

"We always take two cars for distance drives."

Dean rolled his eyes. "Every once in a while it's nice to let someone else drive."

"Liar. You only let other people drive to cheer them up."

"He's right, Dean," Cas confirmed.

"Yeah. So what am I missing?" Stiles pushed.

Dean didn't answer. He didn't think he'd need to lie this early. He wasn't even convinced he'd have to lie at all to the kid.

"Dean always picks scissors," Derek cut in.

Dean glared at him. "Bitch."

"Dork," Derek retorted easily with a smirk.

"Okay. We can pretend I buy that." Stiles leant further forward, making sure he could see Derek's face. "As excited as I am to get a picture of you dressed up like the rest of us dorks, why?"

Derek sighed. "Because I'm working really hard not to think about what I agreed to. So unless you want me to turn around--"

"Nope!" Stiles darted backwards, settling back into his seat.

Dean looked over at Derek. The guy was good.

"So I was reading up on this place. Wanted to go in there with a plan. And you know what?"

"I have a feeling I don't want to," Derek replied.

"You'd make an adorable faerie," Stiles said.

Dean laughed at the thought. "I can see it. Cute little sparkly wings."

"And the glitter," Stiles laughed. "You can't forget about the glitter."

Derek tapped his fingers on the steering wheel and shook his head. "Yeah, I can't do this."

Derek prepped to turn around in the middle of the highway, but Dean grabbed the wheel.

"Dude, there are kinky loose chicks at these things."

Derek looked at him, unimpressed.
"Dudes too, if that's your thing."

The Batman theme song started blaring from the backseat, making Derek cringe. Dean held back a laugh. He'd always wanted to use it on his phone, but it wasn't a convincing ringtone for an FBI agent and didn't intimidate monsters.

"Scott deserves a cool ring..." Stiles trailed off.

The car jerked and Dean looked over to see Derek with his teeth grit and knuckles white. They were headed right for a tree, but Dean was faster. He practically body checked Derek to take control of his baby and steered them onto the shoulder.

Dean let out a breath, staring at the werewolf. "Derek? What the--"

"H-he--" Stiles choked, terrified and stealing Dean's attention. "Home. I need to go home. Cas, take me home."

Cas looked at Dean, confused.

"Now. Now. I need to go now."

Cas was holding back, even though his instincts were telling him to listen.

"Now!" Stiles hit the angel, worked up and desperate.

"Kid, calm down." Dean reached back, pushing Stiles away from Cas.

"He's not dead!" Stiles shouted.

Dean looked at the phone clenched in Stiles' hand. Navid was waving at the camera with a sadistic smirk and blood on his hand and mouth.

"That's my dad's room. He's in my dad's room," Stiles said, his entire body shaking violently. "We need to go. We need to go now. Right now!"

"Okay, okay. Cas, how many people can you take?"

"One."

"Me. Take me. It's my..." Stiles was hyperventilating.

"It's not going to be you, kid. Derek's going to go, because he knows who your dad is and we're gonna catch up."

Dean glanced at Derek, ready for the werewolf to start backing him up. He looked like he'd been punched in the gut and strangled.

"No, no. I need--" Stiles choked, regaining Dean's attention.

It didn't even look like he was breathing. Cas put a pair of fingers to Stiles' head and the kid sagged. Dean turned his focus back to Derek. He was still panting, but seemed in much better shape now that Stiles was out cold.

"Dude?"

"I'm okay," Derek said.
"Be sure about that. Only one of us can piggy back on Cas."

"I'm fine. Get me there and I'll kill him."

Dean eyed him closely, before turning to Cas. "Keep him safe. This isn't his time to die."

Cas's eyes narrowed, considering what Dean was saying.

"Let's go," Derek insisted.

Cas put a hand on Derek's shoulder and the two of them vanished the moment Dean blinked.

Beacon Hills, California

Derek felt the ground beneath his feet, but he wasn't ready to stand. Castiel was holding him up by the scruff of his jacket like he was a toddler.

He twisted free, taking in his surrounding as his stomach settled. They were down the street from Stiles' house. A scream rang through his ears. He recognized it and it didn't belong to the sheriff.

"Scott," Derek gaped.

He moved to help, but Castiel gripped his shoulder, holding him back.

"We don't have time for this," Derek said.

"The house is warded against me. He is expecting us."

Scott screamed again, voice high and broken. He was in agony. Derek had suffered at Navid's hand already. He didn't want to imagine what he was doing to the teenager.

"He has Scott. I won't let..." Derek swallowed. He couldn't allow Scott to experience what he went through. "Stay here."

"Derek..."

"Get as close as you can. They're going to need you."

"Derek!"

But he was already running. He raced past the sheriff's police car and through the open front door. He skidded on the blood, smacking against the stair raling. There was blood all over the floor and smeared across the walls.

Scott cried out again and Derek hauled himself onwards, taking the stairs two at a time. Derek broke through the door to the Stiles' bedroom.

It was a horrible sight.

Navid was seated on the bed with Scott at his feet. The young alpha was beaten down to his human form, weak and held in place with a boot on his arm and a hand in his hair. Isaac was on the floor in the middle of the room, wofled out, bloody and bruised. He tried to crawl for Derek, but the monsters dragged him backwards, burying his claws in Isaac's ankle and making the beta cry out.
"Derek!" Navid's arms opened welcomingly with an enormous grin, dropping Scott so that he pooled at Navid's feet. "I was hoping we could talk."

One of the creatures kicked Isaac in the stomach when he tried to move again. Navid snapped his fingers harshly and Derek watched the others back off, but the one that kicked Isaac remained over top of him, pinning Isaac to the ground with a heavy foot between his shoulder blades.

Derek could see the sheriff was unconscious on the broken chair beside him. There was blood dripping out of his hairline and across his forehead to the dark pool of blood on the floor.

"He's alive," Navid assured. "Not sure how much longer. We did miss our feast after all."

Derek stepped forward and four monsters mimicked his threat. Even if Isaac and Scott weren't pinned down, they were out numbered. Derek took a slow step forward, trying to get closer to his beta, but a pair of creatures blocked him. He could take them both, but Navid had rearranged Scott, his hand curling around Scott's throat with a single claw stroking his jugular, and the beast on top of Isaac was just itching to snap his spine.

"What do you want?" Derek asked.

Navid smiled and it made Derek nauseous. The last time he'd seen that façade, Navid was seconds away from-- Derek shook his head. He didn't need to remember.

"To rebuild." Navid thumbed Scott's chin upwards, stretching his throat. "I'm going to start with these two." He pulled Scott in close, resting his chin on Scott's head. "I'm going to teach them to be my good boys."

"You're not taking them anywhere."

"Prioritize, Derek. Your two puppies that can regenerate. I wouldn't do anything more to them than I did to you." He smiled, taking a moment to lick a line of blood off Scott's cheek. "Mm."

Scott struggled, but he got nowhere. Navid patted his head and tossed him at the other monsters, pretending to give him a chance to get away. Scott was desperate enough to take it. He tripped on his own feet as he tried to get up. But it wouldn't have mattered. He was grabbed by two beasts and punched in the stomach for his efforts. Scott coughed, barely able to breathe as he sagged in their grip.

Scott had put up with a lot over the years, from Derek and from others. But there was always a degree of pity because of his age, his innocence. Those were precisely the things that got Navid excited.

Navid moved forward until there was less than an inch of air between himself and Derek. Derek's knuckles cracked as his fists tightened. It was torture to not tear him apart. The only thing holding him back was the knowledge that it would be a death sentence for Scott and Isaac. Navid ran a finger over Derek's fist, his lips curling into a dark smile.

"I'm going to be very happy when you come crawling back to me. Make sure you're on your knees." His eyes flicked up at Derek's. "I like you beneath me."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"Oh, but you are." Navid's fingers walked across Derek's belt. "You're going to say goodbye to the puppies and take your reward."
"No, Derek," Isaac pleaded. "Don't--"

A kick to the stomach left Isaac gasping for air. Derek winced and so did Scott, causing Navid's smile to grow.

"Well, this just got more interesting," Navid taunted. "You'll have to tell me this story."

Derek tightened his jaw, glaring back at Navid.

"Did you turn them both? Or did the little alpha poach one of your betas?"

But Derek held his ground. He kept his eyes on Isaac, working hard not to react in any way. No answer would help the others. Navid grabbed Derek's jaw, jerking him off balance. He looked Derek over closely, before shoving him backwards. Derek stumbled, backing into the desk.

"You're a naughty little boy," Navid said, approaching Scott.

Scott swallowed, his fear spiking. The young alpha was putting on a brave face, but he was scared. Derek could feel it and he desperately wanted to do anything to fix it. Derek couldn't imagine what Navid had already done to them and refused to imagine what would happen if he left.

"You might be more fun to play with than Derek." He dragged a claw through Scott's shirt and skin, making him shake and gasp in pain. "It's not nice to steal another alpha's beta." Navid pressed his claw into Scott's chest, eliciting a scream. "I'll be sure to set the little one straight." He shot a smile over at Derek, slowly removing his finger from Scott's body and wiping it on Scott's shirt. "And have plenty of fun." He patted Scott's cheek and turned back to Derek. "So let's cut to the chase. You can take one person with you. You could even take me if you wanted to." Navid smiled playfully.

But Derek wasn't amused. He just wanted to tear Navid apart.

"I'm sure you'd love to save your beta-- I mean, ex-beta, and you'd probably like to rescue this poor little alpha..." Navid grabbed Scott by his jaw, shaking his face. "But they're not dying," Navid lazily kicked the sheriff. "He is."

"I'm not leaving them."

"Derek," Scott beckoned, managing to keep his voice calm and steady.

Derek looked at the young alpha and watched him force a smile.

"It's okay." He nodded. "Do what you have to."

"No. Derek, no. Don't leave us. Please don't leave us," Isaac begged.

"Isaac--"

"No!" Isaac cut Scott off. "Please, Derek. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. Don't leave me."

"He's sorry, Derek. Maybe you should let the man die for him."

Derek cracked his neck. He wished there was another option. But the sheriff needed a hospital, badly. Derek stepped back towards the sheriff, trying hard to tune out Isaac's pleas. His hands were shaking as he hefted the sheriff over his shoulder.

He managed a final look at Scott, but couldn't bare to look at Isaac. Derek walked out, listening to
his beta's cries. The door shut behind him the moment he left, leaving him to hear them both scream in pain.

Derek kept his footsteps steady until he was out of the house, before hurrying to Castiel. The angel was standing as close as he could to the house. Derek brought the sheriff over and passed him off.

"Heal him or get him to a hospital. Now."

Castiel nodded and vanished, taking Stiles' father with him. Derek raced back to the house, but it was empty. He stood in the blood-stained room, drowning in the twin spikes of fear and pain. He tried to follow their scents, but every trace of them and the monsters that had them died at the back door.

They were gone.

Two Hours Later

"Where is he?" Stiles demanded, finding Derek in the hospital hallway. "Where's my dad?"

"He's going to be fine," Derek assured, putting a hand on Stiles' shoulder. "Just a concussion--"

"Just a concussion?" Stiles reacted.

"And severe blood loss."

Stiles scrubbed a hand through his hair, trying to calm down. He just needed to focus on the fact that his dad was alive. Navid hadn't killed him. He was going to be fine. Derek stepped back and opened a door. Stiles went inside to see his father lying in a hospital bed. There was a tube of blood in his arm and a bandage on his forehead.

"Where's Cas?" Stiles asked. "Why didn't Cas help him?"

"He looked really drained by the time I got here. Your father's probably better off this way."

"Are you okay?" Stiles looked at Derek, hoping for a distraction.

But Derek just shifted uncomfortably. "He-- He went off looking for Navid. Where's Dean?"

"Somewhere in the hospital. I hopped out of the car long before he found a parking spot."

"I found this when I went back." Derek handed over Stiles' wallet. "They must have taken it back in Kemundi while you were..." Derek dropped his head, refusing to finish the sentence.

"Dead?" Stiles supplied.

Derek barely managed a nod.

"Would you stop blaming yourself for that."

"If I left you handcuffed in the bunker, none of this would have happened."

"Maybe, but if you did, you and Dean would have burned alive and all those people would have been killed."
"He has Scott and Isaac," Derek whispered, ashamed.

"What? How?"

"The sheriff was dying. I had to leave them there to save him."

Stiles sat down on the foot of his father's bed. He didn't want to know the rest. He didn't want to imagine having to choose between his dad and his best friend. Derek was able to go to a rational place. Scott and Isaac could heal. His dad couldn't. It was the right choice. But there was one thing Stiles needed to know.

"What did he do to you?"

But Derek was silent. Stiles looked over and he couldn't get a read on the werewolf. He couldn't tell if Derek was embarrassed or terrified.

"Derek?"

"I'm going to go look for them," Derek said instead.

"Derek--"

"Call me if he shows up," Derek decided, moving for the door.

"No." Stiles shot to his feet and cut Derek's escape off. "Talk to me."

"Right here," Melissa said, arriving on the other side of the door with Dean.

"Thanks."

Stiles recognized the tone and turned around in disbelief. Both she and Dean were smiling. It was the same smile Dean gave a girl before he ditched them for the night. Stiles opened the door and glared at Dean.

"Hey, kid," Dean greeted, giving Stiles the look to back off.

"Don't 'hey, kid' me," Stiles replied.

Dean chuckled, before giving Stiles a sterner look. Stiles just yanked Dean inside, ruining every last trace of his game.

"She's Scott's mom," Derek whispered.

"I'm great with kids," Dean hissed back.

"Then you can prove that when we get him back from Navid."

Dean's head snapped to look at Derek. The werewolf nodded and Dean went serious.

"Which of you is going to tell me what is going on?" Melissa asked, sweetness stripped away as her hands settled on her hips.

"Nothing," Stiles laughed. "Why does something have to be wrong?"

"Some guy in a trench coat walks in carrying your father and you're going to tell me nothing's going on?"
"We heard of a rogue werewolf coming this way. Hoped to cut him off, but it didn't work," Dean offered.

"The not fun kind," Stiles assured. "There's now evil werewolves. Worse than that alpha pack last year, but way easier to kill than Jackson. We got this."

Melisa smiled, stepping towards Stiles. "I decided a long time ago I'd go insane if I kept up with everything you and Scott got mixed up in, but if he's in trouble, I expect you to tell me."

"No, you don't. I never tell you. Then you worry."

"Okay. You're right. You never tell me. But I want you to tell me. It's my job to worry. He is my son."

"He's fine. I called him on my way into town. He said he'd get a head start while I checked on my dad."

"You let a kid go after this freak?" Dean snapped.

Stiles elbowed Dean hard in the gut, eliciting a groan from the hunter. "Call me if anything changes with my dad?"

"Of course." Melissa squeezed Stiles' arm. "It's good to see you."

"You too."

"Tomorrow. Six o'clock. Dinner. All of you. Including the weird one."

"I'll bring pie," Dean assured.

Stiles elbowed him again and Dean finally walked away. He gave Melissa a final smile, before shutting the door to give them some privacy.

"Okay. Someone tell me who's lying before I start hitting back."

"Navid took Scott and Isaac," Stiles said.

"Who the hell is Isaac?"

"He's a werewolf with a stupid scarf."

"He wants to rebuild his army," Derek explained.

"Okay. So where is he?"

"Hidden," Cas answered, startling Stiles. "I can't find him."

Stiles looked at Derek, hoping he had an idea only to realize he had a horrible one. "No."

"You got any other ideas?" Derek asked.

Stiles tried really hard to come up with one, but failed. "We're not asking him."

"Him, who?" Dean asked.

One Hour Later
Derek left Dean and Castiel with Stiles and moved further into his loft. It was silent enough to make even Dean believe it was empty, but Derek knew better. He approached the spiral staircase slowly.

Peter was standing in the shadows at the top, lurking and displeased. The older wolf hated hunters, not that Derek could blame him for that. Peter had yet to reach any truce with the Argents. They were each just waiting for a reason to kill each other.

Derek made a nod to come down, but Peter only stepped out of view. Derek rolled his eyes and went after him. It was dark in the attic, but Derek's eyes quickly adjusted as he walked to the center of the room.

"Really, Derek? Another hunter?" Peter drawled, circling Derek. "Wasn't the last hunter you brought home enough to make you steer clear?"

"This is different," Derek assured.

"Because he has boy parts?" Peter shot Derek a look, before shaking his head, "No. A hunter is a hunter."

"I'm not sleeping with him."

"Did you decide that before or after he tried to kill you?"

"Before."

Peter let out a small huff and glanced downstairs, smiling at what he saw. "I'm almost disappointed to hear that," Peter teased. "Someone should put those lips to use."

"Someone did. Kate."

Peter shuddered, his lip curling and his teeth flashing, and resumed his circle. "And that wasn't a neon warning sign for you?"

"Have you heard of anyone called Navid?" Derek asked, changing the subject.

"The self-proclaimed true alpha of werewolves?" Peter smiled, able to tell by Derek's reaction that he was right. "He's a fraud. Seems only fitting he would track down an actual true alpha."

"What do you know?"

Peter raised a finger. "I don't work with hunters."

"Today, you do. Argents are on their way over. I'm not taking any chances."

Peter crossed his arms, looking like a dignified two-year-old preparing to argue.

"You can tell me or you can tell them," Derek offered.

But Peter wasn't budging.

"He has Scott."

"I'm aware. It might be good for him to get knocked off his high horse."

"If you have a shred of--"
"There's nothing in here, Derek," Peter interrupted, tapping his heart. "He was an ungrateful beta and the only reason people like me don't kill him is because true alphas are very rare."

Derek slammed Peter into one of the walls, applying pressure until he knew Peter's collarbone was strained. But Peter didn't flinch. Then, Derek saw his uncle's expression change and Derek didn't trust it. Peter gave him a small nod and Derek released him.

"I take it you met the mutts he pretends are worthy of our name," Peter remarked.

"Yeah. Most of them are useless. Some weren't."

"They're an entirely different breed. The further a victim is from the source, the less control they have. Their bite is a curse."

"I know all this. I've met him. I need to know why he didn't die like the others."

"Because he's like us. So unless you put him down with wolfsbane or cut him in half, he has the potential to survive."

"And how do you know him?"

"Well, that's two stories. I know of him now, because of his reputation. I know he's a fraud, because I check my facts."

"That sounds like one story."

"It was. I visited him while you were taking Cora to South America. He didn't have many followers when I met him. I stayed for a moon. I saw his ritual. He couldn't be more wrong about the human heart."

Derek's eyes narrowed and Peter rolled his eyes.

"These cursed mutts. They're addicted to human hearts. It's not because of power, but because they crave to be human. Some primal part of them thinks that if they ingest the most vital human organ, it'll cleanse them. But all it does is pull them deeper, turns them into more of an animal."

"You're still on your first story."

"Because I don't really want to be bruised or bleeding in front of hunters."

"Then you better not lie."

Peter shifted, his hands resting on his hips. "Navid is not a common name among werewolves. I doubt you'll find another werewolf named 'Navid'. Would you agree?"

Derek nodded. "Get to the point."

"Contrary to popular belief, I spoke with Laura before I killed her. I offered her some words of comfort when she told me about the difficulties of becoming an alpha before one is ready. She warned me of the need to build a pack and told me about a mistake she made."

Derek's head tilted. He refused to believe what Peter was implying.

Peter rolled his eyes. "She wasn't as perfect as you made her out to be. Laura made several mistakes."
"Like trusting you?"

"I suppose that was a mistake." Peter smiled, before realizing how much that irritated Derek.

"Are you telling me that Laura bit him?" Derek pushed.

"Unless there's another werewolf named Navid running around that skipped the cliché college seminar about how no means no, yes. He's always been a bad boy. That didn't change much after she turned him."

"You're lying."

"And why would I do that?" Peter leant back against a wall, crossing his arms with faked insult.

Derek glared at his uncle. There was a reason he didn't trust Peter. Or anyone else, for that matter. But Derek knew his sister. She couldn't have hid something like that. Laura knew about Paige and would never risk someone's life without their consent.

"Laura said she could smell pain and depression. She wanted to help him. Unlike you, she at least waited for kiddies to finish college before sinking her teeth into them. Apparently, there was something wrong with his heart."

Derek heard the door open and backed up to the staircase to see Chris and Allison walk in, each with a duffel bag of weaponry. He turned to face Peter again, only to find his uncle standing less than an inch from him, stealing a slow inhale. Derek shoved him backwards.

"You smell like them," Peter snarked.

"It wasn't my choice to stick around."

"Yet there's still a hunter down there worried that you've been up here an awfully long time."

"Downstairs," Derek ordered.

"No."

Derek raised an eyebrow, making it clear that Peter didn't have a choice. Peter glared at him, holding his ground.

"You can walk down, or I can throw you down."

Peter remained in place a second longer before making his way downstairs. Everyone was eyeing him. They didn't trust him and Derek didn't blame them. Although, Peter wasn't the only one suffering from lack of trust. It was clear that Dean and Chris were purposely putting plenty of space between one another.

"I thought you were better than this, Derek," Chris said, each hand resting on one of his guns.

Stiles rolled his eyes, but it was Allison that asked the real question,

"Where's Scott?"

"A werewolf named Navid took him," Derek answered. "Isaac too."

"Then we go get him," Allison pushed.
"That's the plan. As soon as we figure out where he is," Dean explained, eyeing Allison.

"What?" Allison reacted, arms folded tightly over her chest.

"Nothing." Dean crossed his arms as well, cracking his neck.

"Say it. You don't like that I'm a girl?"

"I don't like that your daddy thought it was a good idea to turn his princess into a killer."

"From what my dad says, I started later than you and am better than you'll ever be."

"That so?" Dean looked at Chris.

"She has a right to know," Chris replied with a shrug.

"That you turned your back on plenty of hunters when all Hell broke loose? That your family decided to arm itself and leave everyone else to fend for themselves. Hunters are supposed to protect everyone. Not run and hide."

"We're doing good here. We have the manpower to protect this town no more than that and plenty happens here," Allison defended. "We're protecting people."

"Yeah, by going after the wrong freaks half the time," Dean accused.

"We're not here to argue," Stiles interjected. "I get that most of the people in this room don't play well with others, but we've got two goals that I think everyone can agree on: kill Navid and save Scott and Isaac."

Derek caught the shift in Peter's demeanour and watched his expression change. He knew more than the other people in the room and loved it.

"What?" Derek growled.

"Leave a boy with a hunter long enough and he becomes one."

"And let's be clear on the priority," Allison insisted. "Scott first."

"Yeah, obviously," Stiles agreed.

"If it was so obvious, why didn't you say it first?"

Peter's eyebrows rose, only too happy that Allison made his point.

"Scott comes first," Stiles assured. "Isaac too. We wouldn't be calling in back up otherwise."

Allison's jaw stiffened. She wasn't convinced, but didn't push any harder. "We should check the school."

"Empty," Castiel answered.

"Okay, the abandoned warehouse district."

"Also empty," Castiel volunteered helpfully.

"How about you tell my daughter where you looked so we can move on?" Chris snapped.
"I've checked every building."

"How long did you wait before calling us?" Allison asked, glaring at Stiles.

"He's an angel," Stiles explained. "He checked most of the town before I even got here."

"An angel?" Allison questioned. "Angels aren't--" she looked at her father, already able to see he wasn't going to support her. "How could--" Allison cut herself off, taking a deep breath. "How do we find Scott?"

"Last time we crossed paths with Navid, he took over an abandoned town and got himself an army of werewolves," Stiles explained.

Stiles scratched his chest, right over his new scar, and Derek gulped. Stiles unfolded a piece of paper, handing it to Allison.

"Those symbols are designed to keep Cas away. He did it at my house and at the town before. If you see them, he's probably nearby."

Peter stood taller, casually stealing a glance. Derek could have stopped him, but it would have been pointless.

"And he hasn't sensed or whatever any places that might have these?" Allison asked, handing off the paper to her father.

Stiles looked to Castiel, but the angel shook his head. So, Stiles shrugged at Allison in reply.

"Navid's smart. Smart enough to make us think he's dead," Dean said, before turning to Derek. "Any theories on how he pulled that off?"

"Turns out he's our kind," Derek admitted, nodding at Peter, who was beginning to use Derek like a shield.

"They're not always the good guys," Chris pushed, glaring at Peter.

"We were always on the defensive," Derek snapped.

"More of us would be alive if that weren't true," Peter whispered to Derek.

"Without the element of surprise, you would have never been an alpha," Castiel said, making it clear that he had heard Peter. "Laura trusted you."

Peter took a step back, not enjoying the shift in power.

"We're getting off track," Derek reprimanded.

"We should split up," Allison suggested. "Maybe after a break, we won't all want to kill each other."

"Good idea. But if Navid's a Hale-kind werewolf, we need wolfsbane bullets. You brought spares, right?"

"Yeah."

Allison put her duffel down on Derek's desk and took a few handguns from her and her father's duffels, laying them out. Dean picked one up, checking the chamber and the sightline.
"We don't usually equip so many people so don't waste bullets," Allison said warningly.

"I'm a good shot," Dean reacted, boarding on insulted.

"Guess we'll see."

Dean looked at Allison like he still didn't know what to do with her. Allison was unique. She was talented and knew it. Dean was much the same, but he was used to putting children and women in their place. Allison had a very different approach. She was more than willing to be anyone's friend until they gave her a reason not to. Underestimating her was the easiest way to piss her off and Dean did that the moment she stepped in.

"How many followers does he have left?" Chris asked.

"I saw eight," Derek answered. "But I don't know if there's more."

"We killed almost a hundred of them in Kemundi," Dean supplied.

"Maybe more," Stiles added.

Allison looked at him.

"I didn't keep track," Stiles responded with a shrug.

"How on earth did you manage that?" she asked.

"Cas took out plenty and the kid knows how to make a nail bomb. We picked off as many as we could and told the hunters around to keep an eye out for survivors that fled," Dean explained.

"And you're okay with that?" Allison asked, looking at Derek.

"They were killing people by the hundreds," Derek said.

"Tell yourself whatever you want. You should know better than anyone that it's never that black and white," Allison scolded, heading for the door.

"If we went after him sooner, he would have never made it here," Derek snarled, cutting Allison off. "Everyone makes their own choices. Everyone there supported him."

"Get out of my way."

"Erica and Boyd were trying to get away when you captured them. They'd be free and alive if you didn't stop them."

"They'd also be alive if you didn't turn them."

Derek felt himself begin to shift, but Stiles yanked him to the side.

"Call us if you find anything," Stiles ordered, making sure to put himself between Derek and the Argents until they left.

Derek blinked away his rage, letting out a slow breath to calm down.

"It's now very clear why you don't like hunters," Castiel remarked.

"Hey! That's one of my best friends," Stiles defended.
"Some friend," Dean seconded, before noticing that Peter had moved to Castiel's side. "What are you doing?"

"Looking," Peter said, circling the angel. "You're spectacular."

"Yes," Castiel affirmed.

Peter laughed. "Oh, I like him."

"Peter," Derek said warningly.

"I'm just looking, nephew. Honestly, you should have more faith in people."

Derek caught Peter by the scruff of his shirt, throwing him into the hallway. "Make yourself useful and then you can be a creep," Derek said, before hauling the door shut.

"I don't like him," Castiel said.

"No one does," Derek agreed.

Seven Hours Later

Dean glanced in the backseat to see Stiles slowly nodding off. He was trying hard to stay awake, but it had been a long few days. Dean intentionally swayed on the straight road, gaining an odd look from Derek, but he just nodded towards the backseat and Derek understood. When Sam first found out demons and monsters were real, he only seemed to have a good night rest in a moving car. By the time he was ready to sleep in a bed again, Dean had mastered the art of using his baby to lull Sam to sleep.

Stiles didn't stand a chance.

Derek twisted on his side of the bench and Dean took a turn a little harder than necessary. Stiles swayed towards Derek and the werewolf caught him, lying him down. Dean pulled over gently, making it easy for Derek to keep Stiles asleep. He reached under the front bench to take out the blanket stashed there and handed it to Derek so he could cover Stiles.

The Impala wasn't the best place to sleep, but there were plenty worse places. It did the trick for Dean's family on more than one occasion. It was a warm night and Stiles could use a good night's sleep. Dean took an extra moment to open his door silently and Derek followed him out. Dean quietly shut the door after him, watching Derek put some distance between himself and the Impala, but still making certain he could see Stiles.

Dean took out his flask, settling next to Derek. "He's gonna be fine," Dean assured.

"Scott always believes the best in people. No matter what they've done or what they're capable of doing. He relies on finding good in people or at least threatening them into doing good. He can't do that with Navid."

"Yeah. I wasn't talking about some wolf-boy I haven't met."

Derek glared at him.

"Relax. We're going to save the puppies." He just questioned if they were going to find them before Navid broke them down like he did Derek. Dean took a heavy swig from his flask.
"You trying to beat me to the grave?"

Dean swallowed his gulp, scowling at Derek. "This clears my mind. It makes it easier to sleep."

"Drowns out the guilt?" Derek asked.

"No. The anger."

Derek’s eyes narrowed and his eyebrows rose in confusion.

"Every hunter story starts with revenge. They lost someone to something."

"The Argents didn't start losing people until after they were hunters."

"Because they didn't start off as hunters. They called themselves hunters, but they were mercenaries. They killed the werewolves they were paid to kill. It's where their family fortune comes from. It's why they think they're so much better than real hunters."

"And what makes you real?"

"Hunters are offensive. We don't wait for the monsters to come to us. We save people because it's the right thing to do. Mercenaries are in it for the money. They only care about protecting their family, their land and their reputation."

"You've basically described every hunter I've ever met."

"Then you haven't met many real hunters."

Dean raised his flask for another swig, but Derek took it, helping himself. They drank for a while, taking in the night.

"So this is it? Our last case," Derek said, breaking the silence as he polished off the last of his whiskey.

"If you want," Dean replied, taking his flask back and tucking it into his pocket. "Or we can try and save your ass." He looked over at Derek, unable to gauge his reaction. "I'm not promising anything. But I figure we got a year. Either way, we'll put up a good fight."

Derek smiled. "Wouldn't want to make anything easy for her."

"So we got a deal?" Dean held out his hand. "The kid never has to know."

Derek stared at Dean's hand. He still couldn't seem to wrap his head around the fact that Dean didn't want him dead. He would miss nights like these. They could spend hours together and never say a word. They could simply coexist. For whatever reason, they fit. Dean didn't understand it, but it was nice having someone that fit into his lifestyle and didn't need protecting.

His eyes drifted over to Stiles. Although, it was nice protecting someone. He'd loved teaching Stiles how to fight, how to protect himself. Dean took enormous pride whenever he got to see the kid using what Dean had taught him.

"He never finds out," Derek repeated, shaking Dean's hand.

"Scout's honour."
One Hour Later

Castiel remained at Derek's front door. He watched his companions closely, trying to understand what had changed. Derek and Dean were walking side-by-side, seemingly happy to be in each other's company. Stiles was slung over the werewolf's shoulder, his arms swinging with each step Derek took.

They had called Castiel to make certain Stiles' remained asleep, but Castiel could not comprehend why the older two had suddenly become so close. He had first suspected them to have bonded during torture, but Derek had spared Dean from Navid's hand. There was nothing but distrust both in Kemundi and before. Yet, he was seeing Dean look at Derek as if the werewolf was his own brother or, at the very least, a kindred spirit.

Dean and Derek parted in the middle of the room, Dean clapping a hand on Derek's empty shoulder before turning to the desk. Derek took Stiles to his bed, laying him out and covering him with a blanket. Dean took up the marker left on the table, placing an x over each area they had searched and taking note of where the Argent family had been.

Castiel looked at Derek again, watching him sit on the floor by Stiles' head. He stretched his legs out in front of him, leaning back against the wall and crossing his arms across his chest for warmth. He was settling in to sleep. Derek had always been highly protective over Stiles, but it seemed to have grown. It was like he didn't trust Stiles' revive.

Like he didn't expect it to last.

"Cas," Dean hissed, pulling Castiel away from his train of thought.

Dean motioned Castiel to come, moving further away from the other two and towards the worn velvet couch. Castiel descended the few stairs and crossed the room slowly. Derek didn't take notice of him or, rather, didn't acknowledge that he was still listening to every step Castiel took through his home.

"Leave them alone," Dean instructed softly, putting his duffle onto the couch, before removing his jacket.

"They are alone," Castiel responded.

"I meant with the staring thing." Dean lied back, using his bag as a pillow and his jacket as a blanket. "And that doesn't mean you get to start staring at me." He shifted his position, crossing his arms and shut his eyes.

Castiel exhaled, moving away from Dean. It was times like these he wished he had the need for sleep. He had gone through every block of the town twice now and found no trace of angelic sigils or Navid apart from Stiles' home, but Dean and Derek had cleared the building of the expulsion symbols and Castiel had cleared it as well.

As Dean put it, Castiel's batteries were starting to run low. He was enjoying a chance to see within Derek's home, as bare as it was. His uncle had more objects in the attic than Derek. Even on the main floor, he kept every item of remote value, sentimental and monetary, hidden away and Castiel knew it was inappropriate to take them out.

He looked back at Dean. He was asleep, so was the rest of the room. Castiel moved to the desk, attempting to sit down silently in the chair there, but it creaked and both Dean and Derek opened a single eye that was instantly trained on him. Castiel forced a small smile in apology, taking a
moment to get comfortable, before settling in for the night, happy to watch over the others.

Dean and Derek both quickly drifted off again. They had each mastered the art of falling asleep near instantly. It was a necessity with how easily they were awoken. He looked at the map, seeing how few places they had left to check, but there was too much foot traffic in the remaining areas for Navid to use them. He liked space, giving him several opportunities for misdirection and escape.

Stiles rolled over hitting Derek in the face. The werewolf exhaled sharply, putting Stiles' hand back onto the bed and leant his head against the mattress. Castiel smiled as Stiles wriggled closer.

He had enjoyed watching their bond strengthen.
Derek woke up to the sound of Peter sneaking in. He listened for any changes in the heartbeats around him, but his uncle hadn't woken anyone else. Derek curled into the mattress, trying to let Stiles' slow breathing help him back to sleep. He was used to Peter sneaking around. Even as a kid, he remembered Peter sneaking around the house. Sometimes, Peter would sneak him out at night.

But Derek didn't have the luxury of indulging his uncle. He needed his sleep. So did everyone else in the room. They'd barely survived the last time they faced Navid. Their odds were better this time, but Navid was waiting for them and his hostages were people they knew, people they cared about.

Stiles whimpered suddenly, writhing in his sleep. Derek lifted his head, trying to figure out if he could calm Stiles down enough to keep everyone else asleep. Stiles had a white knuckle grip on his blanket and his eyes were screwed shut. His heart rate began speeding up and Stiles' breathing became rushed and uneven. He was clearly having a nightmare. Derek gently put a hand to Stiles' forehead, hoping that he could possibly draw out some of the emotional pain.

It didn't work. Stiles' eyes snapped open a second later and his hand shot to his wrist, gripping it tight. Derek rose higher, letting Stiles see his face, before putting a finger to his lips. Stiles didn't move, emotions bouncing between panic, confusion and anxiety. Derek nodded at the other two and Stiles looked, before calming down. Derek watched Stiles sink into the mattress, trying hard to relax again. Judging by the tightening grip on his wrist, it wasn't working.

Derek did what he could to hold onto Stiles in return, stretching his fingers so the tips could squeeze Stiles' forearm. Stiles looked down at their hands, before pulling on Derek's arm. Derek looked up, confused. Stiles nodded at the bed and Derek shook his head.

He was fine on the floor.

Stiles tugged on his arm again, making it clear he wasn't going to let this go.

'No,' Derek mouthed.

'Please,' Stiles mouthed back.

Derek rolled his eyes, but nodded. Stiles smiled, switching his grip to Derek's hand instead. He wasn't willing to let go, but it was enough to let Derek stand.

A loud bang echoed through the loft, setting off every instinct. Derek yanked Stiles' behind him, shifting quickly as he looked for the source of the noise. Peter was flat on his back, pinned beneath Castiel. Castiel had his blade out, pressed to Peter's throat and Peter had sunk instantly into submission. His body going lax and exposing his throat. Derek shifted his gaze to Dean. The hunter was on his feet, gun raised, cocked and aimed at Peter.

Derek shifted back, loosening his grip on Stiles.

"Hit him as much as you want, but try not to kill him," Derek grumbled, eyes still shut. "I don't
have a lot of family left."

"He makes a good punching bag." Stiles added, rubbing his eye as he moved to sit down on the bed again. "What time is it?"

"Three...ish," Dean replied, running a hand down his face as he lowered his gun.

Castiel stood up, looking as close to uncomfortable as Derek had ever seen him. Dean tried to intervene, offering him a hand up, but Peter had no interest in taking it. He was fixated on the angel's blade.

"I'd like to see that," Peter confessed, his lip twitching upwards into a half smirk.

"No," Castiel answered softly. He didn't trust Peter.

"Come on. We're all friends here."

Peter extended his hand towards Castiel, opening his palm, but Dean simply took it upon himself to haul the werewolf to his feet by his arm. He gave Peter a stern look, but Peter wasn't deterred.

"What are you doing here?" Dean asked, trying to keep Peter's focus.

"I considered this a second home while Derek was away," Peter answered, already looking at Castiel again. "You are on my territory."

"Let me guess, you peed all over it."

Peter laughed, flashing his teeth like the wolf he was. "A dog joke." He stepped towards Dean, getting closer than Castiel ever did. He kept moving in until Dean bent backwards to keep any semblance of space between them. "How original."

Dean drew his gun, pressing the tip to Peter's temple.

"And predictable too."

"I've been warned," Dean explained, taking a step back so he could straighten his spine.

"Really?" Peter pulled back, spinning towards Derek. "Telling hunters about your family again, dear nephew? When will you learn?"

Derek resisted the urge to glare, trying to maintain his unimpressed demeanour. He had begun to trust Dean more than he should, but he was running out of allies. "Maybe I just don't care if you live or die," Derek said, strolling slowly towards the others.

"Ah yes, but then I wouldn't be able to tell you where Navid is."

"Where?" Stiles asked faster than anyone else could, moving towards the older werewolf.

Dean crowded Peter, attempting to intimidate him, but there wasn't a trace of fear in Peter's eyes. Peter glared at Dean, eyeing the gun still in his hand. Dean forced a smile and tucked it back into his pants, showing Peter his now-empty hands.

"Oh, yes. Much better," Peter said sarcastically.

It pissed Dean off, but that wasn't the point. Peter was testing his boundaries. He wanted to see how far he could push the hunter before he pushed back.
Derek smacked the back of Peter's head. "Talk."

"You've still yet to offer me any incentive," Peter cooed.

"I'm not using you as a test subject to see what that blade does to our kind," Derek responded, nodding to Castiel's weapon.

"So it is special." Peter looked down at Castiel's hand again. "And here I was thinking it was just shiny."

Castiel locked eyes with the werewolf. The angel was smart enough to know Peter was lying.

"I'd enjoy having one of those in my collection," Peter remarked, eyes flickering over the smooth blade.

"Not a chance," Dean snapped, his hand itching to draw a weapon.

"Of course the hunter doesn't care that Isaac is missing a finger. I hope the boy can regrow one, because there will be no reattaching it."

"You saw them?" Stiles asked. "How's Scott?"

"I only saw the fashionable one, but I heard them both."

"All that talk about you and Scott being brothers and you never heard him howl." Peter clicked his tongue disapprovingly. "You should be ashamed."

Derek grabbed Peter by his shirt, slamming him into the column.

"What now?" Peter taunted, not fighting back in the slightest. "You'll never hurt me enough to make me talk and killing me will get you nowhere."

Derek heard Dean draw his blade, catching the glint of it in the corner of his eye.

"He might not, but you'd be amazed at what I can do," Dean threatened.

Peter raised his eyebrow at the hunter. But Castiel put a hand on Dean's shoulder, squeezing until he backed down. Castiel stood next to Derek and spun the silver weapon in his hand, before catching it by the blade and presenting it to Peter.

"Should have guessed you'd be the sensible one," Peter appreciated, accepting the blade. He twirled it between his fingers as easily as Dean did a switchblade or a pen.

"Well?" Dean pushed.

Peter glanced down at the hand Derek still had at him and Derek stepped back. Peter tucked the blade inside his coat and straightened his appearance. He was stalling, enjoying the glimpse of power he'd obtained.

"He's staying in our home," Peter finally said. "The one you got burned down the last time you trusted a hunter."

"Why didn't we look there?" Dean snapped.

"Because usually only people that have been there know where it is," Derek responded.

"That used to be the case, but someone burned it down and now it's in all the papers," Peter
reminded. "Honestly, Derek, this was an utter lapse in judgement. It amazes me that we're related."

"May I throw him out the window?" Castiel asked Dean.

Dean was about to say 'yes', but Derek gave him a warning look.

"Maybe later," Dean whispered.

Castiel shifted his weight. The angel really wanted to throw his uncle out the window. Even Peter could tell. He was suddenly standing much closer to Derek.

"Where is your home? I will scout ahead," Castiel proposed.

Derek nodded, moving towards the desk. Castiel followed, watching Derek unfold the map further to show the Beacon Hills Preserve.

"Whatever's left of the place is here."

Derek tapped a spot on the map and Castiel vanished the next instant.

"Any chance you'll stay here?" Derek asked, looking at Stiles.

"Nope. And I won't be staying on the sidelines this time either." Stiles picked up Dean's duffel and headed for the door. "Let's go."

Derek looked at Dean, who merely clapped a hand over his shoulder.

"He ain't dying before you," Dean promised.

**One Hour Later**

"I can't hear Scott," Derek said to Peter. He was trying to pick out the young alpha's heartbeat, but he was thrown off by the other werewolves.

"Perhaps we're too late," Peter suggested.

"I'm up to twenty-eight," Chris said as he lowered his binoculars, gaining everyone's attention. "Eighteen on the upper level, ten on the lower and the rest outside."

"And no sign of Scott or Isaac. They must have them in the basement," Allison added.

"And Navid? Have you seen him?" Derek pushed.

"Considering we don't know what he looks like, I don't know."

"Any squirmy guys that give you the creeps?" Stiles asked.

Allison's eyes flicked up towards Peter.

"Besides him," Derek guided.

Allison took her father's binoculars and handed them to Stiles. "Weirdest looking guy is on the second floor. Third window from the right."

She pointed and Stiles followed her finger with the binoculars. Derek narrowed his eyes, taking in
the same view. He felt sick. Navid was seated in what was once his father's study, his feet propped up what was left of the desk, and sucking the blood off his fingers.

"That's him," Stiles confirmed.

"Most of them are muscle mutts," Chris said, retaking control of the meeting. "One punch from them and you're as good as dead. They're slower, but a perfect shot will put them down. So, Allison and myself will take them out."

Dean rolled his eyes. "Second werewolf I killed was at a hundred yards."

"And how many years ago was that?" Allison asked with a smile.

Dean childishly forced one back, crossing his arms.

"There's a bunch of jumpy ones too," Allison explained. "They're just itching to start fighting and it looks like they'll be fast. I'd rather not waste arrows on them so Derek try to focus on them. Let the freak shows help you."

Dean was probably more offended than Castiel was.

But it was Peter that spoke up, "I'm not helping."

"Then why are you here?" Dean snapped.

"Him." Peter's eyes drifted over to Castiel.

It was almost flirtatious. The angel hated it. He stepped closer to Dean, trying to leave Peter's view, but the werewolf followed him, standing close. Derek sighed, grabbing his uncle by his shirt and tossing him towards the woods.

"If you're not helping, go home," Derek ordered.

"I won't be unhelpful. If one of them attack me, I'd would kill it."

"Let him come in. Maybe they'll kill him," Allison agreed.

"Hunters are so charitable today," Peter teased.

"Shut up," Derek instructed.

Peter mimed a zipper over his lips, before allowing them to resume their smirk.

"I won't be any help until I can get in there," Castiel stated.

Allison looked at Stiles. "Thought you said he was useful."

"Navid knows his loopholes. If you see any sigils spray-painted on the walls, break them. Bullet hole in the wood or a bloody smear. Whatever you can do, do it. Cas can clear these guys out easily, but not if he can't get in." Stiles took out another piece of paper with the banishment sigil and showed it to everyone. "If you see this one anywhere, warn the guy. And if you hear Cas warn you to shut your eyes, do it. It's worse than your flash grenades."

"Hunters will take the basement," Peter decided, speaking up again.

"No," Chris reacted.
"Navid's upstairs. That's where I'll be going," Dean seconded.

"I won't be going back into that basement and neither will my nephew. Not with hunters in the house."

"Guys, it doesn't matter who goes where," Stiles interjected. "No one here is the enemy."

"That's debatable," Peter retorted.

"It's fine," Allison accepted. "That's probably where Scott and Isaac are. My dad and I will clear out the basement."

"Cas, you can go with them," Stiles instructed.

Peter clenched his jaw, unhappy with the suggestion, but the angel didn't fight it.

"That puts me, Derek and Dean on the upper level."

"I think the angel should go with you," Peter argued, gaining everyone's attention again. "Hunters work well together and only one person here is severely lacking in combat training."

Stiles glared at the oldest werewolf. "I'm fine."

"No. Creep's got a point," Dean said. "Cas, go with them. Make sure the kid gets out alive."

"Really? There's a girl here and I'm still the top priority?"

"After what happened the last time, you get the angel body guard."

Stiles rolled his eyes, before glaring at Dean. "Navid's not going to kill me twice."

"What?" Allison looked at him.

"I was joking. It was just a close call is all."

"Liar," Peter chimed.

"Story time comes after that bad guy is dead. Now let's go."

Ten Minutes Later

She may have bothered Dean, but Allison's timing was perfect. Castiel watched as Dean, Derek and Chris crept up on the outdoor patrollers, taking them down silently by hand, blade or claw. If two were ever too close or one got suspicious, Allison had them silenced with a flawless shot to the throat and one of the others finished the job.

The three of them then snuck around to where the house ended. The fire had clearly been worse there. It was like a quarter of the house just collapsed and the rest was left barely standing. He could still see the charred edges beneath the plant life that had taken over more and more since the fire.

Dean and Derek rushed inside, trying to draw out as many monsters from their places of rest for the Argents to take down. They kept focused on the brutes and Derek snapped through the smaller ones. He didn't flinch at any of the successful blows, but Dean and Stiles had his back, shooting off
any werewolf before it could latched onto Derek and taking out what they could.

A werewolf leapt at Derek from the side, taking Derek down and tearing off what remained of his shirt. Stiles put a bullet in it and Dean hauled Derek up roughly, before the three of them resumed fighting. At this rate, it wouldn't take long to clear the first floor. But, though he could see Stiles and Dean both checking the walls for sigils, Castiel was still unable to enter.

And there were several reasons he wished to join the others.

He was finally beginning to understand the importance of personal space.

"Can I see your wings?" Peter asked, ignoring the fight all together and shifting even closer to Castiel.

"No," Castiel answered plainly.

"I could give you back your weapon..." Peter offered.

Castiel allowed his angelic blade to slide free and showed it off to Peter. He'd taken it back moments after they left Derek's home.

"Oh." Peter huffed, looking over Castiel's back once more.

"Are you aware no one likes you?" Castiel asked.

Peter shrugged, content to remain at Castiel's side.

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"Clear!" everyone sounded off in turn.

The main floor was theirs. Movement echoed from above, but that wasn't Dean's place. The Argents were already heading for the basement, but Dean and the others took a final second to look for the sigils. He saw the expulsion sigil tucked away in a corner and tore the wallpaper it was painted on top of so that Cas could come inside.

He gave Dean a grateful nod and they parted ways. Cas was the first upstairs, while the Argents made their way downstairs. Dean waited a moment longer, waiting for the white light to erupt, but Cas had a silver blade out and was taking wolves down the bloody way.

"Beautiful," Peter said, smiling darkly. "Don't you have somewhere to be?"

Navid crossed the top of the stairs and Dean wanted to follow, but Derek cut him off.

"Go! We got this!" Stiles shouted, racing after Derek.

"There's more sigils," Dean warned. "Watch for them."

"Got it!" Stiles promised throwing a blind wave backwards. "Help the others!"

Dean rushed after the Argents, following them to the basement. There was a teenager on the floor. Judging by the blood-soaked scarf around his neck, that was Isaac. The other, Scott, was tied down on a chair, shaking and in shock. There were several bodies scattered across the floor, each with their chests ripped out.

Two of the werewolves hurried to use Scott and Isaac as shields, but Isaac was too far away. He
was the first to drop. The one trying to crouch behind Scott was next. Allison just needed an extra moment to perfect her shot.

Allison was tackled from the side and she struggled to find any advantage, but the brawl was a thrashing mess. Her father tried to get a shot, but the werewolf didn't stop long enough for him to fire and he wouldn't risk hitting his daughter. Dean, however, was willing to give Allison a bullet wound if it meant the bullet could make it to the beast's head.

He fired quickly, but made sure it was only a flesh wound. He hauled her up afterwards, ignoring Chris's reaction. Allison had it right. She threw Dean a quick nod of gratitude, before rolling out of the way of the next one and picking up her bow in the process. Dean was impressed. Though, he'd never that admit it to anyone else.

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Werewolves were coming at them through every door. Chris had warned them that there were more up here, yet sending all the hunters to the basement still seemed like a brilliant idea. Stiles was in over his head. He knew that. Luckily, those around him knew it too. Derek and Cas pushed and pulled him, before any werewolf hit him.

Well, through most of it.

A massive brute. A werewolf that would put even Ennis to shame, charged through the hallway with a roar. He sent Derek through the wall, aiming right for Cas. Peter sidestepped him, happy to remain directly next to the action. Stiles tried to shoot him down, but the bullet missed his heart by two inches. He ploughed through Stiles, knocking him through the railing and back down to the first floor.

Stiles sat up with a groan and cracked his back. He dug through the debris, picking up his gun and returning to the fight. The brute was on the floor, neck snapped and lifeless. Derek was pinned down between rooms, but Cas was already there to help him, tossing the werewolf down the hallway like a sack of potatoes and making Peter duck to avoid getting hit. Stiles moved for Derek, helping him up.

Then, Navid emerged.

He didn't look intimidated. He didn't look scared. They were winning the fight and Navid didn't care in the slightest. Or perhaps it didn't matter. Then Navid shut a door and Stiles understood why he was still feeling so confident. He'd set up a banishment sigil and was slicing his palm to use it. Stiles lifted his gun, hurrying to aim. Navid tried to hit it first, but Stiles fired, pegging the circle and cracking the wood so it was useless.

Stiles smiled, proud of his shot only to have Navid snarl at him, fangs flashing at him. Stiles took aim again, but his clip was empty. Navid smiled at him, eyeing Stiles. His claws slipped free, but suddenly Derek was standing in front of him. Navid considered his options, before ducking into one of the rooms.

Derek growled, shoving past Stiles and charging after Navid.

"Derek!"

But he'd never been able to stop Derek. Stiles was torn. Cas was struggling to deal with the remaining wolves and Peter still showed no interest in helping.

"Go!" Cas bellowed.
Cas threw the next werewolf to come at him at Peter, forcing him to fight or die. Stiles nodded, racing after Derek.

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Allison was clearly looking for an opportunity to return the favour, but Dean was efficient and it wasn't long until the basement was cleared. The moment the last werewolf hit the ground, she was at Scott's side, rushing to free him and look him over for injury.

Chris knelt beside Isaac and checked him over quickly. He was still breathing and it looked like his injuries were slowly starting to heal. Chris slide his bag from his shoulder and removed a broadsword.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. What's that for?" Dean asked.

"Silver bullets and wolfsbane are great, but werewolves have always been tricky to kill. Some go down easy, others keep coming back. Their bodies repair, but they can't regrow." Chris brought his sword down on one of the dead werewolves, cutting it in half. "Only way to make sure a werewolf stays dead is to cut it in half." Chris lifted his bag, exposing the handle of a second sword. "Make sure the guy's dead when you walk away."

Dean took the sword, by its sheath and tied it to his belt.

"You always carry swords with you?"

"There's always a sharp one in my trunk."

"Would have guessed it was up your ass," Dean teased, smiling at his own joke.

"Go help the others," Allison said, unimpressed. "We've got this covered."

"See you for the bonfire."

Dean made his way back upstairs. Cas was overwhelmed. They were coming at him like wild animals. It wasn't like action movies where every monster waited for his turn and Cas could easily fling them aside. Cas tried to better his odds, killing where he could and throwing aside what he couldn't, but he was getting closer and closer to the corner.

And there was Peter wandering the hallway, looking over the walls. It looked like he'd grown bored at watching Cas's near-mortal fighting tactics and wanted to see the extent of Cas's powers. Dean rushed to help, picking off the werewolves he could before he was in the same predicament as Cas.

"Where's Derek?" Dean shouted, knocking a werewolf down with the blunt of his gun.

"With Navid."

Dean heard a loud crash coming from the room at the end of the hall. He and Cas might be outnumbered, but Navid was the only real threat. He'd had worse odds than this in Purgatory. All that mattered was keeping their teeth away. Though, like Purgatory, these had no interest in turning him.

Dean drew his sword, slicing open a werewolf and scaring the others into giving him an inch of breathing room. Dean opened his arms, inviting them back, inviting them to die.
Stiles had tried several times to get a shot off, but Navid was fast. Stiles had had practice with shooting a moving target, but he couldn't risk a bullet hitting Derek and Navid knew it. Even when he threw Derek into walls, or through, he was right after him, never giving Stiles enough time to aim. Each shot he dared to fire missed. He couldn't pull off the quick shots like the pros in the other room and it was showing more and more after each bruise Navid was inevitably leaving on Derek.

But then the tables turned.

Derek managed to get the upper hand, taking control of the fight. Stiles kept following them both with his gun, waiting for an opening to end this, but Derek shot him a glare. He'd regretted not killing Navid the first time and wasn't going to let this opportunity pass by. Stiles nodded, not flinching in the slightest as Derek beat Navid down until he was a bloody and bruised pile of limbs.

Derek stood, needing a moment to breathe and admire his victory. Navid spit out a mop of blood, before bursting out in laughter.

"She was so convinced you weren't enough," Navid laughed, his arms unable to support his own weight. "Guess she was wrong." Navid tried to laugh, but merely choked on his own blood. "I'm going to look for her in the afterlife."

Derek snapped, slamming his fist deep into Navid's chest. Stiles watched him turn human, eyes wide. Derek had hit his heart.

"I didn't know what she was. I just wanted her to be my good girl." Navid stroked Derek's thigh. "I touched her here."

Stiles saw Derek's muscles squeeze and Navid cringed.

"She didn't like it either."

Derek squeezed harder and Navid laughed, more blood and black leaking out of his mouth.

"I didn't care. Still don't. This is what I love." Navid squeezed Derek's thigh, leaning as close as he could. "I never had someone bite me so hard."

Navid surged forward, causing a sickening squelch noise and a loud crack in his own body, but he'd achieved his goal. He sunk his teeth into Derek's neck and bit down hard. Stiles saw the blood, watching Navid's fangs cut deeper into Derek's flesh.

Derek growled, struggling to get free, but it took both him and Stiles to get Navid off. Stiles shoved Navid to the ground, before steadying Derek. Blood was rushing from his neck, but Derek was still more concerned with keeping Stiles behind him and away from Navid. Derek swayed slightly and clamped a hand over his neck, applying pressure to his wound.

"She thought she killed me too."

"Too?" Stiles asked.

But Navid was too focused on Derek.

"Think she'll be my good girl in the afterlife?" Navid asked, before surrendering to death.
White light spilled in from the hallway and more bodies dropped. Dean burst through the door bloody and a broadsword in his hand.

"Do it," Derek said, staggering.

Stiles grabbed Derek's arm, just able to keep him on his feet. The guy weighed a couple hundred pounds. Stiles still didn't know how he kept them both afloat all those years back.

"Cas! You wanna help the werewolf out?" Dean called, coming to help Stiles keep Derek standing.

Cas came in, followed closely by Peter, who was doing everything to hide the fact that he was beaming. But it didn't do a damn thing. He'd seen all he wanted and loved every minute of it. But that didn't mean he was going to pass up the opportunity to see this. Cas held his hand over Derek's wound and light sealed it shut.

"Thanks," Derek said, able to stand alone again.

Dean smacked Derek's shoulder and stepped back. He brought the sword down, cutting Navid in half. Stiles didn't flinch. He didn't feel nauseous or like he was going to pass out.

He felt relieved.

At first.

"He was talking about Laura," Stiles said.

Derek nodded.

"And who else?" Stiles took his eyes off Navid and looked over at Derek. "Who else did she kill?"

Derek looked offended. "No one."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes. Laura probably left him for dead like we did."

But Stiles wasn't so sure.

"Could we get some help down here?" Allison yelled.

"Scott," Stiles remembered, rushing out the door and down to the main floor.

Allison had just come out of the basement. One of Scott's arms was pulled over her shoulder and she was completely supporting his weight. Scott twisted free the moment Stiles was close enough and literally fell into Stiles' arms. Stiles caught him, both of them hugging each other as tightly as they could.

"I gotcha, buddy," Stiles said, hooking his chin on Scott's shoulder. "I got you."

"Always said I wouldn't survive without you," Scott joked weakly.

Stiles laughed, squeezing Scott tighter. "You're stuck with me now, that's for sure."

Everyone else came down. Scott and Isaac clearly had it worse, but Cas and Peter looked like the only two coming out unharmed. Although, Stiles had seen Cas go through enough that he knew the only reason he was still standing was because he was an angel.
"You up for helping these two walk on their own?" Stiles asked, still not letting go of Scott.

Cas stepped towards them, but Scott just twisted free, almost falling down for his efforts.

"Isaac first," he said, clinging to Stiles to remain standing. "Please."

Cas nodded, moving to help Isaac, who wasn't even conscious yet. Scott swayed again and Stiles had to fix his grip to keep him up. Derek came to help, getting a weak smile of thanks from Scott.

"Did you have to go through this too?" Scott asked Derek, squinting at the light coming from Isaac's direction.

"Depends what he made you do," Derek responded, looking Scott over.

"Well, there's what he did and what he tried to do."

Cas came back and put a hand to Scott's head and finally Scott was able to stand on his own.

"I told you he was useful," Stiles said, noticing Allison's impressed face.

One Hour Later

Dean tossed the last half body on the bonfire and stepped back. He wiped the sweat off his brow and settled in beside Derek, who was still staring at the final remains of Navid. He was barely more than a skull, but Dean knew that wouldn't help the nightmares. He still didn't know the details, but he recognized the expression on Derek's face when he asked him about what Navid had done the last time.

"Such a waste," Peter said, watching the pile of bodies shrink under the flames.

Dean rolled his eyes, starting back to the car.

"It was the right thing to do," Derek replied, turning to follow.

"But not the best." Peter smiled at his nephew. "How many followers did you say he had?"

"There's a reason why I didn't call you."

It was just the three of them left. The others were already at the hospital. Stiles was itching to see his father now that everything was over and Scott needed to see his mother. Dean had barely spent any time with the pup and he could tell he was a good kid.

"Can't we let the psychopath walk home?" Dean sniped. He was exhausted and it was beyond obvious that only an idiot would trust Peter.

"Remarkably, I believe I have the smallest body toll. Maybe that's why I have the least amount of guilt over my actions." Peter strode by Dean with an easy smile. "But I'll let you have the front seat. Maybe I'll try and catch up with you two."

Dean forced a smile, waving a blade at Peter, before sinking into the backseat. Peter shimmed into the front, happy as ever, even with a knife aimed at his back. Derek climbed in as well, starting his engine and driving out of the woods.

Peter tapped a single claw on the dash, watching the trees pass through the headlights. Derek

...
glanced back at Dean. He was just as irritated as Dean was.

"I should have bitten Stiles," Peter said suddenly. "He always proves to be more useful. Certainly more perceptive."

"How have the Argents not killed him?" Dean asked.

"Because I beat them to it and he hasn't given them reason to since."

Dean leaned forward, making sure to get uncomfortably close to Peter. "If anything happens to that kid, I will personally come and take my time cutting you in half."

"Will you bring the angel?"

Dean snapped. He was sick of Peter standing by and letting everyone else struggle to even survive. His obsession with Cas just pushed him over the edge. Dean drew his hand back, ready to stab the older werewolf, but Derek veered suddenly, throwing him to the other side of the back bench. He lost hold of his knife and Derek quickly picked it up, tossing it in his door pocket. Dean glared at him, but let it go. Peter was family after all

"I don't remember much after the fire," Peter continued. "Mostly I remember the agony. I was sure I was going to die. My body couldn't heal all the damage. But I remember seeing it try."

"What are you talking about?" Derek asked.

"At the hospital. I would wake up for moments at a time. The walls weren't always white."

"You guys heal with that black guck. Big deal," Dean groaned, wishing the guy would just shut up.

"I wasn't the only one in the room."

Ten Minutes Later

It took a shot of midazolam to get Stiles' dad back to sleep. Stiles still wasn't sure who hugged him tighter. His father or Scott in all his werewolf glory. Cas had made certain his dad had a clean bill of health, but Melissa wasn't taking any chances. With his dad or Stiles. Melissa had already decided Stiles was staying with them overnight. He didn't mind. He'd missed Scott and Melissa as much as he'd missed his dad. They were a family, even if it wasn't true on paper or they didn't live in the same house.

Allison and Isaac were getting snacks, while Chris was warning Melissa about Dean. Stiles was just grateful that he knew Melissa well enough that he recognized the smile on her face. She gave it to spoiled patients that thought they should come first with their minor injuries or sicknesses. It was polite and convincing, but she couldn't disagree more. She, like Scott, always wanted to believe the best in people and had been let down in the past, but she never let anyone else control her opinion of people.

Cas was nearby, watching out the window for Dean and Derek. They were taking their time, but Stiles didn't mind he was just happy to be sitting next to Scott, leaning against him. He could feel it in Scott too. They'd been joined at the hip since preschool. They'd gone to the same summer camps and spent almost every holiday together. They'd survived everything from cooties to his mom's death and everything in between.
Scott was beginning to nod off, leaning more and more against Stiles. They didn't have a ride out of the hospital. Chris wasn't going anywhere fast and the others still hadn't shown up. Stiles had expected to pass out the moment everything was over and sleep for a week. But his brain wouldn't shut off.

Something wasn't right.

Twenty Minutes Later

Derek held back when they arrived at the hospital. Peter disappeared into the shadows, having no interest in celebrating with hunters. Dean may not have understood the implications of what Peter was suggesting in the car, but Derek knew exactly what Peter was talking about. Peter never missed a single word, especially when he wasn't in the room.

Derek made his way to the coma ward. Peter had been moved there when he first turned catatonic. The wing was down to the minimum staff by eight o'clock. Derek waited around the corner from the reception desk. He knew the woman on duty. She always worked evenings to get away from her children and always needed plenty of coffee to make it through her shift.

Which was exactly why Derek liked her.

Within ten minutes, she was slinking off to the bathroom. There were so few visitors that it rarely mattered. Derek took her seat and was quickly reminded of the second reason he liked her. She never logged out. Derek went into the hospital records, searching for patients that were admitted the same week as the fire.

He printed off the names and their patient numbers. It was a long list, but Derek didn't want to have to come back. Derek took the page and made certain there was no trace of him. He looked over the list on his way to the records room, scanning the names quickly.

"There you are," Melissa acknowledged, startling Derek.

He looked up to see Dean and Melissa chatting over a couple cups of coffee. Melissa handed her cup to Dean and approached Derek, hugging him gently.

"Thank you," she whispered, squeezing him softly, before stepping back.

Derek forced a smile, trying not to draw attention to the fact that he hadn't been celebrating with the others. He looked at Dean, hoping the hunter would provide him with an excuse to leave, only to find out he wasn't welcome. Dean was nodding at him to leave and Derek's jaw tightened. He'd watch Dean leave bars with plenty of women. Derek typically appreciated it because Dean always slept like a log afterwards.

But Dean had his sights set on Scott's mother.

"Scott's looking for you," Derek said.

Dean's eyes narrowed, but he hid his anger the moment Melissa turned around, smiling at her like the charming son of a bitch he was. Derek ignored their pleasantries and dropped his attention to his list, waving haphazardly once he heard Melissa begin to walk away. He also ignored Dean swatting his shoulder.

"What the hell was that?" Dean growled.
"She's too good for you," Derek responded automatically, flipping to the next page.

"Most women are, but that doesn't mean I can't make them forget that for a night."

Derek opened his mouth to reply, when he recognized a name. "It can't be."

"What?" Dean reacted.

But Derek didn't answer. He was barely able to keep himself from running the rest of the way to the records room.

He arrived to find the door unlocked and pushed it open silently, moving towards the sound of papers moving. Dean was behind him the next second and Derek lifted a hand, telling the hunter to shut up before he dared open his mouth.

Stiles was on the floor with a medical file spread out around him. He was a wreck and Derek quickly came to the realization that Peter had been right. Derek moved towards him, crouching down in front of him. He reached out to put a hand on Stiles', but the kid shot backwards, his hand moving as far as possible from Derek.

"You're a liar," Stiles breathed, eyes wet with hurt and anger.

"I didn't know," Derek promised.

"How could you not know?" Stiles snapped, shoving Derek down as he stood.

"Take it easy!" Dean ordered, forcing Stiles away from Derek before he could lash out further.

"You would have been here," Stiles insisted, anger taking over. "Peter was the only one to make it out alive and there's no way you wouldn't have been at his side."

"Laura kept me away," Derek explained, staying down. "She thought it'd be too hard for me to see him."

Stiles swallowed, still worked up and distrusting. It had been a long time since Stiles looked at Derek like that. He noticed Dean crouching down out of the corner of his eye, picking up the file. It didn't take him long to figure out why Stiles was so upset.

It was the patient file for Claudia Stilinski.

Twenty Minutes Later

"She said it was an accident," Castiel explained, sitting with Stiles in the empty cafeteria.

He had refused everyone else's company. Had the circumstances been better, Castiel would have felt privileged. But the boy was pale and wouldn't even look at the angel.

"Your mother had stopped by the motel they were staying at. She brought waffles," Castiel specified with a smile. He hoped that fact might draw a reaction.

But Stiles appeared catatonic.

"Laura was trying to leave town. She wanted to take Derek away. But your mother insisted she stay. That the sheriff would surely find who was responsible. She even offered to take them in, but
Laura was convinced leaving was for the best. So, your mother hugged her." Castiel paused, working hard to remember every detail Laura had given him. "She hugged her tight and waited until Laura relaxed.

"Laura hadn't even realized what she'd done. It wasn't until Laura stepped back that she saw her claws leave your mother's body. She apologized, but your mother didn't mind. There was no reason to think she'd done anything wrong. They both thought it was just a scratch."

"Did Derek know?" Stiles grit.

"I don't know where Derek was. Laura didn't mention him so I assume he wasn't there. I don't think Derek knew."

"But you did?"

"She never told me a name. Laura only told me that she was a wife and mother and would never forgive herself for ruining someone's family the way hers had been ruined. She still carried the guilt of this in Purgatory."

Stiles' jaw clenched and he shook his head. Castiel recognized his reaction, his expression. Dean had it on more than one occasion. He wanted to hate Laura. Perhaps, he even did. But it was difficult to despise someone that was dead. Without Laura, he didn't have anyone to direct his anger at.

There was a knock on the door and they looked over to see Scott. Stiles turned away.

"He's worried about you," Castiel said. "They all are."

Stiles swallowed, trying to calm down, but it wasn't working. "I never thought he was a monster."

"He's not."

"And Laura was?" Stiles glared at Castiel.

"It was a mistake."

"A mistake that killed my mother."

Castiel regretted that he was the one here. Dean was much better with words. Stiles was still so angry and Castiel didn't know how to help. Stiles shoved backwards, getting to his feet. He paced, once again trying to calm himself, but it seemed to have the opposite affect. Stiles dragged his hands through his hair and clawed at the back of his head, dropping into another chair and holding his head down.

The door opened softly and Scott came in. Stiles was too worked up to notice. Castiel remained silent about the matter, watching the young werewolf approach Stiles slowly.

"Stiles?" Scott asked calmly.

Stiles snapped to his feet again, putting ample space between them. "No."

Scott looked devastated by Stiles' reaction. "I'm just--"

"Don't." Stiles backed further away from his friend. "Get-get out."

"Did you want--"
"I want you to get out!" Stiles shouted.

Scott stared at him, dumbfounded. When Scott didn't move, Stiles did. Castiel got up, following him into the hallway, only to have more people console him. Stiles shied away from it all, squirming away from every hand and sympathetic smile. He went into his father's room and locked the door behind him.

One Hour Later

Stiles sat with his dad for a long time. Cas had already made sure that he was the picture of health, apart from his high cholesterol. Not even Cas could cure his father's addiction to burgers and curly fries. Melissa still insisted that he spend the night. Werewolves and Kanimas were one thing, but getting anyone to believe in angels was a struggle.

Stiles always prided himself on being the smart one. Sure, he wasn't going to Harvard like Lydia, but he always knew who the bad guy was. He knew who he could trust. He knew who his friends were. He knew things.

Or at least he thought he did.

He thought his mother died of some freak medical anomaly. Stiles shifted, scrubbing his hands down his face. He remembered the black vomit. He remembered wiping it from her chin and her joking about actually liking the crayon sandwiches Stiles used to make when he was three. He should have made the connection. He'd seen werewolves choke on it enough times.

But Lydia never did.

Stiles stared at his dad. He was out cold and Stiles didn't know what to do. He knew it was a mistake, but that didn't make him feel better. It didn't fix things. It didn't change the facts. It changed everything, even though he didn't want it to. He had a plan. He and Scott were going to go to college. They were going to be brothers again.

But he didn't see a brother.

Not anymore.

Thirty Minutes Later

Derek watched Dean pace. His steps were slow and steady. Derek tried to focus on them, but his attention kept drifting into the sheriff's room. Stiles wasn't saying anything. His breathing had slowed down, but his heart was still racing and anger poured out of the room.

"You can't take it personally," Derek overhead Allison say, pulling him out of his headspace.

He looked over, watching Allison hug Scott tightly. He could tell Scott felt the hurt and anger as clearly as he did. They whispered a few more goodbyes, before Allison withdrew. Scott watched her leave with her father and came to sit across from Derek, hunching over his knees.

Silence resumed. Melissa was called back to the floor, taking them down to four. Castiel was leaning on the wall across the hall, unmoving and seemingly calm, but Derek had finally begun to notice the subtle changes in the angel's disposition. He glanced up at Dean. The hunter's arms were
still crossed tightly over his chest. He was just as worried about Stiles as the rest of them.

Twenty Minutes Later

"He's never looked at me like that," Scott said suddenly. "Not even on those first full moons."

"Because he forgot what you were," Dean responded.

They all stared at him. They each wanted to argue that statement, but they couldn't. Dean knew what Stiles was going through. He'd gone through it himself plenty of times.

"It's damn near impossible for a human to kill someone by accident." Dean sat down next to Derek so he could face Scott. "Most of the things I kill aren't evil. I call them that because it makes things easier. It's what I see. Because it doesn't change the fact that there are things in this world that need killing. It's my job to figure out which things go on what side." Dean looked over at Derek for a moment. "I know it ain't black and white, but there isn't always time for shades of gray. And, sometimes, it's too damn hard."

"He's my best friend," Scott said, insulted.

"Might be a while before you're his again."

Scott got up, beginning to pace anxiously. Dean leant back in his chair, folding his hands over his stomach. He twiddled his thumbs, shifting into an internal debate. But it wasn't long until Dean was leaning towards Derek.

"You doing okay?" Dean asked, dropping his voice in hopes that no one but Derek heard him.

"I'm fine."

"Dude--"

"I'm fine." Derek looked over at Dean.

He was lying. He knew. Dean knew. He was just in denial that the others knew. Derek had never been one to share his feelings anyway so Dean gave him a sympathetic nod and didn't push any harder.

The door opened, but Stiles didn't cross the threshold. He looked calm, but that wasn't the case. His hand was shaking and he was clearly forcing himself to breathe slowly.

"Can we talk?" he asked, barely managing to look at Dean.

"Yeah." Dean got up, going inside with Stiles.

Stiles shut the door, struggling with the lock.

"You realize that won't stop them from hearing us, right?"

"I can't stay here," Stiles said flatly.

Dean knew it was coming, but he still wasn't ready. He opened his mouth to cut him off, but Stiles was faster.
"I want to go with you when you leave," Stiles continued.

Dean stared at him, seeing the desperation in his eyes, but he couldn't do it. He couldn't ruin Stiles life. "No."

"Dean, I--"

"No." Dean crouched down in front of Stiles, sitting on his heels and looking up at Stiles. "I dropped out of high school for this. I pulled Sammy out of college to go hunting with me. I'm not ruining your life before it begins. So, you're going and you're staying there."

Stiles shook his head. "I'm not."

Dean ran a hand down his face. He knew he couldn't force the kid to go to college. He saw his real options and hated them both.

"Don't make me the guy that ruins your life. You got a hell of a lot more going for you than I ever did. You don't want to be me."

"I can't..." Stiles took a deep breath, looking at the floor. "I can't be around werewolves. Not right now."

He didn't know what to do. He'd made Derek a promise. Several. Derek was a dead man if Dean left him. But the others didn't understand all of what was happening here. Stiles wasn't just asking to get out of town. It wasn't just space he was craving. He'd do that on his own. He wanted to go hunting.

Dean sighed, deciding to try his luck on a different path. "I'm taking Derek with me."

Stiles' eyes narrowed. "Why?" He wasn't angry, just confused.

"Does it matter? I'll chase his creep of an uncle out of town and this place can be all yours."

Stiles shook his head, tears creeping out of his eyes. "If I stay here, I'm going to hate them." He wiped his eyes, struggling to swallow a breath. "I don't want to hate my brother. I don't want to hate Derek. I just--" Stiles choked, working himself up again, but Stiles took a deep breath, holding himself together. "Only one thing makes sense right now and I'm going to do it. With or without you."

And that there was the scary part. Dean had taught Stiles plenty, but no where near enough to survive on his own. He still needed protecting.

Dean nodded and watched relief flood over Stiles. He let out a laugh, smiling as a couple more tears slid free. He tried hard to say 'thank you', but it didn't come out. Dean squeezed Stiles' knee and stood up, far from relieved.

"You're giving your dad a proper goodbye," Dean decided. "You're telling him the truth."

Stiles nodded. He knew it was fair, but Dean was just hoping that maybe the kid's father could talk him out of leaving. But he knew he was kidding himself. Dean made his way back outside and could tell instantly that all three of them were listening. Scott looked devastated. He felt bad for the kid. Stiles had gone on and on about him. The two of them sounded even closer than Dean and Sam had ever been. Derek's chair, alternatively, was empty.

He was gone.
"He asked me to tell you, he understands," Cas said, approaching Dean. "And it was never your problem." He put a hand on Dean's shoulder, steadying the hunter.

**Five Hours Later**

Derek stared at the Impala from within his apartment. It had been parked there for a couple minutes and no one had come out. He could hear Dean pushing Stiles to say goodbye, but he refused. Eventually, Dean gave up, getting out of the car alone. Castiel appeared in front of the hunter.

"Give us a minute, would you?" he heard Dean say. The hunter made it two steps before turning around. "And don't count to sixty and show up." He made it two more steps before turning around again. "And don't eavesdrop."

"Because that'll work," Derek muttered, gaining the angel's attention.

He backed away from the window, letting his claws slide free and going to one of the support columns. He carved the sigils to keep angels out in every way possible. He didn't need nor want Castiel knowing about his deal. He didn't want Castiel watching over him.

He just wanted a clean break.

The door slid open behind him and Derek finished off the final sigil, before letting his claws vanish. Derek turned looking at Dean. He'd left the hospital to avoid all this. He saw the pity in Dean's eyes and hated it. He didn't need pity.

Derek scoffed, stepping slowly towards Dean. "There was only one choice. You and I both know that."

"Derek, I--"

"It's okay." He chucked weakly, trying to smile. "Would have been a long shot anyway, right?"

"I'm going to figure something out."

"You're going to do nothing." Derek looked Dean in the eye, swallowing every sign of remorse, because he needed Dean to know something. "This isn't your problem." He finally managed to force a smile. "Never was," Derek concluded, backing away.

"Derek..."

"Make sure he doesn't die before me." Derek took his book and moved for his bed.

"Hey, no." Dean grabbed him by the shoulder, slamming Derek into a column and pinning him in place with a hand fisted in his shirt. "This ain't done." He shoved at Derek's chest, trying to get a reaction. "I'm not letting things end like this."

"You're going to walk out that door and forget about me." Derek pried Dean's hand off, putting space between them. "He needs you."

"So do you."

"I don't need anyone." Derek backed up further. He just wanted this to be over. "Go."
"I'm coming back."

Derek shook his head. "Don't." Derek swallowed, dropping his book. "Don't-- Just don't."

Dean sighed and Derek saw the pity vanish. The space between them went next. Derek tried to put it back, tried to keep himself away from Dean, but the hunter yanked him into a hug and didn't let go. Derek struggled for a minute, but Dean just clapped one hand on his back and the other gripped his head, holding him in place.

"I'm coming back," Dean repeated.

Derek believed him and he hated it. He couldn't hear the falter in his heartbeat. He couldn't find any proof that Dean was lying. Derek nodded, letting out a shaky breath. Dean patted his back roughly, before stepping back. His eyes were wet, but his jaw was still a hard line.

"If you run, I'll hunt you down." Another promise that sounded so convincing.

"I don't run."

"Good." Dean cleared his throat, rubbing his jaw.

"Don't tell him."

"I won't."

Derek held his ground, watching the hunter leave. He went back to the window, watching Dean emerge. Castiel pushed him for answers, but Dean just snapped at him to get in the car. The angel obliged, climbing in the backseat. Dean spared a final look at Derek, offering a final promising nod, before sinking into the front seat and speeding off.

Derek let out a slow breath, before turning around to look at his empty loft.

It had been a long time since things were this quiet.

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Chapter End Notes

- season two will begin in the fall.
- spoilers/sneak peaks, if asked, would come through my tumblr.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!