

Under the Songbird's Wing

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Summary

Captivity easily destroys the will of escape. It can break the fiercest of animal. It can strip the most regal man and woman down to nothing but animal needs.

Captivity can, if met with unwavering determination, shape a person into something unimaginable.

Stiles is sixteen when he's captured. Stiles's first thought is, "I won't die here."

Chapter 1: The Mysterious Disappearance of Stiles Stilinski

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stones and twigs snapped under Peter's bleeding feet. Adrenalin narrowed his vision, his breath heaved out in ugly bursts, and all he could taste was ash and dirt. He was stripped of any complexity, all he cared about was *run, escape—at any cost*.

He stopped when the gashes on his feet were too deep for him to continue. He snarled, urging his body to heal faster as he limped across dewy grass. His vision slowly widened out from the narrow tunnel into a full picture. The half-crescent moon glowed and the *stars*—God when was the last time Peter had *seen* the stars?—glittered ethereally above him.

Tears fell because he was outside, the grass was cold against his bleeding flesh, and the *wind*—it tasted of flowers, summer, and approaching rain. He let out an uneven cacophony of sobs and laughter, and when he was able to get himself under control he realized that he was not only outside from his prison, but he was also by a house. A house with lights on, with food, and with a *phone*.

He ran to the porch and clawed through the screen door. The living room was empty. Peter's heartbeat and hunger deafened him to anything else.

The kitchen was small and worn in a way that the old Peter Hale would have turned his nose up at—but now it was a beautiful sanctuary, more breathtaking than the Sistine Chapel. Peter ripped the refrigerator open and grabbed as much food as he could.

Orange juice spilled down his chin as he greedily sucked it out of the carton. Lettuce fell to the floor when he ate salad by the fistful. He coughed around globs of yogurt. He managed to swallow a burst of flavor (strawberry—he had a feeling it was strawberry) when he saw a birthday cake.

Happy 16th Birthday Stiles!

It was covered in an explosion of rainbow sprinkles. It was a colorful orgy of sugar and artificial flavoring. Memories bombarded him of off-key singing, his nieces and nephew on his lap as they waited for their cake. He shook himself free of the memories that seemed to come from a faraway life, a movie that had deteriorated to the point where all the images were distorted. Peter gently moved the cake aside so he could reach for the loaf of bread behind it.

A floorboard creaked behind him.

Peter whirled around, eyes red and fangs out to see a boy across the room with a shotgun aimed at Peter's chest. The boy's heartbeat spiked. Peter had forgotten the scent of fear. It curdled the food in his stomach into sour clay. Despite his pungent terror the boy never let his grip falter on his weapon.

“You must be Stiles.” The boy’s eyes widened, his heart racing even faster, and Peter quickly continued. “I found the cake—the birthday cake.”

Peter had been robbed of his civility. The first time he’d had contact with someone other than his fellow captives and he was too broken to be a gentleman. Fuzzy memories of social protocols now seemed alien. The boy didn’t move—he barely breathed. Peter’s heartbeat slogged as he cleared his throat.

“I’m sorry.” Peter wished he knew how to adjust this body to seem less menacing while yogurt dripped off his fingers. “Please, I need help, I’ve—I’ve been held captive for...”

Peter’s voice crumbled under years of silence. The boy raked his eyes over Peter’s greasy hair, dirty fingernails, and wild beard.

God Peter looked like a maniac. He *felt* like a maniac.

“Okay.” The boy spoke, his brown eyes steady and his voice a siren’s promise. “My Dad is the Sheriff. He can help.”

The boy was, in fact, Stiles and it was his birthday. He kept the shotgun in his hands. Stiles served him leftovers. He sat at the opposite end of the table and watched Peter devour cold lasagna with his hands while Stiles kept his shotgun on his lap. The kid dug in his pocket and produced... a phone unlike Peter had ever seen, a tablet with a screen that lit up with no discernable buttons.

The more Peter ate the more he grasped just how far he’d fallen from who he used to be.

Peter used to be *Peter Hale*—the Hale Second, a sarcastic seducer so slick he’d enchant James Bond. He paused as Stiles activated the tablet-phone’s speakers so they both heard it ring. Bits of meat and cheese fell from his nails and Peter felt a brutal wave of self-loathing close around his throat.

He heard Stiles speak, his voice warbling like he was underwater. The “*Dad there’s a man in the house—wait, Dad—*” barely registered as Peter glanced down at his arms, how his skin had scaly, dry patches, and how he must smell. He didn’t remember the last time he showered. None of the captives did.

“It’s fine just—”

Stiles blew out a long breath. He reached over and touched Peter’s wrist. Peter recoiled, the chair screeching as he threw himself away from the physical contact. Stiles yanked his hand back, his grip on the shotgun tightening though he didn’t take it off his lap.

Peter sucked in air and he *hated* how loud Stiles’s heartbeat was. He hated how his touch was both revolting and euphoric.

“I’m sorry.” Stiles swallowed, his eyes tight with concern and fear. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—to startle you.” Peter struggled to get his breathing under control as Stiles pointed to the

phone in the middle of the table. “Can you talk to him? It will—it would be better if you talk.”

So my Dad doesn't think you're crazy and are going to kill me, Stiles didn't say. Peter nodded, digging his nails into his palms.

“My name is Peter Hale and I've been—I've been held captive along with two others. Satomi Ito and Deucalion Blackwood are back there, please—”

“Easy, Mr. Hale.” Stiles's father's world-weary voice poured into the air like desert sand. *“I'm ten minutes away. We've got half the squad coming.”* Peter could hear the Sheriff moving, the murmurs of others around him and cars starting. *“Stiles, I want you to keep me on speaker, I'm going to be driving.”*

“You got it, Dad. See you soon.”

He dragged the phone to him. He heard the Sheriff bark orders and Peter wiped his fingers off roughly with a napkin.

“Thank you.” Peter could count on one hand how many times he'd expressed sincere gratitude. In Stiles's small kitchen he meant it the most—from the bottom of the heart he didn't know remained. “I'm sorry I ruined your birthday.”

“Oh, don't worry about that.” Stiles snorted, his back hitting his chair as he smiled, crooked and exhausted. “The celebration isn't until the weekend.” He tapped on his phone idly, his posture relaxing piece by piece. “You'll be okay. My dad will be here soon and we'll get this all sorted out, all right, Mr. Hale?”

For that small sliver of space and time Peter had hope. The refrigerator hummed as Stiles pointedly stared at Peter's claws.

“Will you be able to, uh,” he cleared his throat, “hide those? I'm assuming you won't be ready for the questions those will bring.”

“You assume correctly.”

Peter smiled and later he'd be shocked that he remembered *how* to form the expression. His claws fully retracted as the boy smiled back. He'd think of that kitchen, of the chairs that wobbled and the Batman placemats—and he'd think of it as a lost paradise.

A few rooms over a window shattered. Seconds later the front door splintered against an oppressive boot. Peter watched the echoes of approaching violence hit Stiles as he stood, his fair skin paling to a sickly grey. Peter ran forward and grabbed Stiles's wrist. He felt the boy's pulse against his palm. Stiles pulled Peter up the stairs, shotgun in hand. He slammed into his room and locked the door before he went to the window. He yanked it open as Peter's captors clambered up the stairs after them.

Stiles stepped out of the window and onto the roof.

“Come on!”

Stiles shrieked, holding his hand out to Peter. Peter took it, trembling. The door crumbled behind him and Peter heard Stiles choke down fear. Peter felt the shotgun blast burn through the air and he turned to see the old, muzzled monster take a hit to the jaw.

It yowled, black, syrupy liquid oozing from the wound. The monster's eyes flashed blue and Peter could hear the other, the *woman*, shout something from the doorway.

Stiles was frozen, watching the old monster writhe on the ground, muscles bulging. Peter grabbed Stiles.

"It won't stay down for long."

Peter's vision tunneled. He ignored how his hands stung when he picked Stiles up and leapt off the roof.

Peter Hale had grand plans to expand the Hale Pack to make them a staple on the East Coast. Peter now only had plans of running, of getting to the road to meet the police. He landed, his teeth rattling painfully in his gums. Stiles slid out of his grasp, his hands gripping Peter's shoulders so tight his knuckles were ivory white.

"This way," Stiles whispered, "this way—" The shotgun had fallen to the side and Stiles went for it, his hands shaking. "Fuck, I left my phone on the table—"

A shot cracked from the window and Stiles leapt back right before the woman fired a second time. Peter felt the poisoned metal sink into his shoulder. He fell with a howl, trapping Stiles underneath his dead weight. Peter's eyes blurred and his skin burned with endless fury and despair.

Stiles desperately tried to suck in air against Peter's weight.

"Fuck," the teenager sobbed, "*fuck*." Peter heard the woman laugh and the *thing* growl. Stiles couldn't budge and Peter smelled the salt in his tears. "Peter, they're coming."

Peter heard their boots on the stairs. He knew what they'd do to Stiles. He knew what happened to people they couldn't use. The ghost of his old self whispered. *Kill him*, the Hale Second commanded, *kill him so he won't be killed by their hands. You'd be doing the boy a great service. It's the honorable thing to do.* Peter shakily propped himself up on one elbow, his claws gripping Stiles's shoulder as he eyed the boy's jugular.

Stiles squeezed his deep brown eyes shut.

"*Fuck*."

They were coming, their stench creeping closer.

"Stiles." The boy opened his eyes, tears streaking down his pale cheeks. "Stiles, they'll kill you if they don't view you as necessary." Peter dragged one knee up, his body shaking around the bullet that blazed in him. "I can—I can make you necessary."

Stiles nodded.

“Do it.”

Peter took Stiles’s dominant hand and twisted it to expose his inner wrist. Peter struggled to withdraw his claws and push back his fangs. He vaguely heard himself apologize right before he sank his blunt, human teeth into Stiles’s tender flesh.

Stiles *wailed*. Peter closed his eyes but it did nothing to block out the sound.

Blood spilled into Peter’s mouth. He felt the woman’s nails dig into his shoulder and Peter pulled back.

“He’s my mate,” Peter lied with blood dribbling off his tongue and teeth, “he’s my—”

She hit him with the butt of her rifle, once to break his nose and twice to drive him into unconsciousness. Peter dropped like the useless sack of meat he’d been reduced to as Stiles howled his name.

....

Days In Captivity

Stiles: 0

Peter: 3,281

Deucalion: 5,112

Satomi: 9,858

Japanese whispers guided Stiles out of unconsciousness. He didn’t understand them in the slightest but the woman who spoke sounded nice. Worried.

His right wrist throbbed. Whatever he laid on was hard and uncomfortable.

Just start with the little things, his father had said when Stiles was paralyzed with panic. *Focus on the tiny details, latch onto it and don’t let go until you’re ready for more.* Stiles focused on the Japanese words. The woman repeated the string of words reverently and Stiles wondered if she was praying. He followed the hills and valleys of it, the lyrical tendencies she utilized. Slowly, Stiles became ready for more.

He’d been bitten. It hurt—it *still* hurt—but he was alive. Stiles felt he bubble of relief burst in his chest. He *hadn’t* been shot on his lawn, and his dad wouldn’t have to bury his only son. *Thank God*, Stiles thought.

“—irresponsible and *selfish*. How *dare* you!” A British man roared but his voice sounded odd, like he wasn’t in the same room. He lowered his voice but didn’t lose his rage. “I didn’t think my opinion of you could sink any lower, Hale, but you continue to surprise me.”

The moment Peter’s name fell from the stranger’s lips the entire night returned to Stiles with brutal clarity. The skeletal man who’d inhaled half their leftovers but didn’t touch Stiles’s

birthday cake. Stiles opened his eyes and the Japanese prayers stopped. He turned to see that thick glass separated him an older Japanese woman. She grinned, her wrinkles by her eyes deepened as she exclaimed in Japanese then English.

“He’s awake!”

She pushed her hands against the glass and Stiles returned the gesture. He groaned and rolled onto his side to push himself up. He held his hands up to block out the fluorescent lights. He blinked his eyes into focus to see that he was in a glass room, the floor was rock, and by the looks of it... he was underground.

He turned to see that on the other side the opposite glass wall was Peter. In the room next to Peter, which curved so it shared a wall with the Japanese woman, was a blind man. The man’s pale eyes had thin scars stretching all the way out to his temples. Peter met Stiles’s eyes and his wrist throbbed.

The blind man snarled and hit hands on the glass. His mouth was a mess of fangs and spite. The Japanese woman stood, shouting in Japanese but the British man wasn’t having it. He shot back in fluent Japanese and their voices kept rising until Stiles had to cover his ears.

Stiles couldn’t latch onto tiny details because there was too much to take in. The glass walls, the door that had no handle and seemingly could only be opened from the other side. They had a small toilet, sink, cot—and there was a sticky patch of Stiles’s blood that stained the stone slab floor. Stiles couldn’t catch his breath and he stumbled to the other side of his room—his *prison*.

Peter pressed his hands up against the glass. Stiles swallowed down his panic in ugly, full body shudders. Stiles clamped his fingers over his wrist. His shoulder mashed against the glass. Tears burned his vision and he cried. He cried the same way he cried when he was a little kid and he felt same prickles of embarrassment at the back of his neck. He cried in the loud, grotesque way that made his head throb and spin.

“Stiles,” he heard his father hiss, embarrassed that his son was having another panic at the grocery store just because they’d passed the shampoo that his mom used. His wrist ached and he needed to stop crying, to stop embarrassing the Sheriff—when he realized it wasn’t his father saying his name. “Stiles, breathe.”

Stiles opened his eyes to see Peter. His eyes were wide and his beard was gone and his hair had been cut. Air filled his lungs and he wiped his eyes clumsily.

“You shaved.”

Peter shrugged.

“I woke up like this.”

Stiles snorted but judging by the flat expression on Peter’s face he hadn’t made a Beyonce reference. Stiles wiped his face, rubbing away the feeling of being raw and exposed. Stiles realized that the shouting had stopped. The Japanese woman smiled at him while the blind

man glared in Stiles's general direction. The blind man snarled, the glass fogging up in front of his mouth.

"You should have killed him, Peter. He's better off dead."

When Stiles was little he'd been bullied. His mother said that they were just as afraid as we was, that they had to use mean words to feel bigger than they really were. He saw that same fear in the blind man's face, so Stiles turned away from him.

"Where are we?"

Peter sighed, his head thumping against the glass.

"I don't know."

Stiles gazed around, at the petulant blind man, the Japanese woman, and the glass walls. He crossed his arms.

"If they caught up to you so quickly it's probably in Beacon Hills somewhere." Maybe on the outskirts of town, but no farther than that. "Who's keeping you guys here?"

"We don't know," the Japanese woman replied, "we weren't conscious when we were taken. She..." The woman shivered. "She wears a mask."

"How long have you been here?" Stiles addressed them all. He watched their faces fall, Peter twisting away while the Japanese woman's eye glazed over. "Can..." Stiles suddenly couldn't stop thinking of the beard Peter had, of how he stared at Stiles's phone like he hadn't seen anything like it. The words felt clammy on his tongue but he forced them out. "Can you remember a date, from before—?"

"Stop it!" The blind man snarled, his whole face transforming into a living nightmare as he roared. "The details don't matter, songbird, all that matters is that we're here now."

"Of course it matters! The more we know, the faster we can figure out how to get out of here and—"

The blind man slammed his hand against the glass and Stiles leapt back.

"And what? Escape? Hale barely managed it and look at what he did. He broke into a kid's house and dragged him back here to suffer and die." Stiles was frozen on the spot and he heard the Japanese woman hiss a name, but Stiles was too shocked to grasp it. To his right, Peter muffled a thick choking sound. "I meant it," the blind man's breath fogged up the glass, blurring the mess of fangs in his mouth, "you might not wish it now, but you will—you'll wish he killed you, to spare you from this."

With a final snarl, the blind man turned around and walked to the far side of his room. He sat down with a huff. Stiles noticed that the glass hadn't cracked. It hadn't even wobbled.

....

Days In Captivity

Stiles: 1

Peter: 3,282

Deucalion: 5,113

Satomi: 9,859

No one talked. After the trauma of being shot at, captured, and imprisoned, the worst part was how no one *talked* to each other. The Japanese woman meditated, the blind man just sat in furious, defeated silence, and Peter... Peter just laid in his cot. Stiles wanted to go to the Japanese woman, she'd been the only person to smile at him so far, but she was in the middle of an intense sounding mantra. There was no way in hell he was going to the blind man, so Stiles saddled up to Peter's wall and tapped his finger gently on the glass.

Peter turns his head to the side and for a horrifying series of moments, Stiles was certain that Peter wasn't going to move, that he was going to just lay there and stare in petulant silence. Thankfully Peter got up, his movements willowy and disjointed, like he didn't remember how to walk normally.

He sat down next to Stiles, five inches of glass between them.

"Hey." Stiles cringed inwardly at the lame greeting. It's not as though courtesy and social standards applied to this kind of situation. "Could I ask you a few questions?"

Peter's grey-blue eyes were unblinking. They weren't exactly kind, but at least he wasn't snarling and slamming clawed fists on the glass.

"You may."

Stiles glanced behind him. The woman was still meditating and the blind man was still sulking.

"What..." He turned back around to face Peter. "What exactly are you?"

Peter's lips, cracked and white with neglect, twitched.

"A werewolf." Stiles blew out a long exhale. He wanted to laugh at such a silly declaration, but he'd seen Peter's red eyes and claws when he'd mangled cold lasagna. He'd seen the blind man's fangs yowling against the glass. "We all are."

Stiles nodded absent-mindedly, until he remembered that Peter *bit him*.

"Wait, d-does that mean that I'm—?"

He couldn't finish it. Peter shook his head.

“I used human teeth to make that mark.” He gestured to Stiles’s wrist and it throbbed. “You won’t turn.”

Stiles slumped over, relieved.

“Thank God. I don’t think I could handle that on top of everything else. No offense.”

“None taken.”

Stiles leaned his head against the glass and let his eyes roam the walls that were past the glass. Long stretches of nondescript rock, dirt, and clay. As far as Stiles could tell there were no racks of medical equipment and instruments that came to mind when Stiles had to think of reasons why someone would kidnap mythical creatures. He felt a faint hum of shame that his mind immediately went to experimentation, but his Dad said that Stiles had a way of cutting through bullshit, even when it got him into trouble.

Looks like I’m in quite a bit of trouble now, Pops.

He saw Peter’s leg twitch like the wolf wanted to go back to his cot and rot. Stiles held up his wrist.

“So, why does this let me live?”

Peter hesitated. Stiles kept his breathing even. He wasn’t going to turn into a werewolf (his mind still giggled around the word) and he was still alive. Small victories, go team Stiles. Stiles kept repeating the facts that he was still alive as Peter’s lips pressed into a thin line.

“It’s a mating bite.”

Stiles felt as though he’d been submerged in icy water. There was an echoing roar in his ears and he jerked his hand away from the bite. He knew his shock must have shown on his face, there was no hiding it. He swallowed and his throat clicked.

“Oh.”

He glanced at the other wolves, his skin blotchy and hot all up his neck and ears. The Japanese woman had stopped her mantra but her eyes were still closed. The blind man hadn’t moved an inch, but his mouth seemed tighter or was Stiles just imagining it? A tap on the glass made Stiles turn back and he hoped he didn’t look as nauseous as he felt. Peter had his hand on the glass, his palm pressed flat against it.

“Stiles, it’s just a mark. It’s like if you stuck a ring on a friend’s finger and pretended they were your spouse. It’s the same thing.” Stiles met Peter’s eyes and tried to clamp down on the tremor that had spread through his shoulders. Peter rolled his eyes and, incredibly, it helped. “It can’t mean anything if I didn’t know you, and I didn’t know you, did I?”

“No.” Stiles smiled with more teeth than he meant to. He slumped against the wall and let his cheek press against the cool glass. “Well, I’m Stiles Stilinski, son of the Sheriff. I don’t have any allergies and I hate cauliflower. Thanks for being my fake husband.” This time Peter’s

lips curled into a half-smile, not fully there but it was better than nothing. Stiles pressed his fist against the glass. “Seriously, thanks dude.”

Peter closed his hand into a fist and mirrored Stiles’s action. Stiles wished he could feel the action returned, that even a semblance of body heat could be exchanged through the glass. He sees Peter’s eyes slide to look just over Stiles’s shoulder. Stiles turned to see the Japanese woman standing in front of the wall she shared with Stiles.

She was the oldest, deep wrinkles in her face and her hair was salt-and-pepper. She had kind, patient eyes that reminded Stiles of his mother.

“I’m Satomi Ito.”

Stiles leans his back against the glass then gets up to his feet before he remembers he can’t shake her hand. He brushes his hands awkwardly by his side but rocks on his heels all the same.

“Stiles Stilinski. It’s nice to meet you.”

He glanced over to the blind man but he had his back turned to them. Stiles glanced back to Satomi and she smiled like it really was a *pleasure* to meet him. Stiles thinks, *We’re going to get out of here*. Stiles thinks:

I’m not going to die here.

....

Days In Captivity

Stiles: 2

Peter: 3,283

Deucalion: 5,114

Satomi: 9,860

There are some things movies and books don’t detail about group captivity. Like having to shit in front of people.

Whoever kidnapped them had thought ahead to keeping contact to a minimum. Each glass room had a toilet, a sink, a cot with one pillow, and two tubes that looked like the chutes at the bank. One tube held liquid soap, and the other would dispense beige pellets the size of Stiles’s fist. He felt like a gerbil. He waited and watched the other wolves eat the pellets before he did the same.

They tasted like cardboard. Stiles remembered his dad telling him about MREs, the stuff they’d eat in the army. This stuff was homemade, but it was definitely in the vein of MREs. Nothing flavorful, but nutrients that were needed to survive. The wolves got more, Stiles only got four. He’d eat two and save two. Just in case.

But, as any person with basic levels of biology knowledge would be able to tell you, the digestive system doesn't take well to sudden and abrupt changes.

His stomach felt like fire and the sharp stabbing pain kept forcing the air through his lungs. He was on the toilet before he realized what he was doing, just how sick he was, and that the walls were made of glass.

This is the worst, Stiles thought with hysteric fervor. *Not the shooting, not the biting, not the kidnapping— this is the worst.*

He cries.

Of course he fucking cries.

Satomi is a sweet old lady, Peter is the reason Stiles is even still breathing, and sure the other guy is blind but that doesn't mean he can't hear everything that's happening in Stiles's room. His stomach lurches and he sobs. His face feels like fire and this is worse than any nightmare his brain could conjure up.

Forget going to school naked. Forget not knowing all the answers for a test. Forget getting kidnapped with a bunch of supernatural creatures on your sixteenth birthday.

He cleans himself as best he can afterward and refuses to look up, he doesn't want to see them. He washed his hands until his skin started to split around his knuckles. The bite on his wrist throbbed and somehow that made it worse. He pulled up his pants and stumbled to the farthest side of his room, to the door with no handle. Instead of a handle it just had a smooth metal surface, and if Stiles pressed his face up against the glass he could see that there was a handle on the other side.

There's a quiet voice in the back of his mind that tries to reason with him. He thinks he has it bad? Just how long have these other guys been here? How long have they had to do this in front of each other— probably long enough that it doesn't faze them anymore. Stiles thinks of what Peter looked like in his kitchen, less man and more animal and that was before he broke out the fangs and claws.

Stiles's stomach clenches again and he knows it's not the last of it.

"Hey, songbird." Stiles spares a glance up to see the blind man with both of his hands on the glass. He was standing, in the small space where his room connected with the very edge of Stiles's. "It happens to everyone," he said as Stiles sucked in a humiliated breath. "Those things turn everyone's stomachs at first. Even ours." He paused and tilted his head to the side. Stiles wondered what kind of things this blind wolf could hear. "Are you okay?"

No, Stiles wasn't okay. A series of unpleasant twists sliced up his stomach and made him curl in on himself. He couldn't tell if the pain came from the embarrassment or the MREs. No, he wasn't okay and he hated that Peter and Satomi weren't offended, that they just regarded him the same as they had before. He hated that even the blind man didn't sneer at him the way he recoiled from Stiles for everything else.

Stiles's throat burned and he nodded. The blind man didn't move from his position and Stiles flushed with embarrassment.

"Y-Yeah." Stiles's voice wobbled and cracked. "I'm okay." He sniffed, his nostrils irritated and red. "What's your name, anyway?" The man turned and Stiles felt his stomach contract again. He limped back toward the toilet, his cheeks still red. "Hey man, if I'm going to be making you listen to my digestive system adjust to our food I should at least know your name."

Peter laughed and everyone stopped to bask in the sound. Peter quickly swallowed it, but his shoulders still jerked with the taboo mirth. The blind man's perma-sowl even lifted, his unseeing eyes wide and staring in Peter's direction. His voice sounded awed, shocked.

"Deucalion Blackwood."

"Cool." Stiles was still crying because humiliation didn't just *go away*. "Thanks for the heads up, Deucalion."

Mr. Deucalion Blackwood didn't speak to him for the rest of the day, even after Stiles is sick again— but it's a start.

....

It was the summer between eighth and ninth grade, and Stiles was going to die on the lacrosse field of Beacon Hills High School. Scott wheezed next to him and Stiles was going to ask him if he was okay, if he needed a breath, when a crazed voice chased them back into movement.

"Did I say *stop*? I've said a lot of shit, overwhelming, some say, dribbling out of my mouth, others say, but I never said *stop*! Stilinski! McCall! Get *moving*!"

Everyone had heard about *The Coach*.

He was a Beacon Hills legend. The kids in junior high whispered about him in fearful amazement. They said he swore, they said he had teeth that once deflected shrapnel when he was in the army, and they said that he only had one nut because he had to get the other removed or else he would have overdosed on testosterone. He was loud. He was insane. But lacrosse was everything in Beacon Hills. If you wanted to be somebody you went to The Coach.

Stiles honestly didn't care about lacrosse. There was an environmental sciences club that sounded cool, the musicals were always fun, and he heard that they were going to get a marching band the year that he'd be a freshman...

His dad loved lacrosse.

So Stiles did the summer lacrosse program.

The Coach was tall and broad shouldered, but seemed a tad soft around the middle. Though that didn't stop him from chasing any of the kids (Stiles and Scott mostly) who were lagging

behind in the drills. He had them run around the field, then skip, then sprint, all while shouting a sermon that was just as dizzying as his exercises.

“Do you know what happens to people who don’t move around? They get *bedsores*. Have you ever had a bedsore? It’s awful, they’re terrible, I sincerely hope none of you little brats ever have the experience of getting one. And that’s what I want to drill into your heads—always keep moving.” He finally let them stop and they all collapsed onto the grass, sucking in burning breaths. Scott’s hand flopped over to Stiles’s. Stiles grabbed it and squeezed. “You’ll be glad to be tough and not just in the game, kiddos, but in *life*! I mean when life knocks you down, when you get your teeth kicked out by global warming, and when our apocalypse comes in whatever form it takes, you’ll be thanking your Old Coach that he gave you legs to get you through it!”

He throws up in the locker room and that’s how Stiles finds out he can’t eat breakfast before practice. He remembers rinsing his mouth out in the sink and jumping a foot in the air when he saw that The Coach waited for him. He was struck speechless, something his dad would never believe, when The Coach tossed a water bottle at him.

“Replenish your liquids. And eat something when you get home, got it?”

“Yes, Coach.”

The Coach grinned, but it was more of a pulling back of his lips to expose his large teeth. Stiles grabbed a towel wipe his face and by the time he looked up again The Coach was gone as quickly as he’d appeared.

Stiles wanted to quit lacrosse, but his dad got so excited when he talked about it. Scott, somehow, wanted to stay on the team. So Stiles stayed.

....

Days In Captivity

Stiles: 17

Peter: 3,298

Deucalion: 5,129

Satomi: 9,875

Captivity brought along a routine. The lights turn on when one of them gets up or moves dramatically. Food is dropped twenty minutes after the lights go up. Everyone is up by the time the food drops, they all eat, go to the bathroom, and wash up.

And then nothing.

Satomi meditates, Deucalion paces, and Peter sprawls out on the cot. Stiles can’t help but get anxious watching them do *nothing*. His fingers twitched as he stands barefoot on the stone

floor. He can't help but think of Coach, or Coach Finstock as Stiles now knew him, and his shrieking voice echoing across the field.

Stiles broke out into a suicide sprint, touching the far wall closest to Deucalion's room, then launched back toward his handless door. The entire distance couldn't be more than fifteen feet but it was enough, enough for Stiles to go back and forth, back and forth, until his legs gave out. He sucked in two breaths and went immediately into push-ups. Once his arms gave out, he switched to leg-lifts.

Once he's got his breath back, he went back into the suicide sprints. He continued until he was dizzy, until his wheezes burned too brightly. He stopped, drenched in sweat.

"Stiles?"

Peter hovered as close as he can get to Stiles. His lips were pulled into a frown. Stiles heard the unspoken, *is this it, have you lost your mind?* Stiles stretched out his muscles massaged the ache and burn with his knuckles. His sweat cooled.

"I can get bedsores. Maybe you guys can't, but I can. I'm not losing muscle."

He goes again and he can feel Peter's eyes on him. At least the wolf wasn't lying on his stupid cot anymore.

Funny, up until a werewolf was shot on top of him Stiles *hated* Coach's drills. He didn't see the point of beating himself to death only to sit on the bench. But in this prison he suddenly thought back to that summer between eighth and ninth grade. Stiles ran, twisted, jumped, and went until his feet were close to bleeding.

This time when he stopped he wrung the sweat out of his shirt in the sink. Tremors worked their way through his limbs and Stiles traced them, following every twitch of his muscles with his fingers. If he closed his eyes he could pretend that he was on the lacrosse field with Coach looming over them.

He kept his eyes open.

A tap on the glass came from his left. Satomi was watching him.

"May I join you?"

At first Stiles wanted to point out that the glass didn't exactly allow them to have tea but then he realized what she meant. He closed his mouth with a jerky nod, and then glanced at Peter. Peter stood, and nodded as well, waiting for Stiles's direction. Deucalion was sitting, his back to them. Stiles shook out his arms.

"All right. We'll start with suicide sprints. Sprint to the wall, then back to the door, and keep doing that until you can't anymore." Stiles paused, then corrected himself. "Or, at least until I can't anymore."

He broke out into a run, and this time he was joined by two wolves.

....

Days In Captivity

Stiles: 54

Peter: 3,335

Deucalion: 5,166

Satomi: 9,912

The lights go up and Stiles covers his eyes, swinging his legs over the edge of his cot.

“Finally,” Peter’s voice came from his right and Stiles didn’t have to look to know that he was rolling his eyes. “I was tired of waiting.”

Stiles flipped him off with his right hand while he waved at Satomi with his left.

“Good morning, Satomi.” He let his eyes slide to Peter’s smirking face. “Fuck you, Peter.”

Peter grinned. They stretched in silence. Stiles made sure to be thorough, his left calf had given him trouble the day before. As he dug his thumbs into his muscles a tick-tick-tick came from the far side of his room.

Deucalion swayed on the balls of his feet, his eyes staring a few feet above Stiles.

“May I join you?”

“Sure.” Deucalion’s eyes adjusted to look a bit down right as Stiles slapped his hand against the glass, pulling himself up to his feet. “The more the merrier.”

When he runs, he runs with three wolves.

Chapter End Notes

I've been SO EXCITED ABOUT THIS PROJECT GUYS. The idea came to me when I was watching The OA and while I won't be lifting the themes of that show, I will be drawing inspiration from their obsession with touch starvation and what captivity can do to people and how it can force tribalism. This is going to get angsty kids. I just hope you trust me to take you on a good ride.

Please let me know what you think, all thoughts and comments welcome!

Chapter 2: Forget-Me-Not... Please

Chapter Summary

Peter always imagined that being an Alpha would make everything fall into place and that his life would sharpen and make sense.

All being an Alpha got him was misery and impotence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 67

Peter: 3,348

Deucalion: 5,179

Satomi: 9,925

Coach used to say that if people were smiling after drills then they were doing it wrong. Well, Stiles certainly wasn't at lacrosse practice so he smiled, his clothes sticky with sweat. The wolves breathed heavily with him. Even Deucalion's lips were curled in an exhausted rush of a dopamine released with exercise. Without a word they stripped off their clothes and went to the sink to wash up as best as they could.

The cold water made Stiles's skin tighten as he splashed himself, lathering up quickly before washing off. He pulled on his pants and shirt. He rubbed his hands together and continued the conversation they'd had on their last break.

"None of you got around to seeing *Star Wars*?" Remnants of cold water clung to Stiles's neck as Satomi led them through stretches, whispering her every move so Deucalion could follow along. "It was a phenomenon!" Satomi shrugged with polite indifference while Peter and Deucalion rolled their eyes. Stiles blew out a dramatic breath, shaking out his legs. "It's a good story."

Stiles tread lightly around Deucalion, the blind Alpha seemed fine with working out and *some* conversation. Peter was reserved, but not in a way that meant anger, just a lack of a will to feel anything else.

Stiles remembered, back when his mom was still alive, he was always in charge of keeping his dad awake whenever they drove anywhere. Talking wasn't so much a luxury as it was a

necessity to keep his dad from nodding off on a long stretch of highway.

The highway they were currently on stretched longer than Stiles wanted to think about. He cleared his throat.

“I could tell you guys the story... the story of *Star Wars*.”

Deucalion frowned.

“Weren’t there three movies?”

Technically there are seven and one stand-alone, Stiles doesn’t say. He shrugged instead.

“Yeah but we’ve got the time.” Peter snorted. Satomi smiled. Stiles bounced on the balls of his feet, *hoping* that Deucalion wouldn’t withdraw under the dark cloud that hovered above him. “What do you say, Deuc?”

Muscle mass wasn’t the only thing Stiles could lose if he wasn’t careful. Peter had been a shaggy, horrifying mess when he’d been stuffing his face with whatever food he could grab from the refrigerator. He could hardly speak, like words and basic human interaction were a dead language. Stiles remembered having to keep his aim steady as Peter struggled to adjust his posture and beg for Stiles to not be afraid, please— don’t be afraid.

Stiles wasn’t going to forget how to speak. He *wouldn’t*.

“Knock yourself out,” Deucalion growled.

“I’m taking that as a yes!” Stiles cheered and cracked his knuckles. “All right, get ready for the space opera ride of your lives.”

Every speaker needed an audience, whether it was his sleepy dad in the driver’s seat or three captured Alpha wolves who hadn’t seen *Star Wars*. Stiles drew in a deep breath right when a strange hiss came from the ceiling. Stiles coughed, his eyes darting up to the ceiling vent in his room. A pale but noticeable gas slithered into the air.

“Shit.” Peter growled and he pushed his cot to the center of the room, Satomi and Deucalion doing the same. Peter quickly got atop his cot and stripped off his shirt and pants. He held the bundled ball of his clothes to the vent to block the gas. “*Shit*.”

Stiles’s knees shook and knocked together when he pulled his cot to the center of his room. His fingers were clumsy as he removed his clothes, but when he stood atop his cot—

“I can’t reach!” Stiles’s voice cracked and his blood was cold. Satomi stood atop her cot and her hands steadily pressed her clothes to the vent. Her eyes were misty with sympathy. Peter wheezed out Stiles’s name, and Deucalion closed his eyes as Stiles felt an acidic sob bubble out of his throat. “I can’t— what’s going to happen to me?”

He stepped off his cot with shaking legs and pulled his clothes on. Deucalion sighed, his unseeing eyes downcast.

“The gas knocks us out. I don’t know what it will do to you, songbird.”

It can’t kill me, Stiles thought hysterically as he sat on his cot, the pale gas dropping in plumes around his shoulders. *It can’t, it can’t.*

He clenched his fists and was barely able to stop himself from screaming, “*This isn’t fair!*” No shit it wasn’t fair. Stiles clamped down on his panic as he breathed in the gas.

“It doesn’t taste like anything.” He met Peter’s gaze and managed a wobbling smirk. “I can feel it in the air, but no taste. It... I feel...” Stiles blinked and *whoa* his vision was sliding in and out of focus. “I think I’m losing consciousness? My eyes, I can’t focus on anything.” He drew in a deep breath and he laid back on his cot. “My body is getting heavier. It... prickles.”

Stiles wondered if his dad was still looking for him. Stiles wondered if they were selling ribbons at his school for him, if people would wear the ribbons at every lacrosse game. *I hope they’re purple*, Stiles thought as his body sank into darkness, *purple is a rad... colo—*

....

Cora followed Peter diligently through the Hale herb garden in the early hours of the morning. She held a periwinkle elephant-shaped watering can in her tiny hands. Dew clung to the grass and the sun was just starting to rise. Peter would never *say* she was his favorite. He wasn’t supposed to have favorites. But he did treasure the mornings Cora would wake up effortlessly to join him on his patrols, her breath coming in quiet, foggy puffs in the morning air.

Peter gathered bushels of mint, barley, and lemongrass. Cora carefully watered the plants after Peter moved on.

“Mom says that most people buy their food at the store.” The next garden was the vegetable and Peter frowned because some creature had nibbled on the cherry tomatoes. Cora frowned with him as he gently placed the surviving tomatoes in a basket. “Why don’t we go to the store, Uncle Peter?”

Peter squeezed her left ear.

“The store isn’t open now, sweetheart. And frankly the selection isn’t that great.” Cora hummed but didn’t look convinced. Peter sighed and shifted the basket of vegetables to his hip. “When we grow our own foods, Cora, we know their source, our efforts make them stronger and, in turn....”

“They make us stronger!” Cora briefly lost her grip on her watering can and some stray drops hit Peter’s ankle “That makes sense.” Peter finished his inspection and a gentle breeze blew over the rolling hills in upstate New York. He took a moment to savor the morning tranquility before the rest of the Pack woke. Cora’s body bumped against his side, her cheek chubby and warm against his side. “If I eat all of my peas will I be stronger than you, Uncle Peter?”

“Hmm... hard to tell.” Peter slid his eyes to hers. “You’d have a better chance if you ate all of your carrots too.” He gently put down his vegetable basket and let out a cartoonish growl. “You’d also have to best me in combat.”

He chased her over the hills, through the creek, until they were laughing as they rolled through a field of dandelions. Peter gently picked the fluffy seeds out of her hair as she leaned back against him.

“Do you think I could be Second like you one day, Uncle Peter?”

Peter paused, briefly, before he went back to braiding his niece’s hair.

“Sure.” Technically Derek would be the first considered for the title, but Cora had gumption. “You’d need to be strong. The Second is the protector of the Pack, they need to be as nurturing as they are brutal.” Peter let Cora out of his grip so she could brush the seeds out of his hair. “It will be hard work, Cora.”

“I can do it,” Cora declared and Peter believed her, “I will be the strongest—” She faltered, her big eyes sliding to the side and she frowned. “Well,” and Peter’s heart sank as she crossed her arms, “I can’t be stronger than the Alpha, can I?”

Peter had to bite down the bitter denials that threatened to spill from his lips. He gently rubbed at her frown lines with his thumb until they vanished.

“When it comes to strength, no.”

They walked back to the vegetable basket and empty watering can. The sun twinkled high above them and the rest of the Pack would be awake within moments. With their time together rapidly coming to a close, Cora gently tugged on Peter’s hand.

“What if... what if mom *and* you were Alphas? And she could be Alpha and you could be an Alpha too, but still the Second?” Peter’s body went cold, at how his little *Cora* spoke easily about some of the very taboo musings that had kept Peter up late at night. She squeezed Peter’s fingers. “Then you could be stronger and the Second.”

Peter ruffled her hair.

“That’s quite the idea, my dear.” Cora grinned and Peter kissed her forehead. “Now, what would you like for breakfast?”

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 68

Peter: 3,349

Deucalion: 5,180

Peter laid motionless on his cot, unblinking and utterly useless.

He couldn't say how long it had been since Stiles had been taken out of his room by the woman wearing her signature gas mask. For all their snarling and threats she hadn't faltered in her steps as she picked the boy up with ease. His body was slack, dead weight, and Peter had been too distraught to see if Stiles had still been breathing.

It's my fault, Peter thought as Satomi sat cross-legged and whispering her meditative mantra. *I shouldn't have let him be taken.*

Hadn't Stiles said he didn't want to die? Hadn't he agreed to become necessary to whomever held them all captive?

Or did you just get drunk off the fact that he looked at you, spoke to you, and you didn't want to let that attention go?

Peter let a whine slip past his lips before he quickly gagged on it, swallowing it down. He curled on his side. How they had all survived before? Before Stiles had been there to talk to them, to keep talking aggressively until they talked back? Before Stiles had made them run until they were sweating, until their minds had been cleared and rooted to the present? He could have been gone for minutes or years.

Being an Alpha meant Peter was the strongest he could ever hope to be... yet he couldn't make Stiles taller, he couldn't help him reach the vents, and he couldn't bring himself to kill him before they'd been captured. Peter always imagined that being an Alpha would make everything fall into place and that his life would sharpen and make sense.

All being an Alpha got him was misery and impotence.

They didn't sleep, they didn't speak, and they didn't eat. After an eternity, the heavy door slammed open and heavy footsteps fell slowly down the stairs at led to where they were being held. Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi were on their feet and silent as the woman returned with Stiles's limp body slung over her shoulder. She opened his door and gently laid him out on the floor before she left without a word.

Peter pressed his hands to the glass and his breath rushed out all at once when he saw that Stiles was *breathing*, his chest rising and falling easily. Satomi stifled a strange mixture of a laugh and cry, clearly seeing the same thing.

"What's going on?" Deucalion growled, his fangs cutting into his own lips with frustration. "What the bloody hell happened? Is he okay? Is he dead?"

"He's breathing." Peter smiled and out of the corner of his eye he saw Deucalion's shoulders relax. "He's breathing, *he's breathing.*"

Peter felt as though language had left him except for those two words. It was a declaration, a celebration, and an agonized eulogy. Satomi's smile was wide and warm. Deucalion snarled

and hit his hands on the glass.

“Wake up! Songbird, wake the fuck up!” Satomi shouted at Deucalion in Japanese. Peter rolled his eyes and was moments away from calling Deucalion dramatic when Stiles’s eyes fluttered open. Peter gasped and Deucalion stilled. “What’s happening,” Deucalion growled, his eyes darting wildly around Stiles’s room. “What the hell is going on?”

“His eyes opened,” Satomi whispered.

Peter crouched down low. He couldn’t tell if Stiles’s pupils were reacting to the light. His arms were slack and the scar from Peter’s bite was upturned, mocking Peter.

“Stiles?” Stiles blinked but made no other movements. Peter swallowed. “Stiles, can you hear me?”

“I can hear you.”

His voice was slurred. His fingers twitched. The other Alphas were perfectly still as Peter cleared his throat.

“Can you wake up for me, Stiles?” Stiles hummed and Peter clenched his jaw until it cracked. “Focus on my voice and—”

Stiles shot up with a strangled gasp. He immediately pressed his hands to his head, the rush making him dizzy. Peter watched Stiles get his breathing under control, blinking his eyes into focus as he twisted around so he could look at all of them. His lips twitched in a panic-laced grin, only for it to vanish when his fingers bumped his head.

His head had been completely shaved.

“I...” Stiles blinked rapidly and his nails dug into his exposed scalp. “I can’t remember anything.” The young teenager’s hands shook, scrubbing at his shaved head. “I can’t *remember*, I was here and then I was back on the floor.”

His eyes met Peter’s. Peter’s throat was tight as he saw the, “*If they cut my hair, what else did they do to me?*” Peter tried to force a smile. Judging by how Stiles recoiled, it wasn’t particularly convincing.

“Why would they do anything to you? Cutting your hair is hygienic... they’d have no need to do... anything to you. You can’t endure what we can. Right, Satomi?”

Satomi didn’t reply. Peter slumped as Stiles wrung his hands, his fingers twitching and tempted to go back to scratching his skin off. He stopped, his breath catching in his lungs.

“If I can’t endure... then you guys could check, right?” Stiles stood on wobbly legs. “Like... you’d be able to see bruises and stuff, right?”

“Yes,” Satomi spoke, her voice like dead tree branches groaning in a cold winter’s wind. “We can do that.”

Stiles stripped off his clothes, his fingers getting snarled in the fabric. He was skinny and he held his arms up as he turned, slowly.

“Do you see anything?” Peter let his eyes sweep over Stiles’s exposed, pale skin methodically, coldy searching for any signs of abrasion or force. He found nothing, the only mark of contact was his shorn hair. Stiles’s breath hitched. “Guys?”

Stiles looked to Peter first. Peter shook his head.

“There’s nothing there.”

Satomi had the same to report and Stiles relaxed, his whole body going slack as he laughed. He hugged his clothes to his stomach as his giggles bubbled up to the ceiling. He wiped his eyes.

“Well, that’s good. God, it feels like Christmas, how fucked up is that?”

He laughed again, but it sounded too sharp, too brittle. Stiles stopped, his jaw clicking when he pulled on his clothes. Satomi hovered and Deucalion shrank back, his face heavy with shadows. Stiles’s smile soured and Peter hated that Stiles was already unfazed being nude in front of them. He saw it pull at Stiles’s lips, knowing that he should be embarrassed but instead he felt nothing. He hadn’t hesitated or thought twice.

“You were talking about *Star Wars*.” Peter flushed when Stiles’s head jerked up, his haunted eyes boring a hole into Peter’s reddening face. “Before. Before you... you know.”

Before we thought it would be the last time we saw you, Peter didn’t say.

There had been a time when Peter talked to people with satiny ease. He lived to please and tantalize, he could host all parties, and he could have anyone wrapped around his fingers with the right words. Now words soured on his tongue until he felt clumsy and stunted. For eight heartbeats Stiles just stared, like Peter’s words were so outlandish he was having trouble understanding him.

Stiles grinned, warm and soft.

“Right.” He motioned for them to gather close, well, as close as the glass would allow. “We’d be better off sitting down.” The four of them sat in the same motion and when Stiles leaned forward he looked less skeletal. Rosy hues colored his cheeks as he drew in a long breath between his toothy grin. “A long time ago,” Stiles swayed, his eyes luminous, and Peter was suddenly struck with the absurd belief that if he were to reach for him that his fingers would pass through the glass. He kept his hands in his lap as Stiles continued. “In a galaxy far, far away...”

....

Days In Captivity

Stiles: 108

Peter: 3,389

Deucalion: 5,220

Satomi: 9,966

Before Stiles, they never had a routine aside from breathing and remaining silent. Before Stiles, Peter had no reason to ever use his voice. Before Stiles, Peter thought he would go mad with the ringing silence in his ears.

Peter would have argued that there was no point to speaking. He'd been like Stiles the first day, full of optimistic rage and questions. With one monstrous glare from Deucalion and an indifferent sigh from Satomi, Peter surrendered.

Before Stiles, Peter had an eternity to go over every sin he'd ever committed. He was trapped in his own mind, a never-ending loop of possibilities. If Peter had just changed this one thing, if he'd done this small thing different, would he be trapped in glass? Was it his desire to be an Alpha? Was this punishment? Did he buy his sister enough time to escape? How would the Hale Pack survive without their Second?

Questions eventually stopped being specific... and cut deeper.

Would anyone miss him? Would anyone remember him? Would there be any stories to tell of him fondly, or would he simply pass on as an afterthought?

"Again," Stiles panted as sweat dripped down his nose, "go again."

He had them run with him, he would change it up sometimes, with various exercises and leaps, but in the end they would be sweating on the floor. When they woke up the first thing they would do was run. Run until the ringing of silence stopped, run until any sort of wonderings of what was going on outside (*Is Talia okay? Is Laura in college yet? Does Cora eat enough vegetables?*) melted away. Stiles drove them until their muscles burned. He didn't stop until all four of them sucked in air as they laid on their backs across the stone floor.

After working out came the bathroom and wash up. Peter massaged soap into his neck, the cold water a relief as streaks of it traveled down his chest and abdomen. They all stood nude and hunched over their sinks. They splashed water on themselves indiscriminately. After bathing, they eat.

Once they've had as much as they could swallow of dry MREs, Stiles would talk.

Sometimes it would be a movie, a book, but Stiles would spin them stories that could extend over several days. But the speaking... Peter hadn't realized how much he'd missed having a voice until Stiles forced them to speak. He didn't twist their arm, but as his stories built suspense they'd all lean forward, even Deucalion couldn't resist a periodic, "Then what happened?"

Deucalion yelled to get what he wanted, Satomi used a zen-like sweetness, and Peter... couldn't remember the last time he'd wanted anything.

Stiles was cunning and Peter wasn't sure if Stiles even realized just how sharp he could be. Stiles didn't raise his voice and he didn't speak in honeyed lilt. He laid out intricate stories that made it easy for Peter to forget about the glass walls. When Stiles spoke it was easy to imagine that they were outside.

Peter wondered what Stiles had been before he'd been doomed with them. He wondered if the rest of the world saw how magnetic Stiles was... or did they simply see him as just another teenager?

They all watched him, even Deucalion's eyes were rarely off when it came to Stiles. He massaged his legs with his long fingers, his skin slowly returning to a less flushed state.

"Hey, Peter?"

Peter glanced over to see Stiles smiling at him.

"Yes?"

"Could you take over storytime today?" Stiles pointed to his throat. "I'm getting a bit sore."

The boy did sound a bit hoarse but he never complained about pain. Even when he first woke up on the stone floor and his wrist was still raw and starting to scab, he never whined. Stiles swallowed and Peter watched the movement of his throat under his fingers and he knew he was being tested.

Talia used to say that Peter needed to have more faith in others, that his habit of assuming the worst had warped his world-view. He viewed it as being prepared. People always wanted something and the faster Peter could figure out what it was, the quicker he could use it to his gain. He felt so alien when he recalled how he used to be, how his life had been so full of luxury and cunning games.

Stiles was trapped like the rest of them. He was a human boy and, just like the other Alphas, he had no hopes of escape. There was nothing he could gain.

Peter couldn't look away from the glimmering *intent* behind Stiles's dark brown eyes. His breath shortened and his skin tightened. He salivated over the puzzle and pressed his fingers to the glass.

"What kind of story would you like to hear?"

Without hesitating Stiles pressed his hand against the glass. The heat from his skin made a halo of fog shimmer around his fingertips.

"Whatever comes to your mind," Stiles smiled and Peter noticed how dark the bags under his eyes had gotten. "Something nice."

Deucalion snorted, no doubt at the ludicrous notion that Peter could even recall *something nice*. Stiles's hand slipped, just a centimeter down the glass, but even that small movement made Peter's heart lurch. His tongue was dry. A cold sweat broke out along the back of his neck and under his armpits.

Stiles's hand slid another inch.

His fragility was terrifying. Some mornings Peter would jerk awake with the taste of Stiles's blood in his mouth, how paper-thin his skin had been under his teeth.

"All right." Peter swallowed the lump that burned his throat. "I've got something."

Usually when Stiles spoke he had the three Alpha's attention. Now Peter had that attention on him and he refused to flinch at their stares. He tasted stone and moss on his tongue. His breath fogged over the glass, briefly hiding Stiles's wide eyes.

"I went to a wedding once." The words numbed his lips like poisoned honey. He felt his eyelashes flutter as his claws pressed against the glass. "It was decadent. The kind of decadence where... if there is such a thing as hell, we would all be taking a trip because there was no need for such luxury."

....

Four beautiful women dressed in black dresses approached him the moment he stepped into the lobby. They asked him what kind of champagne he would like: Regular, Peach, Pear, or Strawberry? Or would he prefer a cup of hot chocolate?

He had the peach to chase away the winter night air. The lobby was all cracked white marble with a large floral arrangement at the start of the stairway. It was bursting at the seams with roses, lilies, and carnations, all white as snow. Beyond the stairway were double-doors that were closed but Peter could hear the murmur of conversation lying just beyond the wood. When he pushed through a gust of warm air with the overwhelming cacophony of noise and *food*.

The room dripped in red and gold. Guests were draped over chairs, cocktails swirling in their hands and necks exposed as they laughed. The bar was behind a giant slab of illuminated cracked glass that provided an underwater atmosphere.

Peter enjoyed simple luxuries but he rarely indulged in such extravagance.

Nimble fingers closed around his arm. Peter turned in time to accept the Whiskey-Sour his sister offered him. He couldn't remember what it tasted like, only that he liked it.

"This is quite the production," Peter smirked into his drink.

Talia pinched his arm as she smothered her laughter.

"I think it's all *lovely*, Peter."

Food lined the three walls with such variety it was absurd. From pasta, thai, sushi, or halal, every taste and flavor was there. Peter ate more than he ever needed to, he drank enough for several lifetimes, and he laughed until he was hoarse. He couldn't recall who threw the wedding, only how Talia leaned her head on his shoulder. She drew in a breath and Peter felt her tense.

The lights went dark and the four beautiful women from before rang chimes. The fourth wall, which had been the same red and gold tapestry, fell away to reveal a silver dance hall. A live band kicked into full swing and the guests quickly filled the dance floor. Talia blinked.

“Okay, what the fuck,” Talia gaped with wide eyes.

Peter laughed, oh how he laughed so carefree like his life would always be this way. He laughed because Talia rarely swore. He laughed because it made her roll her eyes at him with a grin. He laughed because he was free to do as they spun in a sea of silver and music. The room was filled with white flowers encased in water-filled canisters, looking less like decorations and more like specimens. There was a separate bar, a silver smooth corner of the room that sent an array of metallic reflections across the room.

The guests were inebriated on alcohol and extravagance. Peter couldn’t remember if he knew anyone else there and he was starting to forget Talia’s voice. Had it been a higher lilt or a scratchy alto drawl? The more he tried to recall her voice the murkier it became.

“I’ve thought about your theory,” Talia whispered in her constantly-changing voice, “about a Pack lead by Two Alphas with one remaining the Second.” The twinkling wedding reception fell away. Talia led him in a waltz but they could have been dancing in the middle of a landfill, it didn’t matter. What mattered was how her fierce eyes, the same eyes that had made other Alphas of larger Packs stand down during territorial disputes, locked on him. “I think we should do it.”

Peter was speechless as Talia twirled him. They danced the rest of the evening and planned how they’d be a duel-Alpha Pack.

He remembered that he was happy the same way he remembered lines of poetry. It was empty, meaningless, because Peter knew the definition of *being happy*, but he’d forgotten all the sensations.

Chapter End Notes

Second installment. I hope it's keeping y'all interested. I've got some mighty fun plans for this piece.

I'll probably be posting playlists and blurbs about this on my tumblr, so if you want to come and read, or just want to say hi, give me a follow at mia6363.tumblr.com!

All comments welcome!

Chapter 3: The Boy Who Hated His Birthday

Chapter Summary

He reminded himself that stretching was important. Hygiene was important. Talking was important.

“Close your eyes,” Stiles said and fought the urge to shudder when they obeyed without hesitation, “and come on a walk with me.”

Chapter Notes

WARNING at the notes in the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 228

Peter: 3,509

Deucalion: 5,340

Satomi: 10,086

It took time, but Stiles was eventually able to narrow to the year when Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi were taken. He was patient for the first time in his life, lying in wait until he was able to comfortably gather *facts*.

Satomi had never heard of *Jurassic Park*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, or *Beauty and the Beast*. Deucalion hadn't heard of *Hellboy*, *Shaun of the Dead*, or *Team America*. Peter's film knowledge didn't reach *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *Watchmen*, *Up*, *Inglourious Basterds*, or *Avatar*.

With sweat dripping down his back and cold water running down his chest and thighs, Stiles tried not to think about what those titles meant. He bent over the sink and splashed water on his face, over and over, but it couldn't chase away the knowledge Stiles had meticulously gathered.

Satomi had been taken in 1990, Deucalion in 2003, and Peter in 2008.

His ring-finger trembled on his right hand as he wiped the water from his mouth. Time hung over them like a guillotine and Stiles didn't want to think about what his final tally of captivity would be. He shoved out an exhale and stepped away from the sink. His muscles throbbed as he pulled on his clothes.

Without having to speak or ask for it, the three wolves sat and waited for him expectantly.

Stiles took a deep breath and joined them on the floor, legs crossed. He rolled his shoulders and stretched his neck. He reminded himself that stretching was important. Hygiene was important. Talking was important.

"Close your eyes," Stiles said and fought the urge to shudder when they obeyed without hesitation, "and come on a walk with me."

Stiles's throat clicked when he swallowed. He usually introduced a film, tv series, or book, but the ache in his chest was too heavy.

Beacon Hills wasn't a movie that Stiles could rewatch a million times, it wasn't memorizing lines and score pieces. It was a living, breathing place that Stiles had taken for granted and he hated that he was beginning to forget the faces of his classmates and the way the town sounded in the early morning when he'd wait for the bus.

"I'm gonna," Stiles's voice cracked and he swallowed past the way he started to forget what his room smelled like, "I'm gonna walk you through Beacon Hills Day."

A snort came in front of him.

"What on earth is Beacon Hills Day?"

Stiles didn't have to open his eyes to know the scoff that Deucalion wore, or how Satomi would tap the glass on his side in admonishment. He knew their faces, their expressions and diction like the back of his hand.

"It's... you know, small towns have their celebrations? It probably started as a historical thing, but really it's just an excuse to eat fried food, barbeque, and shoot off fireworks." Peter and Satomi snorted. "Peter and Satomi know what's up."

Stiles heard rustling, Deucalion was straightening his clothes the way he did when he felt superior, which was all the time.

"Well, I lived in London. Small towns aren't really my forte."

"Just be quiet and learn about what you've been missing out on." Stiles only felt tense for a moment before Deucalion scoffed. It was the closest the Alpha would get to a genuine laugh. "So let me tell you about Beacon Hills."

Beacon Hills, as Stiles remembered it, was very green. The trees were tall and thick, the roads long and winding, and everyone knew each other. Stiles lived just outside of town and he knew the woods like his own skin. Well, he did... but it all started to blur together, trees and pathways dropping off in his memory.

The state park was a half-mile from Stiles's house. It was expansive and Beacon Hills Day was always held there. People would camp out but Stiles waited until dusk to head over. The path was still fresh in his memory, the feeling of gravel beneath his orange sneakers, the ones where the right heel was starting to come apart from the shoe. The late summer breeze was floral and smoky, the mouth-watering promise of barbeque always a great motivator to walk faster.

Stiles could have given into that instinct, but instead he took it slow, passing Scott's house, the volunteer fire department, and trees. So many trees.

He heard footsteps behind him but he didn't turn around.

"It wasn't better than Christmas, but it was close. I definitely liked it more than my birthday." Stiles retraced his steps to the park in his mind. There were tents set up, a stage for a talent show, and people rushed past. "That day... popularity didn't matter. No matter where you fell on the food chain in school, people just wanted to have fun."

Maybe Stiles was romanticizing it, but he didn't care. He could taste funnel cake and hot dogs.

"What's funnel cake?"

Satomi spoke beside him. Peter laughed on Stiles's opposite side, a silly uneven snort that Stiles hoped would become a full laugh one day. Stiles licked his lips, chasing the memory of sticky fingers and over-sugared energy.

"It's fried dough made into like... a pancake with a ton of holes in it, and then drowned in powdered sugar."

Judging by Satomi's exhale, she wasn't convinced of the greatness that were funnel cakes. Stiles sat on the grassy hill that overlooked the lake and most of the park grounds. His dad would have to patrol but he'd always manage to find Stiles in time for the fireworks. The sky was indigo and purple. The sounds of shrieking laughter could be tracked to kids running around with rainbow glow sticks.

One year Stiles and Scott managed to cut the glow sticks apart and sprayed themselves with glowing paint. They'd shrieked and soon all the kids were doing it, wanting to be like the neon teenagers that splashed in the water. Stiles's throat caught, too tight to keep going, too vivid to bother verbalizing.

"That doesn't sound very safe." It was Deucalion, but instead of being in front of him and encased in glass—he was on Stiles's left side where Satomi should have been. Stiles jerked his head to the side and *Deucalion was right next to him*. Stiles's breath caught in his chest and Deucalion's pale eyes drifted over in Stiles's direction, his lips curled in a lazy, judgemental smirk. "Who knows what's in those things. I'm surprised you didn't start growing extra limbs."

Stiles laughed, out of breath and stunned that he forgot himself for a moment and spoke without thinking.

“I could have five arms. You wouldn’t know.”

Deucalion’s face went slack. Before Stiles could let the *I fucked up, I fucked up* consume him, Satomi giggled. She was sitting next to Deucalion and she nose scrunched up as she smiled. Deucalion’s cheeks were pink but he rolled his eyes.

“You have a point.”

A soft breath came from Stiles’s right. It made the tiny hairs on the back of Stiles’s neck stand on end, it made his skin tighten, and Stiles turned. Peter sat there, clean-shaven and dressed in rolled up jeans and a t-shirt. He had more weight on him and there was a smudge of powdered sugar on the corner of his lips. The sky plunged into darkness and fireworks were so close, Stiles could taste the ash on his tongue.

It was summer and Beacon Hills was celebrating. Stiles reached out with his right hand, to nudge Peter, to pinch him, to touch him just because he *could*.

Pain flared through Stiles’s fingers when they bumped against the glass. Stiles opened his eyes and the Beacon Hills state park was gone. Deucalion sat in front of him, Satomi on his left, and Peter on his right, thick glass between them. Stiles’s fingers throbbed. He sniffed, gently massaging the angry sting that reverberated down to his bones.

“My mom died when I was nine.”

....

After his mother died, Stiles’s birthdays became twisted acts of repentance.

Kids who didn’t look at him twice suddenly were at his doorstep. Parents who’d snidely told Noah to *get a handle on your son* years before were suddenly smiling and said Stiles was *just a darling*. All kinds of people who’d never bothered with the Stilinskis before were suddenly very interested in celebrating Stiles’s birthday. They didn’t ask what Stiles was interested in, but the gifts were always expensive. They’d bring food. They’d bring birthday and grieving cards, sometimes in the same envelope.

Stiles’s last birthday party was when he was ten years old.

His entire class had shown up, even Lydia Martin. Stiles couldn’t bring himself to get elated, not when they started to sing Happy Birthday and Stiles was just so *sick* of how cheap everyone’s smiles were. He cried, loud and ugly. He cried until he couldn’t breathe and by the time he caught his breath everyone was gone except for his dad and Scott.

Three years later Stiles rode the bus home with Scott. They both walked to the cemetery and Stiles picked flowers out of people’s yards along the way. Him and Scott shot the shit like it was any other day. Scott didn’t get Stiles a card, though he does reveal that Melissa made some cookies for the day. Stiles munched on peanut-butter cookies and leaned his back against his mother’s headstone.

Stiles was thirteen years old.

Soon they'd be in junior high and three other school districts would combine under one roof. There would be so many new kids, new faces, and potential bullies. An uglier part of Stiles, one that he struggled to squish down into a tucked away place, hoped that Scott wouldn't find someone to replace Stiles.

"Mom said that I should try lacrosse." Scott licked crumbs off his fingers. They didn't stay long in the cemetery and they walked home along the road. "She said she knows The Coach."

"Wait," Stiles drew back to stare at Scott. "Mel knows *The Crazy Coach*?"

Scott shrugged.

"Yeah. She said his name is Bobby." *Bobby*, hardly a name fitting of such a legend. Stiles listened to his shoes crunch over stones, to the cicadas that shrieked in the trees. Scott bumped Stiles's shoulder. "If I join... will you join too?"

Really, Scott didn't need to ask.

When Stiles got home he was alone. He was alone the night before and he'd be alone the night after. Stiles reheated last night's pizza and kicked off his shoes. He dragged his favorite blankets off his bed and down to the couch and got root beer out of the refrigerator. It was Tuesday but birthdays meant Stiles could stay up as late as he wanted.

Birthdays meant pizza, soda, *Star Wars* DVDs, and hours of no parental supervision.

Most kids would love that. *Mom and Dad are such a drag*, they'd whine loudly on the bus. If they happened to catch Stiles's eye they'd fall silent and their mouths would twist into uncomfortable grimaces. Stiles was *weird* and he was a *downer*. He was weird because it was uncomfortable to look at him for too long because *that's the kid whose mom died*.

Stiles didn't just watch *Star Wars*. That night he popped in *The Mummy* and whispered along to all the lines, even the ones in Egyptian.

His dad still laughed if he saw Stiles watching a movie several times, so Stiles made sure to space them out or do a rewatch when his father wasn't home. He knew eventually his dad would ask why... and that he wouldn't like the answer.

Movies could be memorized. Stiles could live and breathe every moment of his collection, he could pick up a score piece off the first three notes, and he could recite lines in his sleep. As long as Stiles's brain was capable of storing memories, he had all the worlds, stories, and friends he ever needed.

The kids at school could not be memorized. So often Stiles didn't understand their basic actions and eventually he stopped *wanting* to understand. Scott was an exception. Scott was the only exception.

His own father was getting harder and harder to predict.

If Stiles babbled too much about the weirder concepts he was learning in his Earth and Sciences class or the stray observations he had on the way home on the bus... his dad would

sigh and say, “slow down, Stiles.” Slow down really meant stop. At first Stiles thought silence would be preferable, maybe his dad just didn’t feel like talking anymore.

Too much silence would make his father explode. It took a few days, but his dad slammed home and his eyes were red when he asked Stiles why he wasn’t speaking. Was it something he did? Did something happen to him at school? Is he sick?

Stiles couldn’t talk too much but he couldn’t be silent. He still had trouble figuring out the balance. Some nights, when Stiles couldn’t taste the food he reheated and couldn’t drown out the silence, he worried he’d never find it.

“Look I... I may not be an explorer, or an adventurer, or a treasure-seeker, or a gunfighter, Mr. O’Connell,” Stiles whispered along with Rachel Weisz, *“but I am proud of what I am.”*

Real life didn’t have the satisfying swell of music just before the credits rolled. Stiles tried to stay up for his dad to come home, but instead his father’s weathered hands gently shook his shoulder. He smelled spicy and Stiles would later learn that it wasn’t cologne, it was *bourbon*.

“M’awake.” Stiles rubbed his eyes and yawned at his father’s wry smile. “I was just resting my eyes.”

“Sure you were.” His dad sat on the couch, the familiar creak as embedded into Stiles’s brain as the *Star Wars* trilogy. “So what are we watching next?”

Noah Stilinski had never been a talkative man. Claudia was the one who was quick to laugh or spin a story into something outrageous. Together they were balanced.

Stiles knows it could be worse. Some people didn’t have *any* parents. Some fathers would hit their sons or worse. Really, when Stiles kept reminding himself of that perspective, he didn’t feel as bad. His dad might not like to talk a lot, he might not love the same movies as Stiles, and he might not have the patience his mom had when it came to making their own stories, but he never hit Stiles. Stiles had a house, he had food, and he had a father that loved him in his own, quiet way. Stiles missed hugs but at least he wasn’t going hungry.

The trick to pretending to be asleep was to keep your breaths shallow and your weight deader than dead.

Stiles drifted off somewhere in the middle of *Galaxy Quest* and when he woke he was being carried up the stairs. His father had his one hand on Stiles’s back, the other under his legs. Stiles’s knees hung limp on either side of his father’s waist. His chin was on his father’s shoulder. He kept his breathing shallow, his eyes closed, and his weight dead. Deader-than-dead.

The moment he tensed up or breathed too deeply, his father would put him down. He’d stop holding him and Stiles would have to tuck himself into bed. Stiles didn’t move a muscle and his dad grunted as he opened Stiles’s door and gently laid him out on the bed. He took off Stiles’s socks and pulled up the covers. He kissed his son’s forehead, and that stinging smell of spicy bourbon almost made Stiles wrinkle his nose.

The trick to getting hugs from a father who seemed to hate physical contact was to pretend to be asleep no matter what. Stiles only opened his eyes after his father had closed the door for three minutes.

Stiles Stilinski had a house, a best friend, and pizza for dinner. He had three shelves of DVDs that were growing with every year. He had great grades and the nice ladies at the library didn't mind when Stiles would lose track of time in the stacks. Stiles was lucky. He was luckier than most.

He curled into a tight ball. His arms squeezed around his middle to chase the brief, yearly contact. He was lucky, he was lucky, he was lucky.

He'd have bruises along his middle the next day, his fingers clumsily trying to recall the feeling of being embraced.

It was too late. It was already gone.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 307

Peter: 3,588

Deucalion: 5,419

Satomi: 10,165

Stiles had stopped masturbating.

The thought of masturbation had been so far from Stiles's mind for what felt like months. The terror of captivity, learning the nuances of werewolves, and accepting his lack of control when it came to being knocked unconscious via gas took up most of Stiles's time. Then there were the physical and speech exercises to keep his body and voice in use.

After putting together such a regimented schedule, Stiles didn't have time to think about when he was going to jerk off.

He only had to try once for the verdict to be final.

In the dark he remained awake, waiting for the others to breathe shallowly. The shame was miniscule. Stiles went to the bathroom daily in front of them, he was sure that masturbating just fell under that umbrella of "things that shouldn't be normal but now are." If he were to do it Stiles *knew* that Satomi, Deucalion, and Peter wouldn't judge him.

Stiles gently slid his hands into his shorts. He kept his left hand pressed just below his bellybutton while his fingers gently circled his cock.

He squeezed. He felt a dull throb of removed interest as if he and his arousal were in separate rooms. He stroked once and felt nothing.

In the absence of masturbation, Stiles would sometimes get wet dreams. He'd never remember them, mostly just abstract feelings and sensations before he woke with sticky shorts. That morning was the same, another awkward feeling of being flushed and over-sensitive as he peeled off his pants and quickly washed them with cold water in the sink.

The lights remained off and he slouched back to his cot.

He thought he would have been free by now. He thought that a light would shine down and everything would click into place. He'd have a Sherlockian *ah-ha* moment and he'd break Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi out. They'd walk out, his dad would be waiting with his arms open for a hug, and the credits would roll.

Stiles squeezed his eyes shut.

He was *so stupid*. He'd watched too many movies, read too many books where things just fell into place at the right beats. Stiles wasn't going to reach the third act in a blazing climax scored by John Williams. He was just a *kid*. What could he do that three adult Alpha werewolves couldn't?

When he washed his face he could feel it changing, but he couldn't catch his reflection in the glass or porcelain of the sink. His face was distorted, a twisted shape where dark pits were in the places where his eyes and mouth should be. Stiles knew that his face was fine. He got zits but his face wasn't *morphing* into a horror show...

His avoided his shadowy half-reflections whenever he could.

Stiles shivered on his cot. He couldn't tell if it was from the cold or if he was simply so disgusted with himself that he'd developed a physical tic. He gripped his right wrist *hard* and dug his hands into the scar tissue leftover from Peter's bite.

A soft but sharp tap came from the glass behind him. Stiles twisted on his cot to see Peter, crouched as close as he could get to Stiles. Stiles sat up, vaguely aware that he was nude from the waist down. He wiped his eyes roughly, his knuckles skimming over his wet cheeks.

"Hey." Stiles sniffed and sat on the stone floor, pressing his hip and shoulder to the glass. "Did I wake you up?"

Peter didn't answer. His eyes were on Stiles's wrist and Stiles quickly dropped it, his skin blooming in white and red patches. He swallowed and rubbed his abused skin, thumbing over the scars. Peter's breath fogged the glass as he exhaled softly.

"Are you okay?"

Stiles's automatic response was on the tip of his tongue, to force a shaky smile and turn away with a, "Yeah, man." It was so alarming, like an electric shock, because of how *old* this response seemed. He'd done it many times, to his father, at school, to Scott... doing it here,

in this prison with these wolves seemed ludicrous. His shoulders slumped and he shook his head.

“No.” Stiles’s breath hitched around an ugly laugh. “I thought,” Stiles lowered his voice and didn’t meet Peter’s eyes. “I thought I could get us out of here, you know? Like... somehow I’d just...” Stiles covered his face with his hands. He didn’t deserve to cry. The others didn’t cry, why should he? “It’s stupid.”

Stiles let his head hit the glass with a dull *thunk*. His eyes slid into a dull, unfocused state. Eternity loomed over him, the horrifying realization that *this could be it*. All the things Stiles had been worried about, getting a prom date, graduation, what kind of college would he want to go to, what would he want to study—

This could be it.

Peter tapped on the glass.

“You’re not a wolf.”

Stiles’s breath hitched in his chest.

“I *know that*,” Stiles’s eyes burned and his shoulders curled inward. “I just thought—”

“Stiles, no.”

Peter growled, his eyes flashing red with frustration. His fingers curled into a fist before unclenching quickly. Stiles remembered how Peter had done that in his kitchen, a nervous tic that had made Stiles tighten his grip on his shotgun.

Now he recognized it for what it was. Whenever Peter would speak too harshly or lose control of the rhythm of conversation, he’d clench and unclench his fists, sometimes until blood ran out from his palms. It was as though Peter thought he could cling to the words that escaped him.

“Look.” Peter held up his hand and cut his palm with his claw. Stiles flinched instinctively but kept his eyes on Peter’s flesh as it sewed itself back together. “I can heal. You don’t have that ability.”

Stiles rolled his eyes.

“Thanks for the reminder.”

Peter’s sharp, frustrated exhale sent a streak of fog up the glass.

“*Listen to me*, Stiles. If you bleed *you won’t heal*.” Peter pressed his bloody palm to the glass. Stiles mirrored him, imagining that he could feel the warmth and sticky blood. Peter’s eyes were luminous, holding Stiles in place. “If you were to break the porcelain of the toilet or sink you could use the broken pieces to...” Peter’s eyes flickered down to Stiles’s wrist. “It would be okay. No one would... think any less of you.”

Blood roared in Stiles's ears, deafening him to everything that wasn't Peter's even breaths and razor-sharp eyes. Hot tears streaked down Stiles's cheeks. He pressed his forehead to the glass and he thought about it. He really thought about it, the strength it would take to dash the sink across the floor and pick up the pieces. His father...

His father would understand, Stiles thought.

Stiles opened his eyes and roughly rubbed at his face. His hands were sticky with mucus and his eyes felt swollen with acidic anger and self-pity. He squared his shoulders and took a deep breath that he had to swallow in a series of hiccups. He kept breathing until his lungs were full, until he could meet Peter's eyes.

"I'm not going to leave you." Stiles's lower lip trembled and his hand squeaked against the glass as he pushed so hard that the tips of his fingers were bone-white. "I won't."

Stiles could have imagined it, but he swore he could hear soft breaths of relief coming from the other two cells as Peter's lips curled into a grim smile.

...

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 412

Peter: 3,693

Deucalion: 5,524

Satomi: 10,270

The wolves were always on edge when Stiles would return from being gassed.

Stiles stopped after seven sessions of suicide sprints coupled with arm and leg lifts. He panted and watched the muscles in Satomi's jaw relax, Deucalion was so out of breath that he couldn't be more dour than usual, and Peter's breath had stopped hitching on every exhale. If they were wolves, proper wolves, Stiles imagined that the coarse hair down their spine would be standing on end. Stiles rubbed his legs and thighs. *It's like when you come back home from a long day and dogs are happy to see you again.*

The smile that thought might have brought to his face quickly withered and soured. Suddenly it wasn't funny at all.

He stretched his back until it popped in a few places.

"I wish I'd learned how to dance." All three Alpha wolves glanced up at him in an eerie, unified movement. Stiles shrugged through the shiver that ran down his spine. "I don't know how long it's been... but I'm guessing I'm not going to prom." Stiles smiled and laughed even though it really *wasn't funny*. No one laughed with him. He stood with a smile. "I mean, I don't have much rhythm, but I think I would have tried anyway."

Prom.

The word itself had gone from pedestrian to laughably absurd over Stiles's time in captivity. Prom had been the thing Scott talked about with hesitant excitement and hope, while Stiles approached it with blustering apathy. Prom had been a night believed to be filled with hormones and sweaty palms.

Now the word felt alien on his tongue.

Stiles bounced on the balls of his feet, forcing the odd images of puffy dresses and ill-fitting suits out of his mind.

"Do any of you guys know how to dance?"

Whenever Stiles deviated from the routine the wolves stuttered in movement. He waited, determined not to deflate quickly when fourteen heartbeats passed before someone responded. Satomi smiled, serene and just a bit sad.

"Any dance I know is very... tribal." She bumped her shoulder against the glass and when she sighed with a slow curl of her lips, everyone froze. "The last time I tried anything traditional was on my wedding day."

Her eyes shimmered and for a moment Stiles forgot to breathe, she seemed so far away. She breathed and the rest of them breathed with her. Peter picked at a thread on his shirt.

"I've taken a few salsa lessons."

Deucalion snorted and Peter growled at him. Deucalion rolled his eyes and returned his gaze in Stiles's direction.

"Classic ballroom is a classic for a reason." Deucalion's posture changed from his usual slouched shoulders to a more tall, and regal stance. He seemed taller as his milky eyes drifted to the left. "I'd been taking lessons since I was four."

Stiles whistled.

"Wow. So you had to go to a lot of galas and shit?"

Deucalion snorted and when he smiled it wasn't exactly friendly, but Stiles didn't care. A smile was a smile. A smile, no matter how bitter and biting, was *progress*.

"Yes, Stiles, I had to go to galas, masquerades, balls, and *shit*." Stiles smiled. Even though Deucalion couldn't see it, he must have heard the breathy exhale that slid through Stiles's teeth because his own smile widened. "My family valued propriety over everything. Keeping old traditions alive was exhausting but it was their bread and butter. Ballroom dancing is just the tip of the iceberg."

Time slowed and Stiles could see Deucalion lingering in the inbetween of memory and present. It was the same kind of place Peter had been when he shared his wedding story. Stiles swallowed and tried to dig his fingers into that *moment*.

“Can you teach us?” Deucalion’s eyes widened and Stiles hoped Deucalion wouldn’t pull free of Stiles’s idea. “I mean, the classics are a good place to start. I want... I want to know how to dance. And it will be a new way to work different muscles.”

Stiles hoped with all his might that Deucalion wouldn’t retreat into the dark. Deucalion’s smile faded and his gaze was harsh, directed at all of them.

“If I’m going to teach you, I want you all to take it seriously.”

“Yeah.” Stiles nodded fervently. “We will.”

Deucalion hesitated, his eyes sweeping over them. Stiles wasn’t sure what the blind Alpha was searching for, listening for, he just kept his chin up and breathed steady. Deucalion stepped back.

“Backs straight,” his voice commanded and Stiles, Satomi, and Peter immediately moved to obey, “and eyes to the front.”

It only felt silly for the first half-second before Deucalion’s steady direction guided them. Stiles spun, his arms positioned to be on a shoulder and waist that weren’t there. His feet twisted and turned on the stone floor. Deucalion’s voice faded from being firm and directional into... music. Every dictation was lyrical and Stiles thought, *“Tomorrow I’m going to ask Satomi to teach me Japanese.”*

....

The day of Stiles Stilinski’s capture was a Wednesday.

It was an ordinary day that bordered on boring. Jackson gave him shit, Lydia ignored him, Coach was unrelenting, and no one gave him a birthday card. Scott sat next to him on the bus but they were both too sweaty and tired to talk. They were going to hang out that weekend and play video games and eat pizza.

No one was home when Stiles arrived. He kicked off his shoes and blasted music. He danced, well, he writhed and flailed off-beat until he laughed. He bounced his head hard enough to convince himself that he was having a good time.

He made tortellini and ate all of it. He approved of the cake waiting for him in the refrigerator and was certain Scott would like it. He cleaned the dishes as he belted along to Carly Rae Jepsen at the top of his lungs as he dried off the pasta strainer.

Stiles learned to embrace solitude. When he was alone he could sing like no one was listening and dance like no one was watching... because they weren’t. He recited his favorite lines from his favorite films to no one and slid onto the couch to surf the web. He remembers thinking about the sparkling cider he was going to take to the cemetery on Saturday with Scott. He thought about the games he’d play, about the quizzes next week, and the monotony of grueling lacrosse practice.

He thought about them as though they mattered, those little things that shaped Stiles’s reality.

Stiles changed into his comfy red plaid pajama pants and a ratty t-shirt with a faded Gizmo on it from *Gremlins*. He hadn't thought more than a moment when he picked the clothes, they were convenient and comfortable. He packed up and headed to his room at eleven. He turned off his light but still futzed around on the internet. He left *A New Hope* on the downstairs table that he planned to watch once his father got home.

Just as he closed his laptop he heard a clatter at the back porch door.

He froze. His dad wasn't back for another two hours and he *never* came in through the back. Stiles swallowed, his throat sticky and dry as he crept to his door. He gently pushed it open and listened in the hall. Sounds of wet smacking and uneven gulps of air made the tiny hairs on the back of Stiles's neck prickle. He quietly got his father's shotgun off the mantle and loaded it, keeping extra bullets in his pockets as he quietly made his way down the stairs, making sure to skip the third and eighth step because they always squeaked.

Every thunderous heartbeat shaped the new reality that Stiles was minutes away from facing. He swallowed and kept his grip steady just the way he practiced at the shooting range. Stiles peeked around the corner to where the kitchen lights were on.

A dirty, raggedy man dug violently through the refrigerator. He sucked down orange juice but most of it spilled out of the corners of his mouth and fell to the floor. He licked his fingers, his breath thick and labored. The stranger had left a bunch of open containers of leftovers on the kitchen table, every one of them had been picked clean.

He kept his aim on the man as he purposely put his weight down on the floorboard that creaked in the hall. Predictably, the stranger whirled around. *Not predictably*, the stranger had blood red eyes long, gnarled claws.

Stiles still worried about the quiz in Harris's class. He still hoped that Lydia might see him as something *more* than just an insignificant gnat. He still hated Finstock's endless drills though he loved his insane speeches.

Stiles still thought all those things mattered as he kept his aim steady at the monster in his kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

WARNING: Discussion of suicide. It's more of a practical discussion as an option to take, but the implication is clear.

I got this out faster than I thought! Google Docs is my amphetamine. I hope the story is still interesting and that despite the captivity that there are more character developments and questions y'all want answered.

Please let me know what you think, even if you hated it!

Chapter 4: A Ballad for the Lost Blackwood

Chapter Summary

They were growing, Deucalion realized. He was getting stronger. Toned. Under every soft press there was *more* of him than there was before. Each of his breaths were deeper and when he'd wash his hair, it felt as though less would come away with each pull.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 561

Peter: 3,842

Deucalion: 5,673

Satomi: 10,419

As much as he hated to admit it, running drills with Stiles was the closest Deucalion had come to feeling delighted in years.

His arms ached as they lifted them, up-and-down, until the aches and pains faded to a constant, meditative hum. Throughout their exercises they were silent. In fact, it was the most Stiles was ever quiet when he wasn't unconscious. Their breaths were harsh and the slide of sweaty skin against the stone was the percussive heartbeat to their movements.

"All right," Stiles's voice was the tolling bell to slow into stretches. "That's enough for today."

Deucalion wished, not for the first time, that he still had his sight. He wanted to see Stiles's face, to see the physical ways the boy must have changed since his arrival. His steps were longer, his breathing even, and his voice had deepened a noticeable amount. His words had calmed from sharp and curious tones to a more melodic, river-like flow.

He'd lost hope and Deucalion was glad. The quicker Stiles squashed out hope of escape the better off he'd be.

The stories he weaved as they stretched and laid out on the rock were blinders, distractions from that looming certainty that this was *the rest of their lives*.

His words were colorful and Deucalion wasn't sure how much time had passed when Stiles took a deep, calming breath.

"This Songbird has no more songs today," and Deucalion could hear that the young man was rubbing his throat. Deucalion stretched until his spine popped in three different places. Stiles rolled onto his stomach, Deucalion listened to the way his skin slid against the stone. "You know, one time this kid in school threatened to sew my mouth shut."

The sudden and savage burst of red in Deucalion's eyes was an alarming surprise. The bloodlust that overtook him for splices of enraged moments were intoxicating and frightening. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt so angry on behalf of someone that wasn't himself. The red cleared from his eyes and Deucalion was back in the familiar darkness.

When was the last time he'd felt strongly about *anything*?

"You weren't popular in school?"

He spoke without meaning to, his accented voice floating off into the neverending darkness. Stiles laughed and it echoed off the glass walls. He laughed and it sounded like big bursts of clouds, until he lost his breath and it quieted to pittering giggles like rain against a lake. Stiles breathed and Deucalion heard the air move around his smile.

"No, no. God no." Stiles's smile never wavered as if he was telling a wonderful joke that had no end, no punchline, and actually wasn't funny at all. "I had one friend, shout-out to Scott McCall who liked me because I didn't make fun of his asthma."

Stiles sighed dreamily and Deucalion was slowly accosted with sensations and sounds. He felt Stiles next to him, radiating body heat. In fact, a crowd moved around him, mindless chatter of teenagers with sneakers crunching over gravel. The metal *ker-schwap* of double doors being pushed open and a school bell ringing... he was standing outside of Stiles's school *with him*.

Deucalion turned his head and didn't feel the stone he *should* have felt underneath. Instead he felt nothing but the chilled air as he *smelled* Peter Hale and Satomi Ito standing with him.

He couldn't say how he knew it was them... but it was unmistakable, their breathing patterns, their heartbeats... *they were with him*.

Stiles's breath caught in his chest briefly and his shoulder brushed against Deucalion's as they stood in front of Beacon Hills High School.

"Like... I'm sure if Scott didn't have asthma," Stiles smiled with a lazy shrug, "I'd be solo. But I don't mind. I was actually looking forward to college because dad said the pool of people got bigger that... I'd meet more people like me."

Stiles's smile dropped and Deucalion's strange sensory experience came to an abrupt end. He was back on the floor and he didn't have to see Stiles to know the young man deflated. He

wasn't going to college, he wasn't going to explore the expanded sea of people and potential friends.

"To answer your question: No, I wasn't a popular guy." Stiles huffed and sat up. Deucalion and the other Alphas rolled to their sides to follow suit. "You know what's kinda great? If it wasn't for this," Deucalion heard the air move, as Stiles waved his hand in a sweeping gesture, "I wouldn't have met you guys. Like you guys might have crossed paths but me..." Stiles hummed like an old oak chair creaking in the wind. "No one looks twice at me."

Deucalion turned away from the glass, toward more infinite darkness. He dragged his claws along his thigh, feeling the Alpha power thrum through his veins.

Out of the four of them, Stiles was the weakest. That was a fact.

Yet, even as he thought it privately, it felt wrong.

....

Love didn't exist for families full of wealth and history like the Blackwoods.

For centuries every wedding, every child, and divisions of Pack were carefully orchestrated. The Blackwoods had it down to a science and it was a matter of time before Deucalion was going to have to get married. He was nineteen and couldn't care *less* about the files his mother gave him of pretty face after pretty face. After a while all the women started to look the same. Big eyes. Demure smile.

Boring ambitions.

Deucalion was young and impatient. He hated the parties he'd have to attend, the thousands upon thousands of precisely practiced pieces of etiquette put to the test. They were *wolves*... and yet they acted like stuffy Victorians. Deucalion couldn't remember the last time his mother showed fang and claw.

It was as if they *wanted* to be human. Pathetic.

According to his daily planner, Deucalion was in the most refined London tailor getting fitted for yet another gala at the end of the week. Within the hour he'd move from the tailor to the custom ceramics shop for a new mask for the masquerade for the winter solstice. After perusing masks he was due back to the manor to meet with three potential marriage candidates.

Deucalion Blackwood was decidedly *not* in London and hadn't glanced at his planner since breakfast. The countryside sky was stained an angry red as Deucalion checked his watch. His driver knew better than to remark on the time.

His sleek black car came to a stop in front of a stone cottage, the last house on the street that slithered deep across farmland. Deucalion met his driver's eyes through the rearview mirror.

"Stay here. If my mother calls," Deucalion's eyes flashed red, "don't pick up."

The other wolves that came from Old Money and Old Packs were satisfied with the galas, dinners, and charity balls. They found their thrills and pride with their gowns and champagne. Deucalion had to swallow his disgust every time he saw his mother and brothers turn their back on their nature.

Deucalion's leather boots crunched on the stone driveway. Before he could knock on the worn door, it opened.

Opal-blue eyes squinted up at him. Deucalion hadn't seen such a *mousy* werewolf before he met Ruth Castevet. She lifted her hands to her nose and recoiled.

"You Blackwoods always overcompensate with your cologne."

She withdrew and Deucalion took it as an unspoken invitation to follow her inside. He closed the door and turned to get a good look at the dimly lit house. The biggest room was the living room that had been converted into a study, with shelves that were dusty and creaked with age. The setting sun sent streaks of blood-stained amber over the worn rug. Deucalion felt his shoulders relax when *electric thrills* danced down his spine.

Ruth shuffled to a tiny kitchen. She was a lone Beta, known for being a bit "out there" and not one to bother with polite company. She surrounded herself with books, tomes, tapestries, and solitude.

She was everything Deucalion wished he could be.

"How do you take your tea, Mr. Blackwood?"

"A bit of lemon if you have it, but if not don't worry about it." Deucalion took the tray out of her hands once she made it back to the living room. She scoffed but didn't fight him as she sat on the lumpy couch. "How have you been, Ruth?"

"Just fine," she winked with a wry smile that was too wiry to be kind. "I don't want to waste your time, as I'm sure your patience is minimal." She sighed and Deucalion's smile tightened as her milky eyes slid off him. "A woman came by and offered... much more for the Murakami tome."

Deucalion waited and her silence made him stand, his eyes bleeding red as his fangs extended.

"And you *gave it to her*? I would have matched her offer, I don't care *how much*—"

"Mr. Blackwood I know your funds are still monitored and trust me, the amount would attract attention."

Deucalion was glad she was nearly blind so she couldn't see the angry streaks of scarlet that rose up his neck and cheeks. He clenched his fists and his lungs *burned*.

"I thought... I thought no one *knew* that you had the Murakami tome."

Ruth shrugged.

“I did. I guess I was wrong.”

“Some *sympathy*,” Deucalion spat viciously, “would be appreciated, Ruth.”

Deucalion’s tongue was ash and his blood was white-hot magma. He wanted to smash his fists against the stone walls, he wanted to roar until his vocal chords snapped, and he wanted to tear into something living and rip it apart. He hadn’t cried in years because *men of sophistication and elegance did not cry*... yet he felt his eyes burn. He twisted away, his face hot with ingrained shame as he hid his tears from a woman who couldn’t see them.

It wasn’t *fair*.

“It might be difficult for you to hear this, Mr. Blackwood, but maybe it’s for the best.” Ruth crossed her arms. “If word got out a Blackwood was researching Alpha Packs... I could only imagine the fallout to your reputation.”

He left with nothing to show for the long drive back home. His mother was livid, after having three of the four potential wives walk out after waiting for hours. Deucalion barely heard her and slammed into his study.

Deucalion rubbed at his red eyes and dug his claws into his own arms to keep his breathing even. He felt raw and exposed, flinching when his breath would hitch in his chest. The shadows of forgotten history weighed down his shoulders, the barbaric and brutal nature that wolves had chosen to repress for centuries. Blood pacts had changed to brunches. Tribunal meetings were now handled via emails and gift baskets.

A firm series of knocks on the door, three-two-two, pulled Deucalion’s head out of his hands.

“Whatever it is,” Deucalion kicked off his shoes and loosened his tie, “it can wait until tomorrow.”

The hand came down once on the door, hard enough to rattle the oak on its hinges. Deucalion straightened in his chair as a sultry voice he didn’t recognize slithered through the door.

“*Either you can open the door or I can kick it down.*” Deucalion felt emotional exhaustion clear from his eyes, curiosity dispersing his self-pity. “*Your choice.*”

He hurried around his desk to open the door.

A beautiful woman with dark hair and darker eyes stared at him. She didn’t smile as she stepped past him, her eyes flickering over his shelves. She didn’t smell like expensive perfume. Deucalion remembered it was the first thing he noticed.

She smelled like wet dirt, smoke, and sweat. Deucalion closed the door just as she pulled her bag into her lap.

“Eventually you’ll have to get married. You’ve already turned away so many women that you won’t like the scraps you end up with.” Her voice was like a knife being sharpened. Each curl of her lips made Deucalion’s skin break out in goose bumps. “It’s time for you to get married. To me.”

Deucalion pulled his lips back in a half-snarl, half-smile.

“And what makes you so special?”

She snapped the clasps of her bag and pulled out... the Murakami tome. Deucalion’s bravado left him, bursting apart like ash in the wind as she laid the book out on her lap. When their eyes met, hers flashed crimson.

“I believe we share common interests and goals.” She tilted her head to the side in a mockery of charm. “That alone is a good start for any marriage.”

That was how Deucalion Blackwood met Kali. That night he kissed her cold knuckles.

A year later they were married.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 592

Peter: 3,873

Deucalion: 5,704

Satomi: 10,450

Stiles was growing.

Deucalion heard him eat one extra MRE every day and he’d take longer stretching, groaning with pain as his limbs grew. Before Stiles, Deucalion would let time pass in silence with the occasional whisper to Satomi. Time was just more endless darkness and the sound of his own heartbeat. Now...

Now Stiles and Peter were nearly fluent in Japanese. Deucalion would test them, switching between English and Japanese rapidly to trip them up. It made Peter frustrated while Stiles would laugh. Time was spent exercising, stretching, and telling stories, most of them just movies recreated from Stiles’s memory. Even though Deucalion had seen most of them... listening to how Stiles would choose his words, how his excitement would build... it gave each story new meaning.

“Remember to keep your backs straight and your shoulders down.” Deucalion straightened his own back, fighting the hunch that had been forming for years. “I’ll hum the tune, and follow my footsteps and movements. Satomi, you’ll help, won’t you?”

A tap on the glass to his right made him smile.

“Of course.”

Satomi was like a smooth river stone, utterly natural and confident. He reached back into the recesses of his memories to unearth a melody... and he hummed.

He took the first step and heard his three companions mirror him, adjusting posture and sucking in breaths as he continued to hum the haunting melody. He wondered, during the first turn, how much Stiles had grown. His voice cracked less. How much taller had he grown? Did he have facial hair? What sort of things would Stiles have been doing if Peter hadn't bitten his wrist?

"I've been dancing since I was a boy." Deucalion spoke and huffed out a soft laugh when his voice made everyone stumble in shock. "Our family hosted extravagant parties, each one a different theme."

His mother would have the staff in a frenzy for weeks before each event. Deucalion watched them flinch in his mother's aggressive *need* have everything go perfectly even though it always did. He remembered hating every suit fitted for him and the endless amounts of small talk he'd have to make until his tongue was numb. He remembered thinking that Hell had nothing on what the Blackwood Pack had become.

What a fool, the words burned down Deucalion's throat as he spun. *What an ignorant fool*.

Deucalion drew in a breath and suddenly his world blossomed in impossible vision. He was back in his mother's estate under a glittering glass dome where the moon and stars were free to shimmer through. Candles gently burned and jewels shimmered on divine dresses and suits. A woman was in his arms though they were cheek-to-cheek. He felt her flesh beneath his claws and her breath on his neck.

He was dressed in deep, dark green and the fabric felt like Heaven on his skin. The music was provided by a full orchestra in the rafters and Deucalion moved with muscle memory, his grip on the woman's hip tightening as they went for another spin—

As they turned he caught a glimpse of Satomi.

She was draped in beautiful hues of turquoise and gold. She had streaks of silver in her hair and her eyes wrinkled at the sides as she danced with a male partner. *Her husband*, Deucalion's mind provided despite not knowing what Satomi or her husband looked like. The music kept playing and Deucalion kept dancing, subtly steering his partner closer to Satomi, only to catch Peter out of the corner of his eye.

Peter Hale wore a classic black suit, though his cufflinks were a metallic lavender. He was well-groomed, his hair swept back at the temples and his stubble dark enough to be mysterious and not unhygienic. He smiled, crooked yet *distinguished*.

Deucalion could hardly breathe, he squeezed his partner's hip too tight. Deep down he knew it didn't make sense, that he wasn't back at the manor and he wasn't dancing at a party with this three fellow prisoners. He *sincerely* hoped he wasn't losing his mind. It seemed so real, the smell of lingering wax, the taste of brandy on his tongue, and the feel of silk under his palms...

Violins gently drew out a long chord and every pluck of the harp made Deucalion's throat tighten little by little as his eyes moved to—

A long, slender neck bathed in opal moonlight, dotted with dark moles. A tall, lithe man was light on his feet, his suit dark and stitched with goldenrod threads. He was smiling, Deucalion could tell by the flushed swell of his cheek. He laughed, loud and freely in a way that didn't fit the uptight decorum of the party. People would stare, they would snicker and sneer... and Deucalion thought, *let them*, with a vicious mixture of pride and possessiveness.

He twirled and twisted, desperate to see Stiles's face—

Deucalion's nose crunched against the glass.

He stumbled back as three *thuds* echoed around him. Satomi hissed, Peter moaned, and Stiles was silent. He choked on the taste of blood in his mouth. Stiles knocked on the glass.

“Are you alright, Deuc?”

Wet snaps and pops made Deucalion's stomach roil as his nose stitched itself back together. He nodded, his tongue fat and putrid in his mouth.

Did you see it too? We were dancing, we were all dancing together and we were clean... we were free. Did you see it too?

If only he could see their faces... he would know. Instead all he had was darkness and his own thudding heart.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 638

Peter: 3,919

Deucalion: 5,750

Satomi: 10,496

Sweat clung to Deucalion's back. He was naked on the stone ground. He had washed his clothes the best to his ability. They all made due with the hand soap out of the dispenser and cold water... their clothes always crusty and stiff for a few days after drying. He stretched and pressed his fingers down on his muscles.

They were growing, Deucalion realized. He was getting stronger. Toned. Under every soft press there was *more* of him than there was before. Each of his breaths were deeper and when he'd wash his hair, it felt as though less would come away with each pull.

We're changing, Deucalion thought just as Stiles slapped his hands on his skin, either his thighs or his stomach.

“All right,” his voice was crystal clear and sharp, the way it would get when Stiles was opening a new topic he hoped to stay on for the day. “I want to hear dating stories.” Deucalion’s blood ran cold, his body freezing as Satomi giggled. Stiles whined, loud and dramatic with a smile that was so big that even Deucalion could hear it. “I’m serious! I never went on one,” *and I’ll never go on one*, Stiles didn’t say, “and I’m sure you guys have some stories.”

Satomi laughs, a soft way that reminded Deucalion of summer flowers with the promise of rainfall. He had to work for *years* to hear that laugh and yet here she was... providing it so freely.

“I did not date much. I married young... and I was very much in love with my husband.”

Stiles hummed and Peter thumped his fingers against the glass.

“I have had some... *memorable* dates.”

Deucalion heard Stiles’s entire body shift, straighten, and pop.

“Oh yeah? Some *doozies*?”

Peter *snorted* over the ludicrous word, his breaths hitching and his breaths uneven. Satomi laughed with them, getting louder like it was a moment worth extending. As if happiness was attainable. It rang and echoed within the glass walls, growing into a hellish crescendo until it all sounded like white noise.

Deucalion slammed his hands against the wall to put a stop to Stiles’s eager smiles, his gentle but obvious goading.

“Why do you keep talking?” Deucalion spat, his lips numb and his ears deaf to any scolding from Satomi or Peter. “What’s the point of remembering who we used to be? You’ll never need the experience, Stiles, because *you will never get to do it*. You will never date, you will never *kiss*, you will never *fall in love* because ***you are here now***.”

Stiles’s heartbeat was loud enough that Deucalion could hear it fluttering, like a dying bird dashed across the ice. He listened to it stutter as he sucked in a breath the same way he did when he first arrived.

“Deuc—”

“You don’t *need* to know who we were, Stiles. There is *nothing* for you to gain.”

He shifted, he could feel it. When he shifted his vision went from black to red, but it’s not much better. He still can’t see if Stiles is *finally* getting it. He can’t tell if Stiles has finally taken Deucalion’s advice, that to *hope*... to cling to hope for a better tomorrow was a death sentence.

Sharp teeth cut his tongue and lips as he roared, flecks of blood and spit splattering against the glass. His head throbbed in agony, in the dizzying spiral of his own self-hatred. He should

have been better than this, he was a *Blackwood*, part of a legacy that went back centuries. He was an *Alpha*, a born leader.

He had the same hopes that he was sure Stiles kept fed and nourished in silence. When he first arrived, bloodied and blinded, he thought *I'm getting out of here*. He thought, *I won't die here*.

Time didn't stop for him, time didn't hold his hand, and time didn't magically undo locks and break down thick glass.

Deucalion would die there. He wasn't getting out.

The hiss of gas made the hysteria stop. A strange hush that came after there'd been yelling rang in the glass. He was sure Peter and Satomi had tried to calm him down... but now they moved with practiced choreography, grabbing their still damp clothes and moving their cots to the center of the room. Deucalion followed too, he'd done it countless times that it was second nature to hold his damp rags to the ceiling—

He stopped, the gas pressing at his clothes.

Stiles hiccuped, slowly easing himself onto the cot. He cried... which he didn't usually do during the gas. Usually he was quiet, keeping his breathing even, sometimes trying to play off his fear with a witty rejoinder like "See you in a bit, guys. Don't wait up."

He sniffed, loud and thick. He wiped his nose and his breaths were raw. Labored.

Deucalion felt his shoulders quake.

He didn't hate Stiles. He never *hated* Stiles, no matter what the boy might think. He hated Peter for bringing Stiles in, for selfishly marking him instead of killing him. Deucalion was wary of Stiles... because of the songs he'd sing. He was a songbird whose melodies would dull the pain, alleviating their loneliness to the point where every morning he'd wake without the usual suffocating dread weighing him down.

He was a songbird who would put an end to silence and make it into... something like a home.

He tossed his clothes to the side and got off his cot. He heard Peter and Satomi shift, their feet making the polyester material squeak. Deucalion took a few steps to the side, so he was in the center of his room between the door and the far wall that came to a point, and connected with Stiles's glass.

"Deuc?" Stiles whimpered in a cracked voice. "What are you doing?"

He couldn't see the gas... but he felt the thickness in the air around him, how it weighed down his lungs and while it didn't have a specific taste... its presence lingered on his tongue. He straightened his back and breathed the way Satomi did during her morning meditation.

"Maybe they'll cut you a break, songbird."

Blackwood's didn't apologize... and Deucalion wasn't sorry. Not even as the gas made him fall onto his back as Stiles yelled at him to get up, to get up and block the gas, *you stuck-up idiot*. His head throbbed, a dull pain from the stone floor. He closed his eyes and whispered Satomi's mantras, focusing on the Japanese words until he slipped away into deep, forced unconsciousness.

....

The last day of Deucalion's life was a few years after his wedding.

Kali's breath puffed out in front of her. They surveyed their new land in the early morning, their only company fog and frost. They didn't hold hands, hell, they didn't even have a honeymoon. Their ceremony had ended and while their Packs rejoiced at the reception, Deucalion and Kali were dividing up unclaimed territories to start a *new* Pack.

An *Alpha* Pack.

"I have a few interested Alphas." Kali shivered and pulled her jacket tighter around her. Deucalion hummed, his eyes on the map. "Once we start building, they'll come."

The morning hadn't been out of the ordinary. There had been no warning. One moment he was pointing to areas on the map, places for homes, gardens, and the next...

They came from nowhere. His only hint had been the smell of *death*, of something rotting and so pungent that both him and Kali had recoiled, questions on their tongues... when a woman and her *beast* burst through the fog. The woman wore a gas mask, and was armed with blades that reeked of wolfsbane.

Kali took the woman while Deucalion dealt with the beast. It looked like a man, but when it roared it sounded like a wolf. It was old, it was wrinkled, but when it hit him Deucalion had *spots* in his eyes. He had time to suck in a confused inhale before the beast was on him, snapping half-popped fangs in his face, saliva dripping onto Deucalion's cheek.

A few meters away Kali shrieked and knocked one of the blades out of the hunter's hand. It spun and embedded itself in the soft grass.

"Kali!" Deucalion remembered crying out for her. His wife. His *Alpha partner*. "Kali, help me!"

The beast was stronger than Deucalion had anticipated and he just needed help yanking it off, he just needed a moment to tear its throat out. Kali turned to him, and the beast took its milky eyes off Deucalion to look at her. It roared, its entire body shuddering with unnatural rage. Its claws dug into Deucalion's chest and he yowled, twisting beneath it. He squinted past the pain to try and get a good look at its face.

As he grabbed its wrist to try and lift it off, he noticed that something *was moving* on a cut on the beast's cheek. It roared again.

Deucalion's thrashed in revulsion because a *maggot* wriggled in the beast's wound.

He howled and turned his head the side, hoping to see Kali running to assist him. She was frozen, the hunter panting on the ground, eyeing the blade in the ground just out of her reach. Kali met Deucalion's eyes, at the beast atop him. He smiled, more of an exposing of fangs, and waited for her to help.

Kali turned and bolted, disappearing into the trees and fog. Deucalion's eyes had time to widen before the beast dug its claws back into his flesh. The hunter woman laughed and calmly gathered her blade. The beast held Deucalion down and Deucalion wasn't even paying attention to his future captors at that point.

He screamed after his wife. He called her unspeakable names. Horrible insults. But louder than the rest, he bellowed, "*Alphas aren't COWARDS,*" right as the hunter sliced her blades across his eyes.

The last thing he saw was his own howling face reflected back at him in the plastic sheen of the gas mask.

He lost consciousness...

And when he woke he was blind. The wounds were cauterized, that much he could tell by touching the tender skin around them. He smelled the wolfsbane-infused ash burning *beneath* his skin. He felt it prickling, eating away at any hope that he'd ever see again.

He stumbled to his feet and ran, only a few strides before he smacked into a glass wall. He shakily felt around his surroundings, a sealed glass room with a toilet, a sink, and a cot. His first thought was, *this isn't happening*.

This wasn't happening because this kind of macabre circumstance didn't happen to *Blackwoods*. He was an Alpha. These kind of things *didn't happen to Alphas*. He sucked in a deep breath and told himself to keep his breathing even. Blackwoods didn't get hysterical. Blackwoods didn't get kidnapped and imprisoned. Blackwood spouses didn't abandon them in desperate times of need.

His claws rested on the glass, every breath in he counted to four, every exhale he counted to four. All of this, the *beast*, the abandonment, the *blindness*, it was all some sort of misunderstanding. Deucalion was sure of it. Any moment now it would become clear.

A thud next to him made him jump, his eyes widened quickly and *pulled* at the burned remnants of his corneas. He hissed, his hands flying to his eyes, eyes that were sensitive and *squelched* under his palms.

On the other side of the glass came a woman's voice. Deucalion heard warmth in it but it was ragged, as though it hadn't been used in a long... *long* time.

The woman wasn't speaking English. It sounded... Deucalion couldn't be certain, but he thought he recognized some Japanese words. He coughed, his chest seizing as he pressed his hand against the glass.

“Hello?” He hated how his voice wavered with fright. “Hello, who’s there? What’s your name? Where am I?” The woman paused and when she spoke... she sounded disappointed. She asked a question, that much Deucalion could tell, but it was in Japanese. She repeated it, the question that Deucalion had no hopes of understanding. He couldn’t *see her*, he couldn’t even tell if she was close to him. His eyes moved, searching for a woman he’d never see. “Do you... do you speak English?”

His fingers squeaked against the glass. The woman was closer, he heard her move and touch the glass as well. She spoke, and it wasn’t in English.

Whatever she said... it sounded like an apology.

Deucalion’s breath knocked out of him and he doubled over, swallowing uneven gulps of air. Tears scorched at what remained of his eyes. He hiccuped and wept on the stone floor, his back hunched.

Japanese whispers washed over him and Deucalion clung onto them in his first of many days in the dark.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 639

Peter: 3,920

Deucalion: 5,751

Satomi: 10,497

When Deucalion woke it felt as though only seconds had passed. One moment Stiles was shrieking insults in his gas-slurred voice, the next... Deucalion woke to baited breath. He opened his eyes and sat up and he listened to his three companions move with him, pressing as close as they could to the glass. They were quiet as Deucalion brought his hands up to his newly shaved head. His beard had been removed with precision and care. His teeth had a sharp, artificial minty taste to them.

He blinked and turned to glance in Stiles’s direction.

“Why aren’t you working out?”

Stiles blew out an incredulous exhale.

“We were waiting for you to wake up, asshole.”

Deucalion rolled his eyes.

“You shouldn’t break routine over sentiment.”

He snapped his teeth around the words, keeping them clipped and pointed. Stiles didn't flinch. Instead the young man marched up to the glass and kicked it.

"Yeah, I know it's such a drag having people give a shit about you. Deal with it." He kicked the glass again. "Get up. We're doing extra sprints today."

Deucalion's lips pulled back into a smile and he ran with them. He didn't apologize and Stiles didn't forgive him. Sometimes things were better handled in silence, between harsh breaths and strained muscles. Deucalion heaved in air, his arms shaking as they took their first break. Sweat sluiced down his arms and back. He took a steadying breath and sat back with a smile.

"The first girl I ever took out on a date was named Evelyn, though she preferred being called Eevee."

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY AN UPDATE. These past few weeks have been insane... so it pushed back my ability to work on this fic but I'm glad I was able to get it out this weekend. Work really took a lot out of me. I hope you guys like this... please let me know what you think! Any and all comments are welcome here!

Also I have a tumblr: mia6363.tumblr.com if you wanted to chat there about this fic or anything under the sun :) I'm happy to say hello!

Chapter 5: Forced Evolution

Chapter Summary

His mom was dead and “violence is never the answer” had died with her. Reality stared at him from the table, cold and certain.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 703

Peter: 3,984

Deucalion: 5,815

Satomi: 10,561

Wiry hairs made Stiles’s face itch. He scratched at his chin, his nails sliding through his slick sweat. His hair was long, curling around his ears and clinging uncomfortably on his neck. He had zits. He felt their dull ache on his face and sometimes he’d pop them when he’d wash his face in the sink. When Stiles pressed his fingers into his cheeks he felt more bristly hairs.

Trying to piece together what he looked like from vague details made Stiles’s head spin. Even trying to remember what he looked like before he was taken was getting more difficult. He had brown eyes, but how dark were they? He had moles... but where exactly had they fallen on his skin?

The world kept turning and Stiles couldn’t remember what his face looked like.

Beacon Hills would keep turning, growing, aging, and Stiles wondered how long people would remember him. Maybe they already forgot him. He wondered how long it would take for him to go from *Stiles Stilinski* to *didn’t the Sheriff used to have a son?* His throat tightened. It was an obscure pain that had no relevance to Stiles. Not anymore.

The ache from his feet hitting the stone, the burn in his arms from doing endless lifts, the throb in his temples after the last sprint session... that pain mattered.

A tap on the glass came from his right. Stiles glanced up to see Peter. His throat bobbed, like he wanted to speak but decided better. Stiles frowned, then followed Peter’s gaze. He was clutching his right wrist again, his thumb scraping over the bite mark. He loosened his hold but kept his fingers over the scar tissue.

“What’s up?” Stiles’s voice made Satomi and Deucalion turn, their eyes on Peter. Stiles swallowed. “Is something wrong?”

Peter shifted, his eyes darting to the other wolves. His discomfort had lessened but there were still moments when Stiles could see the lingering desire for privacy struggle to find footing in their situation. It always resulted in a foggy look of confusion that Peter shook free.

“You look...” Peter swallowed and even through the glass they heard the loud *click* in his throat. “You have something on your mind.”

Stiles drew his legs close to him and slung his arm around his knees. He heard a soft *thump* on the glass from Satomi. Deucalion scooted forward until his knees hit the glass. Stiles hummed and he leaned back, his head resting on the wall that separated him and Satomi.

“When I was in eighth grade... this kid Terrence Hiem was hit by a drunk driver.” Stiles met Peter’s eyes and the earthy blue-green mixture calmed him. “It was awful, he was on life-support for two days before he... before brain activity stopped. But the thing is... Terrence wasn’t popular.”

That was putting it politely. Terrence had been from a working-class family, though bullies just leered the word *poor* at him and his hand-me-down clothes. He was a fine kid, a few inches shorter than Stiles. He had okay grades and didn’t get overly competitive in gym class.

He smiled a lot. Stiles remembered that.

“Once he was hit, it was like everyone could see him and wanted to pay attention once he was gone. Only when he was gone... was when everyone suddenly wished they could play with him.” His wrist throbbed. An old weight returned in his chest as he forced himself to remember what that time had been like. He rubbed his hand over his heart as if he could erase the bruised sensation that flared up beneath his skin. “You know what was the most insulting part? The kids who bullied him the most... they were the ones who sold ribbons. They were the ones who said his name the most. They said,” Stiles felt his lips pull back in a grotesque mockery of a smile. He exposed his teeth, his breaths becoming harsh. Angry. “They said they would miss him. They went to his funeral and said they were his friends.”

Stiles hadn’t thought about Terrence in ages. Yet it was all he could think about when he’d touch his own face, when he’d stare into the blurred shadows of his reflection in the sink or glass. He thought of Terrence and wondered if the same thing had happened to Stiles.

Would he have been celebrated the same way? Would Jackson cry and call himself a friend?

The more he touched his face, the more Stiles wondered how much time had passed... enough for him to be legally declared dead?

“I bet the same thing happened to me.” Stiles drew in a quick breath that hiccupped awkwardly in his throat. “I must be so popular now that I’ve disappeared.”

At the start of the summer Beacon Hills middle school planted a tree by the staff parking lot in remembrance of Terrence Hiem.

The world kept turning and time eventually forgot everything.

Stiles stood up and wiped his eyes with the back of his wrist. He cracked his neck and rolled his shoulders. He let the sour taste of all the outside *what-ifs* leave his mind. He stretched his arms up until his back popped. He flexed his toes and followed every twitch and shudder of his muscles with his mind. Stiles thought that he'd like to dance.

Without having to say a word, the four of them relaxed their shoulders and slipped into a waltz stance.

.....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 786

Peter: 4,067

Deucalion: 5,898

Satomi: 10,644

Stiles wrung out his shirt in the sink and scooped up water to splash in his recently-shorn hair. He scratched his scalp, it always itched after his head had been shaved. The lights flickered and shut off, a silent command that the day was over, as dictated by their captors.

In the dark the glass seemed thinner. It's dark stretches could easily seem like a night sky... or the endless stretches of the unconscious.

When Stiles still had a house, a bed, and a father, he'd lay awake at night for hours before sleep would finally take him. Stiles remembered how his bed would creak as his legs would jitter and jump. When his mother was alive she'd stay awake and just talk, sometimes an elaborate story or just a play-by-play of her day. Even when her voice would get tired, she'd keep going until Stiles was asleep, lured into relaxing by the sound of her voice.

After she died, his father's advice for sleep was, "just try not to think of anything, Stiles, and go to sleep."

Sleep often evaded him in his bed after his mother died.

The cots were loud and made out of thick polyester. With no blankets and a stone floor, Stiles shivered as the inky-black glass loom around him. His chattering teeth snagged and tore into his lip.

"C-Could," his throat constricted around his words, making them stumble and suffocate. He heard the other cots creak, the Alphas turning toward his voice. Stiles squeezed his arms around his stomach. "C-Could one of you t-tell a story or s-somethin'?" Stiles's breath fogged up the glass by his mouth. "I keep thinking myself in circles. Can't sleep."

Deucalion snorted.

“Wow, Stiles. That’s such an inconvenience. How will you ever cope?”

Satomi hissed an exhale, disapproving while Deucalion chuckled. It was lighter than the barbs Deucalion had hurled Stiles’s way in the early days. Still, Deucalion had a point. Lack of sleep was hardly something to worry about. It was stupid. *Come on*, his father’s voice that grew murkier each passing day, echoed within the glass, *it’s time to grow up, Stiles*.

“I have something.”

Peter’s voice was close. Stiles twisted in his cot. Peter’s cot had crept closer and closer each night until its metal side was pressed to the glass. His eyes shone on the other side of the barrier, the corner of his eyes wrinkling as he smiled. It was the first time his smile wasn’t twitching with uncertainty. It was naked and unabashedly *fond*. Stiles’s lips wobbled.

“You do?”

Peter nodded, his breath fanning out over the glass.

“I do.”

Stiles prayed that Deucalion wouldn’t try and squash Peter’s concrete moment of happiness. Thankfully, no snide remarks or chuckles came from the room, only held breath and attention. The silence that filled their glass rooms was like the hush after church bells.

Awed, respected, and anticipating silence.

Stiles knocked his fingers on the glass. Peter followed the movement with his fingertips.

“Well, if you’re feeling up to it,” Stiles watched his words puff across the glass. “I’d love to hear it.”

Peter’s smile widened. It smoothed years off his face. He sidled up as close to the glass as he could get, only stopping when his cot threatened to tip over. Stiles wiggled as close as he could get and thought, *we’re so close we could be sharing a bed*.

“My littlest niece, Cora, she was sweet but weird.” Peter’s nose wrinkled as his smile slanted. His eyes drifted shut. “My other niece and nephew liked traditional bedtime stories, princes and princess, rescuing, happily ever afters. Those bored Cora to *tears*. It took me a couple tries to get it right.”

Peter’s eyes opened and Stiles could see them clearly even as their breath fogged the glass.

“A long time ago, there was a Russian astronaut. He’d been studying and training for space for so long, that his family was so ecstatic when he finally was selected to be the pilot of a one-man space-ship. It was his big day. His calling. It’s a very small craft and he’d be all alone up there for five years, but he insisted that he was ready.”

The other two cots creaked. Stiles matched his breathing to Peter’s, a slow but steady rise and fall of his chest.

“He takes off, and it’s loud, fighting against nature is always *loud*. The whole ship rattles and this man, this *boy* clenches his fists and his teeth rattle in his mouth. His skin is shaking so hard, his muscles that cling to his bones are tight and for a moment he worries that maybe he *isn’t ready*. Maybe the ship won’t make it... but then the rattling stops. He’s broken through the atmosphere. Everything is silent.”

It’s easy to imagine the heavy feel of his mother’s blanket, the one she knitted when she was pregnant with Stiles. It had a lot of holes in it and the colors were mismatched with no pattern... but it was Stiles’s favorite blanket.

“His world went from brutal chaos to bliss in a moment. He gets situated, makes sure the ship is in order, and he floats, experiencing zero gravity for the first time. He gazes out of the small porthole window and he sees... the Earth, its oceans and land suddenly so vibrant, so expansive and he couldn’t look away from it’s unreal beauty. He thinks, *if everyone could see this, there would be no evil left in people’s hearts*.

Stiles’s fingers tightened on his shoulder, moving to pull the knitted blanket that wasn’t there. It was long and thick, heavy, and would keep Stiles warm on the coldest of days. *It could fit the four of us*, Stiles thought and he heard the other cots creak behind him.

“So our astronaut drifts, in awe, and then he hears this... sound.” Peter tapped his claws on the glass. “Tap, tap, *tap*. And it’s coming from somewhere inside the ship. He waits and it continues, a steady tap... tap... tap.”

Stiles couldn’t look away from Peter’s gaze and warm smile.

“He carefully dismantles the control board, he searches every wire, every crevice of the ship, and he can’t find the cause of the sound. Everything is operating normally, except for that sound. And after an hour, he hopes it will stop. After a day he tries to ignore it. After a week... he thinks he’ll go mad. He had *years* go and for all his tests and engineering, this little sound would be his undoing.”

Peter swallowed and Stiles could picture him, sitting at a child’s bedside. His back would be slouched and he’d gently card his fingers through his niece's hair.

“The astronaut closes his eyes and he listens to it. Tap-tap-tap. He *listens* and reaches into his imagination. He makes this annoying noise evolve into an elaborate symphony. And when he opens his eyes,” Peter drew in a long breath, his eyes shimmering in the dark, “he hears the most beautiful music. And he drifts in space, in bliss.”

Stiles closed his eyes and he let himself think about drifting in space, he thinks about the music, and he thinks about transforming under dire circumstances...

His eyes flew open and he jerked up so hard that his cot fell over.

“Wait.” Stiles’s breathing quickened and his heart thundered in his chest. He was wide awake and his skin slapped against the rock as he scrambled to stand. “This is what’s happening to you, isn’t it? This is why you were captured.” Stiles grinned as he stumbled back to the far glass wall so he could look at the three of them. “Whoever she is, that woman, she’s *waiting*

for something, isn't she? She's thinks you guys are going to take these extreme circumstances and that... something will *happen*, right? That something is going to change?"

Blood stopped roaring in his ears long enough for Stiles to take a breath and worry that he'd snapped, that his logical leap was one of unsympathetic madness. He glanced at Satomi and her wide eyes, her wide *knowing* eyes made his heart swell because *he was right*. Deucalion's eyes were bright red in the dark but instead of looking angry he just looked scared. Stiles whipped his head to Peter—

Peter flinched away from Stiles's gaze.

"Guys." Stiles's hands shook. *Be patient*, he tried to warm himself, but he was *tired* of being patient. "Guys, you *know*, don't you? You do, I can see it on your faces. Satomi," Satomi recoiled away from him when Stiles touched the glass wall they shared. He stumbled back. "Come on, Satomi, if you guys know then..." She shook her head, her eyes wide. Stiles swallowed. "Deuc?" When he turned to glance at Deucalion the Alpha had already dragged his cot to the farthest reaches of his room. Stiles turned slowly. "Peter?"

Stiles righted his cot so it still was close to the glass. He sat on it. Peter had his back turned, laying on his cot. Stiles tapped his finger on the glass, biting his lower lip until it throbbed.

"Peter?" His voice had never sounded so small before. Stiles swallowed and let his forehead rest against the glass. "Peter, please—"

"No."

The rejection was snarled, louder than Stiles had ever heard Peter yell. A long time ago, Stiles would have let frustrated anger slam his fists against the glass. He would have shrieked at their unnecessary fear because *didn't they understand that they were all together? That they were a team?*

Instead Stiles deflated. He laid down on his cot and remained awake. His leg jerked and jumped.

....

Stiles was eleven years old the first time his father took him to the Argent shooting range.

His mother had been a strong believer in "violence is never the answer." Stiles believed her, because his life had been playgrounds and summer camps. Violence, to Stiles, was a bully shoving him in the halls. Violence was a leer and maybe a stomped foot. When she died, his father sat Stiles down and explained what violence really was. His father explained that the world could be a terrible place, where terrible people would give in to dark urges that he hoped Stiles would never be exposed to.

"Protection is important, Stiles. You need to be prepared. Being prepared doesn't necessarily mean that you will face those kinds of people. It's a precaution. You know what precaution means, don't you?"

His dad drove a white truck that would squeal every time they tried to use the air conditioner. Stiles's skinny arm hung out the window. The summer had been hot and his dad would take the turns just a little too quickly because it used to make Stiles laugh when he was little.

He didn't laugh at much anymore.

"Yeah." Stiles rubbed his nose as they turned down another long, winding road. "I know what precaution means."

Precaution meant *just in case*. Stiles tried to focus on the thick foliage of the trees and flowers to distract him from the growing weight in his stomach. His dad's knuckles were white and the leather steering wheel groaned under his grip. Stiles tried telling his dad not to worry but that had resulted in his father reminding him, *firmly*, that his job as a parent was to worry.

Stiles remained silent as the narrow road opened up into an expansive property. Stiles had only been to the Argents a couple of times, but he was never prepared for the beauty of the property. Flowers, bushes, and fruit trees were intricately placed and tended to. All Stiles knew about Kate Argent was that her property and house used to be her father's and that every summer she'd throw a barbeque that Stiles and his father would attend.

Further along the property they had a shooting range. At the barbeque it would be closed. Stiles never thought about it, guns were reserved for movies and his father's holster.

"Howdy, Sheriff," Kate grinned with a wink as she tipped her non-existent hat at Stiles, "good morning, Stiles. You boys ready for some target practice?" Kate clapped her hand down on Stiles's shoulder and he remembered thinking that Kate always touched him a little *too* hard. He smiled because he was supposed to even though the inside of his mouth was dry and sticky. "Right this way, I'll get you all situated at the very end of the range."

Precaution meant Stiles having a copy of the key to his father's cabinet that held his shotgun. Precaution meant that after homework his father would lecture him on gun safety and ethics. Precaution meant learning how to load the weapons in his house and how to clean them. Precaution meant target practice.

Kate said they should "start with the basics," which meant pistol, rifle, and shotgun.

"Great hunters, people who truly respect the animal, will use every part of it as a way of not letting their time and violence go to waste." His dad knelt so he look at Stiles eye-to-eye. "In thinking about defense, don't treat a gun lightly. If you find yourself in a situation where you need to use it, know that you're taking another's life into your hands. Consequences will be faced."

Stiles swallowed, his father's eyes locking him into place.

"So... so I shouldn't use it?"

"I didn't say that." His father sighed, wrinkles forming between his brows. "I'm saying... it's a big responsibility. Use your best judgement. If you're in danger, Stiles, I want you to do

whatever you can to get out of the situation, okay?”

His fingers gripped Stiles’s shoulders tightly, like he thought Stiles was going to vanish into thin air.

“Stiles...” His father’s voice cracked and Stiles tensed. His father had only ever cried in front of him once, and Stiles was on *high alert*. He could hear the *snap* of Kate’s bubblegum as she sat, bored, behind the counter and flipped through a book. His father took a deep breath and his voice didn’t waver again. “Your life is important. Protect yourself.”

He nodded and his father’s fingers slipped off his shoulders.

The weapons were dark on the table. Stiles had held them before, in his own house while his father gently explained their mechanics. He shouldn’t be scared... yet he wanted to avert his eyes. His mom was dead and “violence is never the answer” had died with her. Reality stared at him from the table, cold and certain.

“We’ll start with the pistol, Stiles.”

Logically, Stiles knew that he’d have to fire a gun. He knew that this day would be coming the first night his father sat him down to have *the talk*. Stiles’s first talk hadn’t been about *girls, boys, and safe sex*. Scott dreaded having *the talk* with his mother. Stiles dreaded the feel of bullets in his hand as he loaded the pistol by muscle-memory.

The first talk had been about protection in the context of firearms. His father’s hand weighed heavy on his shoulder as he gently put the noise-muffling earmuffs on Stiles. It lessened the noise, it didn’t *erase it*. His dad’s voice was still clear, when he spoke close to Stiles’s covered ear about things like keeping his breath and hands steady, to take his time and look at the target, to have a firm stance and to keep his grip on the gun because there *will* be kickback.

Stiles fired and the gun roared in his hands, the air vibrated with the sonic wail of a thousand tuning forks, and Stiles felt something leave him, something soft and delicate that he’d never get back.

He wasn’t aware his breath heaved out of his lungs until his father loosened his fingers off the weapon and pulled the earmuffs down so they hung loose around Stiles’s neck. He could still hear the bullet’s echo. Stiles eyes were locked straight ahead at the burned hole at the very edge of the target sheet.

“Are you alright?” His father’s voice wavered. Stiles heard the silent *please, let him be okay. Dear God, please let him be ready*. “Stiles?”

Stiles nodded, hard enough until he convinced himself that he was fine. His tongue felt big and clumsy in his mouth and his teeth were sensitive like he’d been chewing on ice for hours. He nodded until the fog over his mind cleared. He swallowed bitter saliva and glanced back at the target sheet.

“Can I try and hit closer to the target, Pops?”

He saw his dad relax out of the corner of his eye. Stiles was relieved.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 832

Peter: 4,113

Deucalion: 5,944

Satomi: 10,690

When Satomi danced it felt more archaic, less about maintaining a strict elegant posture and more about keeping kinetic energy moving. Stiles followed her twits, jumps, and kicks with the rest of them, sometimes slipping on the rocks but just using the momentum to propel forward into the next movement. Satomi used certain words to dictate which position they had to quickly get into, words like *mountain*, *river*, *canon*, and *blossom*. They parroted the Japanese commands back at her.

Dancing Satomi's way worked out muscles Stiles didn't even know he had.

He twisted to strike the *tiger* position and wondered who in Beacon Hills would be capable of holding them all hostage. Stiles knew *everyone* in Beacon Hills... so he must know who the hell was keeping them in their basement.

Yawning Dragon. Stiles arched his back and threw his arms out, his right twisting behind him and the left flung forward.

Who would benefit from it? It must be expensive, to have such an elaborate set-up. The electricity and water bill must seem suspiciously high... so they must make decent money to maintain this sick obsession.

Setting sun. Stiles dropped to the floor and rolled onto his back, slowly raising his legs from the floor to the ceiling, breathing slowly four times.

Their captors must be held in high regard or complete hermits. Stiles was willing to bet held in high regard, because the first thing his father would have done was question anyone remotely *off*. But search warrants weren't granted just because the Sheriff thought a person was creepy. They'd need evidence. Stiles had no way of knowing what kind of evidence, if any, was left in his house.

Rocky hillside. Stiles turned onto his stomach and curled inward until his forehead touched his knees.

Every instinct told Stiles that he must be mistaken. Beacon Hills was a quiet town, it was a nice place to live and raise a family. Sure, some folks had their quirks, but who didn't? Speeding tickets were the most crime that ever accrued. Stiles felt like he was a hamster stuck in a wheel, spinning in endless circles and ever going anywhere. *Someone did it*, a voice that

grew stronger with each passing day reasoned. *Everyone has secrets. Someone in Beacon Hills is keeping you here. That is a fact.*

Fighting warrior. Stiles sprung to his feet and punched the air twice before spinning into a kick.

The familiar hiss of gas made them all stumble to a stop. Deucalion had to catch himself on the glass, his shirt soaked through with sweat. Peter's mouth sucked in air like a beached whale. Stiles's arms felt like overheated jello. They glanced up and Stiles brought in air so that Deucalion didn't waste his strength.

"It's only in Satomi's room."

Most of the time when the gas was activated it went to all of their rooms and Stiles would sit and wait to be taken. Once in a blue moon, the gas would isolate one of them. Peter and Deucalion would accept their fate and wait, not wanting to waste time in fighting the inevitable.

Satomi quickly stripped out of her clothes and climbed onto her cot to hold her clothes to the vent.

Whenever their captors only gassed Satomi's room, she never stopped. Stiles saw stand for two days straight, never making a sound as she held her clothes to the vents. Deucalion murmured to her in Japanese, a quiet *"I wish I could help you."* He sounded truly sorry.

Stiles's heartbeat slowed as he let his body recover from the vicious dance.

Someone in Beacon Hills, someone Stiles was sure he was at least distantly acquainted with, purposely singled Satomi out in a different way. Stiles couldn't be certain *why* it felt different when the gas was isolated to Satomi's room, but his gut soured more than it did when he would lose consciousness.

She never let it take her, even when her arms shook and tears streaked down her face from the strain of holding her clothes to the vents, Satomi didn't relent until the gas was turned off.

It must have something to do with the reason they're keeping them here. The reason that Stiles had been close to touching until they all refused to answer him. It had taken him several days of running and exercising alone before they joined him again. It had been a silent warning, to not ask too many questions that would reopen old wounds.

He pushed his cot to the glass wall he shared with Satomi.

"Alright, Satomi, I've been saving up some good stories for you." Stiles leaned his head against the glass and smiled. "We're going to start with *Monsters Inc* and see where the time takes us."

He started describing the music of the opening credits, jazz inspired and bright. He did his best Mike and Sully impressions, he hoped that he was able to paint a world full of wonder with notes of melancholy at the end.

This time Satomi had to stand for three days. Stiles didn't sleep, he kept talking even as Satomi cried, even as urine ran down her leg... he just moved onto the next story. The next scene. When the gas finally stopped Stiles had been halfway through *Pan's Labyrinth* and his voice was shot. His vocal chords strained but he didn't stop, not until the hiss dissipated and Satomi collapsed in relief.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 871

Peter: 4,152

Deucalion: 5,983

Satomi: 10,729

As time went on, as time *always* went on, Stiles began to notice differences between his cell and the rest of the Alphas.

The lights were sometimes motion-activated. There were times when they were set to turn on and off, at least it seemed. Stiles had no way of knowing for sure, but it certainly *seemed* as though the lights would turn and off at the dawn and dusk of each day. When the lights would turn off that was the silent command to go to bed.

However, when Stiles was on a run with one of his stories or recollections, when they all sat on the stone floor and slipped backwards into their imaginations... the lights would turn off because they weren't moving. Stiles waved his hand the first time and nothing happened. When Peter, Satomi, or Deucalion would, the lights would flicker back on.

He got less food, less soap, and his room wasn't motion activated when it came to lights.

Stiles didn't matter to the captors. Whatever they were hoping the wolves would do... Stiles couldn't do. Being human wasn't of value.

He idly thumbed over the scar tissue on his right wrist and shivered at the ghostly sensation that whispered down his spine.

They should have killed me by now. Stiles found himself touching the mark more and more with each passing day. It was what was keeping him alive, the false idea that Stiles meant something to Peter. *I'm wasting resources but they're still keeping me.*

He wondered if they'd figure it out one day, that what Peter did on that night was a fallacy. Killing Stiles would have no consequence. His life could end at any moment. It should scare him... Stiles knows it should terrify him, but after still being alive for so long it just felt flat. The fact of *I could die at any moment* was just the same as *the sky is blue*.

Stiles laid on his cot and listened to the Alphas shallow breathing. They slept and Stiles remained awake.

He thought of Peter's astronaut story. He thought about drifting through space, through long stretches of black glass and eternity. *Tap, tap, tap.* Stiles fantasized about drifting, so far away from everything and everyone who had ever known him. Drifting so far that they'd forget about him with the stars at his back. Drifting until time had no meaning. *Tap, tap, tap.*

Stiles's eyes widened and his breath stuttered in his chest when he realized that the *tap, tap, tap* wasn't just in his mind. He twisted on his cot to see Satomi gently tapping against the glass. She laid in her cot, her arm stretched out to tap the wall they shared. Stiles stood, glancing over his shoulder. Peter and Deucalion were still asleep.

He crept quietly to Satomi's wall and crouched down so they were eye-to-eye. She waved him closer until his forehead was pressed against the glass. He swallowed and his throat clicked.

"I know why we are kept here." Satomi spoke quietly in Japanese. Her eyes were wide, the whites of them shining like a scared animal inches away from a predator's claws. Her breath came in rapid puffs against the glass. *"I know what they want us to become."*

Stiles felt dizzy, like he'd been held underwater and was only just being let up for air. The world's axis tilted and he gripped the glass as if it would keep him from hurdling off into space.

"What is it?" Stiles responded in fluent Japanese. He pressed as close as he could to the glass, his heart hammering in time to Satomi's breaths. Her eyes wouldn't look away from him and for a dizzying series of breaths he was sure that she was terrified of *him*. She blinked and she said two words that Stiles didn't recognize. The roaring in his ears, the thunderous drums of his heart... it all stopped and the silence was freeing and suffocating all at once. When he spoke he felt as though his words permeated the glass. *"Satomi, I don't know those words."*

Stiles realized that Satomi was hurdling with him, that her fingers clutched to the glass just like Stiles. His world wasn't the only one without an axis. Her breath stopped. So did Stiles. They held their breath with the gaping maw of silence at their backs when Satomi whispered, sharp and with absolute certainty.

"True Alpha."

Chapter End Notes

Ahhh this update was a tough one. But it feels right to finally get it out. I hope you're all still enjoying it, and that it's not stagnant. The astronaut story is completely ripped from *Another Earth*, a great movie starring Brit Marling. Highly recommend.

Any and all thoughts are welcome! Please leave a comment, I really appreciate every word.

Chapter 6: Satomi Ito and the Absolutes

Chapter Summary

“But in the same respect, because the very small and the very large depend on each other, and all those in between... it is my belief that you are *everything*.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Satomi Ito was seven years old.

Her life was deeply rooted in rural Japan, in a small village that grew in the long valley between two snow-capped mountains. Satomi's house was tucked on the side of a steep hill that faced away from the rising sun. The shadows kept them cool in the summers and Satomi would often lay in the long grass and listen to the wind sing in the trees, the nearby river answering with a song of its own, and she thought, *this is Paradise*.

At that age her worldview was limited but she did understand the important things. The Ito name was as old as the village itself and while the rest of the world didn't know about werewolves, it was an open-secret in Satomi's village. She had the freedom to be herself when other Packs did not. It was why the Ito Clan received so many visitors from all over the world. Her Pack provided a space where others could express themselves. They often brought gifts, and some just for Satomi. She was beginning to suspect that there was something *more* to her family than a relaxed atmosphere.

Cold water flowed around her ankles. The sky was a pale orange as the sun sank lower and lower. Satomi sat on a mossy rock in the middle of the river that flowed through the forest behind their house. She watched small fish dart around her toes. She breathed with the land around her, with the birds and insects. She hoped the water would provide answers to the growing suspicion that the gifts meant something more than simple good will.

Twigs snapped and Satomi glanced up to see her father. She remembered that he always had a slow, melodious way about him, from how he spoke down to his posture. Visitors would hang off his every word, waiting for him to finish with a reverence that Satomi struggled with because, to her, he was just *dad*.

He rolled up his pant legs with patience that Satomi lacked and joined her on the mossy stone. His feet joined hers in the water and the fish moved to make room and then soon adapted to the additional occupant. The river tugged at her toes as her father kissed her temple.

“Satomi,” her name sounded like winter ice cracking to make room for spring.

Her name was the hints of green that poked through the white snow, it was the promise of flowers after a long, long winter. Her father had sensed her growing curiosity and unease. He told her that their family had *history* and that all their visitors were fascinated with their legacy. Recently, he informed her, they also came to gain a perspective.

Perspective, her father explained, was the way a person viewed the world.

He pointed to the water and explained that their world was like this river. There were absolutes as well as mysteries. The Ito Clan did their best to live by the absolutes, her father explained.

The first absolute was: One day she will die.

Satomi knew that, *of course* she knew that, but she'd gotten into the habit of ignoring it. Her father didn't let her, he repeated the sentiment until it reverted in Satomi's chest. It echoed against her ribs and it *hurt*.

Her father said that it was natural to reject the notion, to turn away from this simple absolute. He asked for her to keep breathing in time with him, to put her ear to his chest and listen to his heartbeat and breathe. She struggled, the air burned in her lungs and she gripped her father tightly. He stroked her hair and asked her to join him in a thought experiment about viewing the world. *Perspective*, she reminded herself.

Right now Satomi only knew her perspective because she views herself as the most important. *It's a natural state of ego*, her father reassured her, but he hoped to challenge it. *Take the fish*, her father pointed to the minnows that darted around their toes.

To Satomi they were simply fish. Unimportant, weak, with short lives. *Now try and think as though you were that fish*, her father insisted. He had her think of the waters, of the seasons, of what it meant to feed off the algae. To the fish, Satomi was very unimportant. *Think smaller*, her father asked. Think of the moss they sat upon. How it persevered through seasons, how it was comfortable, and provided food for other animals. To the moss, Satomi was very unimportant.

Now... think bigger.

The trees, which creaked and groaned in the wind, were very old, older than her father. They lasted through winters and bouts of famine, the trees remained. They saw sun, rain, and decades pass with the wind. The trees saw Satomi as a baby and would see her as an old woman, and time would continue after *Satomi* had passed. To the trees, Satomi was unimportant.

But... she wasn't unimportant. Because that was a part of the absolutes that her family lived by. From the biggest to the smallest things, the art of existing together was proof that there was a *meaning* to the chaos. Perspectives of all sizes were needed for a bigger understanding, to know that it's about working together, about understanding how the very small to the very big feel to achieve harmony. It was also about remembering that one day her life would end. Just as all life would end.

Satomi sobbed, her chest heaving and her fingers gripping her father's shirt tightly as she really *tried* to be brave about the first absolute. He held her close.

"So... I am nothing."

Satomi spit it out, the words soured on her tongue. Her father hummed.

"That is one perspective." He leaned down, his lips were on her temple the same way when he'd tuck her in for bed. Satomi closed her eyes, tears streaking down her cheeks, as her father spoke. "But in the same respect, because the very small and the very large depend on each other, and all those in between... it is my belief that you are *everything*."

Satomi's eyes opened and her tears stopped flowing. The universe slotted into place and she understood. The minnows nibbled at her toes, the wind blew through the trees, and the fireflies spiraled in the night sky. Her father helped her across the river. She chased the dandelion seeds in the wind, she spun in the scent of her mother preparing dinner, and she rolled down the hill until she felt as though she were spinning in an elaborate dance with the Earth.

Her dad found her out of breath at the bottom of the hill. She was dizzy and the world still spun as he laid down next to her. Soon they would have to return home for dinner. More guests were coming the next day and Satomi would have to be ready.

"Centuries ago, our clan produced a True Alpha," her father said.

"What's a True Alpha?"

Her father drew in a breath and taught her another absolute.

...

Satomi Ito was seventeen years old.

Visitors were a frequent occurrence but the purpose of the meetings had changed. There were the occasional Pack looking to expand and explore the Ito Clan perspective, but lately... lately local Packs were visiting. On paper, the parade of dinners and lunches were just visits. But every Pack had a single male around Satomi's age. No one said "marriage meeting" aloud, but the implication was clear.

Summer winds did little to ease the humidity that weighed down the air. Satomi's mother and father had prepared a small feast for the Kurosawa Pack. Slow-roasted vegetables and meats made Satomi's mouth water even as her stomach was heavy with anticipation.

The Kurosawas were nice but their son, Hiroaki, looked seconds away from throwing up. His glances at her were fleeting and if she tried to return his gaze he'd look away, his ears red. Satomi resisted the urge to sigh and kept her posture straight and relaxed. Her father and mother politely ignored Hiroaki's discomfort and kept the benign conversation flowing.

Since that particular dinner seemed to be exhausted in its purpose, Satomi let her mind wander.

They had already hosted seven Packs with mixed results. Her mother explained that it was Ito tradition to be carefully selective. It was how she met her father, and thus it was how Satomi would meet her future husband. She wondered how far their lineage would go, how many other Packs would come to the Ito Pack due to their history... and would history repeat itself?

Would the Ito Pack produce another True Alpha?

A sharp clatter ended Satomi's introspection. Hiroaki Kurasawa had knocked his bowl with his wrist and sent it hurdling to the floor.

"Oh no." Hiroaki's voice shot up several octaves as he grabbed his napkin and did his best to clean up the mess. He grabbed the shards quickly, cutting his fingers on the ceramic because he rushed. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

The Kurosawa Pack was frozen as their son hastily cleaned up the mess. Satomi felt her chest constrict in sympathy and she stood quickly, her chair screeching against the floor. The young man glanced up at her, his face a sickly grey.

"It's fine," Satomi crouched down to reach for the remaining shards. "It's just a bowl. We can always make another." She already saw herself going to the riverbed the next morning to gather clay, and how she'd shape that clay into a dipped disc, and maybe apply a stain to give it color before using the kiln. She was looking forward to the sensation of cold earth between her fingers. "It's a thing that can be replaced."

Hiroaki's eyes *finally* met hers and Satomi saw that they were a deep, earthy brown. She paused because his eyes were striking, in a way that most would overlook. Then he recoiled, glancing down at his stained shirt.

"I need—I need some air."

He fled, sliding the door open so hard that it shook on the track. Satomi blinked, shocked at such an outburst, before she turned to the boy's mortified parents.

"I'm going to see if he's alright."

Stepping out into the night air was a relief. The heat of pressure and strained hope didn't follow Satomi outside. She walked, following the rapid heartbeat into the forest. Her bare feet whispered over grass and stone, until she stopped at the river.

Hiroaki Kurasawa was eighteen and a half years old. He was a nice boy who was a decent student, enjoyed baseball, and he volunteered at animal shelters. That was what his parents told her parents, as though that single sentence could accurately sum up a real person. Satomi figured she'd get to know him at dinner, and all that she observed was that he wouldn't look at her if he could help it, and now—

He was knee-deep in the river, the legs of his slacks sloppily rolled up over his knees as he dipped his white button-up shirt into the water. His shoulders were broad, though because he'd constantly slumped during dinner, Satomi hadn't noticed. It was impossible to hide it when he had his back turned. His thin undershirt couldn't hide the distinct knobs of his

vertebrae and his long arms. He was taller than Satomi and his frame was leaner, like thin, twisted metal.

Satomi slowed on the riverbank.

He didn't turn around, his shoulders rising as Satomi came to a stop. She smelled the salt in the air and heard the rattling inhale in his chest. He wiped at his eyes with the back of his wrist and his shoulders shook.

"Is it badly stained?"

That made him turn, his eyes red-rimmed and his mouth slack in shock.

"Uh," he glanced down at his button-down shirt in his hands. A few small spots remained and he sighed. "I can get a new one."

Satomi marveled at his eyes and was pleasantly surprised that his shock helped him maintain his gaze. She gathered her skirts into her hands and held them up as she stepped down onto the clay beds. The cold earth beneath her feet made her smile. The stars began to peek out one-by-one and the moon was a half-crescent, though Satomi didn't pay the sky much mind.

"It's okay if we don't hit it off. The pressure isn't on *you* for this."

"That's not," Hiroaki flushed when Satomi raised a disbelieving brow, "that's not *the only* reason why I'm anxious." The more he looked at her, the more Satomi noticed about him, the way the lines and bags under his eyes were deeper than most. It gave him a distinguished, mature look. She watched his Adam's apple bob when his shoulders slackened. "I didn't get it, the way everyone talked about you and your Pack. It just... it didn't seem real. But it is. And now I feel like an idiot." He wrung out his shirt, his fingers still trembling. "People say the Ito Clan will produce another True Alpha."

Satomi felt a flutter in her chest, something hot and sharp that she tried to suppress. She stepped into the water, her breath catching at the chill. The current was strong and Hiroaki's hand shot out instinctively. Satomi grabbed his hand and let her skirts fall into the water.

"True Alpha..." Satomi held out her other hand and Hiroaki took it even though they both knew she didn't need help keeping her balance. "We believe that a True Alpha isn't a predetermined figure that's destined in the stars. We believe that a True Alpha is a state of being. They are an absolute. Their words and actions are true. They are a standard to aim for. To achieve." The cold water swept through her legs, just above her knees. "It can be anyone."

Satomi Ito truly believed that. She felt Hiroaki relax and when he smiled it washed away his worries. She didn't say, *I think it could be me*. She never admitted it aloud, how she *felt* that it was her purpose to be another Ito True Alpha. Years later... she wondered if she'd revealed how prideful she'd been if it would have changed anything.

Fireflies flickered to life and the silence between them grew. Satomi glanced down, at her soaked skirt and his wet pants. Her hands squeezed his as heat crawled up her neck and ears.

“I thought you were annoyed at me at first. I’m glad I was mistaken.”

Hiroaki didn’t like baseball, his parents just wanted him to sound more normal. What he loved was knitting, sewing, and crocheting. He stayed up late to listen to foreign radio programs when his parents went to sleep. When he smiled and truly meant it, his lips were slightly lop-sided with a hint of teeth.

His hands were warm in Satomi’s when she led him back to the riverbank and pulled him up to the grass. His cheeks were pink against the indigo sky, stars spread above them like a blanket.

“Thank you,” his eyes never strayed from her as he squeezed her fingers, “for coming to check on me.”

“Of course,” Satomi whispered despite them being alone, despite being so close that she could feel his breathing hitch when she swayed even *closer*, “I’m glad you’re feeling better.”

Satomi closed the gap between them, raising up on the tips of her toes until their lips connected. Hiroaki made a small, vulnerable sound of surprised delight. He dropped his wet shirt to the ground in order to let his hands fall on her waist. Her world narrowed until it was only Hiroaki Kurosawa, how his lower lip was slightly chapped, how his fingers smoothed over her cheek, and how when Satomi pulled back for a breath he immediately followed like he couldn’t get enough.

Everything about Hiroaki was soft and familiar, like a sunbeam in the winter. Satomi guided him closer, her fingers gently brushing across the thin hairs on the back of his neck. The *sound* that left Hiroaki’s mouth was *delicious*.

Satomi pulled back with a smile. Hiroaki’s answering grin was one that she wanted see for the rest of her life.

....

Satomi Ito was nineteen years old.

Marriage and bonding ceremonies were a wondrous and celebratory affair... also tedious. Satomi was happy to honor centuries upon centuries of tradition, she was delighted in the different ceremonial robes that she adorned for every step. She enjoyed the way her hair was silken and woven into elaborate braids that hung loose down her back, she took time to say hello to everyone invited, and *loved* dancing under the moon. Still, Satomi was not a saint.

Hiroaki’s lips were on hers as soon as the door to their new home swung shut. Satomi laughed despite the urgency in her own movements to twist out of her intricate robes.

“Oh my God,” Hiroaki bared his neck to Satomi when she skimmed her teeth along his lower lip, “I thought our wedding was going to take *forever*.”

Satomi laved her tongue over his pulse and relished in how he jumped, a high-pitched whine leaving his throat as his long legs fell open as he fell against the door. She moved quickly and

with purpose, her body hot with anticipation and desire.

“The point is we’re married and bonded.” Satomi spoke the words against the sensitive skin that stretched over the space between Hiroaki’s neck and shoulder. Her fingers tugged at the sash holding her husband’s robe together. “No more chaperoned dates. No more long, tedious family dinners.” She yanked the sash and, like her, her husband was bare beneath his clothes. His blush extended down his face, neck, all the way to his chest. She spread her palm out over his heart. “You’re mine.”

“Yours.” Hiroaki nodded, his hair falling in his eyes as his chest heaved for breath. “Satomi, *please*—” The Alpha in her liked hearing her husband beg for her affections. Satomi trailed her hand down, her fingers skimming over his nipples and down his abdomen, when her husband shook his head, his fingers gently closing around her wrist. “No, I meant... I meant, I want to see you.”

He stepped forward, his knees shaking as he kissed her, an open-mouthed kiss on her cheek. Satomi let him gently work her sash free until her robe fell to the floor like flower petals. She shivered, exposed.

Hiroaki’s erection throbbed against her thigh and Satomi swallowed, her throat tight.

“Let’s go to the bedroom.”

They didn’t take time to explore the rest of their home, too young and giddy with excitement. Satomi could hardly breathe around the mess of nervousness, excitement, lust, and a pinch of terror. It made her limbs awkward, her steps stuttered once she stood before their large bed.

I can do this. Satomi reassured herself because it was simple biology. Reproduction, *sex*, it was an act as old as life on earth. Nothing to be afraid of. *I can do this like my ancestors before me.*

Large, calloused hands ran down her sides and settled over her stomach. Hiroaki came up behind her, his chin resting on her shoulder.

“I’m nervous too.” He kissed down her neck, lazily chasing the chills that darted over her skin. “You’re so soft.”

Satomi inwardly preened as she gently guided her husband to the bed until he had to fall back on it. He laughed though it became strained when Satomi crawled after him until she straddled his waist. His hands gripped her thighs but didn’t move.

“You can touch me,” Satomi breathed, her ears hot, “if you want to.”

Hiroaki’s hands immediately swept up her stomach to her breasts. She reached down to grip his erection, her fingers skimming over his shaft. His breath rushed out in a gasp.

“Satomi,” His voice moaning her name made a harsh *throb* pulse between her thighs. Her hands shook as her hips jerked forward and she brushed *against him*, wanting and *wet*. “S-

Satomi—” His hips thrust upwards and Satomi gasped when he came, his seed splashing up her chest. His face flushed red and his hands slapped over his eyes. “I’m sorry!”

Satomi frowned and she tugged on his one hand while she played with the mess on her chest with the other, loving the smell of him on her skin.

“What for?”

He cracked his eyes open and Satomi felt a lurch of distress weigh down in her stomach when his eyes were watering.

“I... I w-wanted to last longer.”

Satomi hushed him, sliding up his body to kiss him through the aftershocks.

“It’s okay.” She kissed his cheeks, peppering him with tiny kisses until he laughed. “We have all night. We’re young.” She bit his earlobe and *oh*, she liked how he shivered beneath her. “There are other ways we can have fun.”

“Right.” Hiroaki smiled sat up, playfully twisting her until her back hit the bed. “You’re right.”

He kissed her lips, then down her chest, his fingers gripping her thighs. His breath was hot against her skin, against her most delicate parts and Satomi sighed his name. He smiled against her thigh.

Her hands tangled in his hair as he worshipped her, their bed the altar and her body a doorway to the divine. Satomi’s thighs trembled when Hiroaki licked *into* her. When she chanted his name it only spurred him on, further, faster, sweeter, until she was dizzy with want, with the oncoming wave of pleasure. Pinpricks of pleasure numbed the tips of her toes and grew into a fire that consumed her.

She arched her back and fell off the precipice.

We have our entire lives, Satomi thought in her drowning pleasure-haze, *we have our entire lives to love each other*.

....

Satomi Ito was twenty-five years old.

Flower petals danced on the spring winds. The countryside was in full bloom and the animals sang in the hills. Music drifted out of their modest cottage from a record player. Satomi was elbow deep in dirt as she weeded their herb garden. Tiny hands joined her and Satomi smiled. Her young daughter Yomiko held the clumps of weeds in her tiny fists.

“These plants are bad plants?”

“No plant is a bad plant, Yomiko.”

She watched Yomiko's eyebrows lower, wrinkles appearing on her forehead.

"But... how come you're taking them away from the garden?"

Satomi finished up the last of the weeding and her daughter readily gathered the discarded leaves and roots. Satomi stood and brushed off her muddy knees.

"These plants are weeds and they can cause damage to the herbs we need to grow. They spread very quickly, but that doesn't make them bad. A plant's job is to grow, and a weed grows. But in order to protect our food, I take the weeds away." She led Yomiko down the hill toward the forest. The compost pile never failed to make Yomiko wrinkle her nose. "Toss them here."

Yomiko threw them on the pile and ducked behind her mother's legs.

"Yuck!"

Satomi chuckled and ruffled her daughter's hair.

"Race you to the river."

With a gasp and a joyous howl, Yomiko raced off into the woods. Satomi followed at a slower pace, mindful of her stomach which grew heavier with each passing day. Her daughter splashed on the bankside and they bathed themselves in the forest.

"When we throw the weeds in the compost pile we are giving them new purpose. They decompose and make fertilizer, which makes other plants grow."

Yomiko splashed with the fish and Satomi would save her lesson for another day when her daughter was older. They climbed out of the water and shook themselves dry before retrieving their clothes. When they stepped out of the treeline a waft of delicious scent hit them full force. Yomiko took off running.

"Daddy made stew!"

Stew meant visitors were coming. Stew could be made in large quantities but still hold flavors over the next few days. Satomi continued her parents' legacy and hosted Packs from all over the world who wanted to learn a new perspective. Her husband hid his nervousness well, mostly by cooking to Yomiko's delight.

Her clothes were damp when she made it to their house. Yomiko sat at the kitchen table, legs swinging from the chair.

Once her second child was born Satomi was going to travel more, to expand her knowledge. She had gotten a passport and planned to visit a different country every year. When she spoke about it with Hiroaki he would beam at her, his eyes brimming with excitement. She rested her hand over her stomach and thought *my children will see the world, and the world will teach them.*

“Do you need a towel, sweetheart?” Hiroaki’s eyes swept over her and they darkened a bit, a light blush dusting his cheeks. “I can get you a change of clothes if you need it.”

His smile still widened when she’d kiss the corner of his mouth. She delighted in the affectionate hum that buzzed on his lips.

“I’m fine, thank you.”

Her husband ducked down to kiss her on the lips, his tongue playfully slipping over her teeth. His hand came to rest on her stomach and he pulled back breathlessly.

“I love you.”

He said it like it was an absolute. And it was an absolute. Satomi loved Hiroaki and she loved Yomiko. These were absolutes. Satomi held her hand on the back of his neck and she repeated her absolutes back to him. *I love you, I love you, I love you.*

....

Days in Captivity

Satomi: 11

Satomi Ito was thirty years old.

She paced in her prison, she snarled and hit the walls until her fists were just slabs of flesh barely clinging to the bone. She screamed. She roared until the tears that tracked down her cheeks felt like fire. She abandoned any worldly and peaceful thoughts in exchange for mindless bloodlust and dreams of sadistic vengeance.

It took eleven days for her to tire herself out until she was panting on the stone ground. Eleven days of no food and only the water she could cup in her hands from the sink.

Her skin knit back together. The pounding in her head faded to a distant ringing, the sound of her daughter’s finger around a wine glass. Her breaths evened out and she thought *at least my Pack is safe*. She swallowed the thoughts that they were adrift without her. Surely, *surely*, Hiroaki would be able to hold them together.

Eleven days was how long it took for Satomi to realize that she was truly at the mercy of her captors. There was no hope of escape... not unless that *woman* or *man* decided to open the door and let her out.

She drew her knees up to her chest and clung to them. She didn’t realize that the woman had returned until she knocked on the glass. She spoke in English. Satomi just stared at the eyes of the woman who ripped Satomi away from her Pack. She spoke again, slower and louder as if that would miraculously make Satomi fluent in a foreign language. The stairs creaked and the older man joined her.

He had deep wrinkles and an unkind face. That’s what Satomi remembered about him.

The woman blew hair out of her face with frustration. She dug out a piece of paper on her phone and spoke in broken Japanese. Her grammar was atrocious, but Satomi got the key words.

Father. Sick. Bite. True Alpha. Cure.

Satomi stood, slowly and on weak limbs. Her eyes left the woman and stared at her father. His deep frown and crossed arms as though he hated being in Satomi's mere presence, despite the fact that they had captured her. She drew close to the glass until her breath fogged over it.

They wanted the bite of a True Alpha to cure her father's sickness. Judging by the sallow look of his skin, the way desperation rimmed his eyes, it was cancer. They captured her and demanded a miracle.

Satomi was not a True Alpha.

It was in that moment that she realized she would never become a True Alpha the way she'd foolishly dreamed. She'd been so prideful, to think that *she* was at a higher importance than the rest of the world's population. It had made her weak, weak enough to be so easily ripped from her Pack. Her father had tried to bestow such a simple lesson on her when she was young and all she'd done was wasted his words, his beliefs, on her own pride. Her saliva soured and she pressed her lips into a thin line to keep from vomiting.

She turned back to the woman and nodded. *I understand. I agree.* Satomi spoke though she wasn't sure how much the woman understood. She was weak, from having not eaten, from having not slept, and when they opened the door Satomi didn't think of escape. She watched the older man hold out his arm... as though he were doing her a great service by *allowing* her to bite his skin.

They thought she was a True Alpha. They were wrong.

Satomi had never met a True Alpha, but the legends had all sorts of beliefs. True Alphas spoke and lived by their irrefutable truths, True Alphas formed a bond *stronger* than Pack, and True Alphas could do the unbelievable with ease. Many people had different ideas as to what *the unbelievable* could be. Some thought a single bite from a True Alpha could cure all sickness and disease. Satomi had no way of knowing if this was true...

All she knew was what a regular Alpha bite would do to disease.

Satomi took the man's arm into her hands and she opened her mouth, her fangs dropping like guillotines. He said something to her, in rough English blackened with a sneer. Satomi met his eyes and her thoughts were stripped of language. Her hatred burned so deep it went to a place where no words could breathe. It rotted inside of her, it poisoned her down to her very soul... and she thought, *why not return the favor?*

Her fangs pierced his arm and she bit hard. She let his blood fill her mouth and she waited.

Depending on the severity of the disease, the effects of the Alpha bite could take anywhere from seconds to hours. The man seized immediately and black liquid spewed from between his teeth. His veins bulged and a shrill scream tore from his throat. Whatever he was afflicted with...it was everywhere. Satomi stumbled back and the woman shrieked, hysterical, as her father foamed at the mouth, his eyes wide and his muscles snapping apart only to reform. He bellowed like a dying lion as he twisted on the ground. His hands hit the glass walls and then he went still.

True Alpha bites might be able to cure all disease. There was no way to know.

Alpha bites did not react well with abnormal cells. It compounded the problem at an exponential rate, burning through any remaining healthy cells and then turning on the diseased. Instead of fixing the problem, it only served to make it worse on an unfathomable level.

The woman fell to her knees and pressed her ear to the man's chest. Satomi's quaking legs were too weak and she had to lean on the glass as she listened to the man's heart stop. The woman's breath hiccuped in thick sobs... and then the man's chest heaved.

His heart did not resume beating, but his body continued in operation. An Alpha bite would keep the body going, but in doing so would break down the brain to nothing but the base components. When the man snarled, empty and hollow, Satomi felt ghostly chills run down her spine. She'd never seen the consequences... she never thought she'd be the cause of such a pitiful abomination.

The woman she used to be seemed so far away. Within moments Satomi had killed everything she stood for, every lesson her father taught her, it all fell through her fingers like water. The woman shouted in short, shrill bursts, her eyes wide and scared. Satomi sucked in air and laughed.

She laughed like she was dying, loud coarse, she threw her head from side to side and shrieked in demented glee. The woman kept hitting the man on the chest and he gurgled, mindless, and Satomi wept in perverse bliss. The woman whirled on Satomi and with every hit to Satomi's starved, weakened body, she just laughed harder, she laughed even when the woman kicked Satomi's teeth in.

The woman tossed her back in the room. Satomi barely noticed. Blood ran down her mouth and throat, she spit out her teeth so she could continue in her howling laughter. The woman kept hitting the glass, screaming at Satomi in English. The woman's father stumbled back to his feet, dead behind his eyes, and Satomi laughed until her voice gave out.

....

Satomi didn't know how old she was when she told Stiles everything.

She took in his young, pale face, his earnest eyes that still had so much empathy in them. They drifted in the dark, separated by glass as she confessed everything to him, her life of pride... and the darkest sin she committed. She knew why the woman continued to capture

Alphas, she knew that she still held out hope that a True Alpha's bite would cure him... but now it was to cure him of the affliction Satomi gave him.

His hand was pressed against the glass, his fingers long as he finally understood why Satomi never let the gas take her. The woman had a reason to keep the rest of them alive... but Satomi...

She would be killed. For the longest time Satomi fought to stay alive and as she whispered in the dark to Stiles, she realized why. Perhaps her old self hadn't died... perhaps her old self had clung to life just as Satomi had... and now...

With every passing word she left her legacy. She would never be a True Alpha. She drank in every detail about Stiles.

Despite how he had never touched her, she felt calmer in his presence. She shared visions that he led them down, and he brought the air back into their lungs after they'd spent so long waiting in silence. He made the unrelenting and agonizing... bearable. Liveable. Sometimes, depending on what kind of story he was weaving, their time was enjoyable in a way that no one believed was possible.

Stiles reassured her that she wasn't some macabre reflection of what she used to be. If she let him... he could convince her that he was right. But she nodded and kept her resolve.

She'd finished what she'd been waiting for.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 902

Peter: 4,183

Deucalion: 6,014

Satomi: 10,760

The familiar hiss of gas ripped Stiles from his story. He blinked spots from his eyes and got up on shaking legs. Peter stripped off his clothes in the room next to him and Deucalion dragged his cot to the center. Stiles glanced up at the vent and rolled his shoulders. He pulled his cot to the center and stripped off his clothes.

On wobbling legs, he stepped on his cot and raised the clumped ball of clothes above his head...

"I can reach!" Stiles's voice cracked. His arms felt like they were filled with static and his tongue was too big for his mouth. His head whipped to Peter. "Peter, *Peter*, I can *reach*!"

Peter grinned like they were out in the open with the wind in their hair. Stiles's face hurt, his smile was so wide. His eyes drifted to Deucalion and the blind wolf's smile was crooked and

toothy.

“You finally grew tall enough, songbird.”

Stiles’s heart tremored in his chest as he held his clothes to the gas. He exhaled in one big *whoosh* before he turned to—

Satomi sat on the floor with her back to him. Her hands rested on her knees and her head tilted back as she took a deep breath. She spoke softly, in melodic whispers that Stiles now understood.

I am nothing. I am everything. If I can not live by truth, then I will die by truth. I love my husband. I love my children. These are my absolutes.

Crumpled clothes fell from Stiles’s hands as he leapt off his cot and slammed his hands against the wall he shared with Satomi.

I am nothing. I am everything. If I can not live by truth, then I will die by truth. I love my husband. I love my children. These are my absolutes.

He pleaded with her in his broken, blown out voice. His vision burned and blurred. His throat choked on the gas and spots appeared in his vision. He watched as Satomi swayed to one side and fell, her long, ink-black hair swirling around her spilled oil. Her voice continued, even as Stiles struggled to remain conscious, telling her to get up, get up, *please*—

I am nothing. I am everything. If I can not live by truth, then I will die by truth. I love my husband. I love my children. These are my absol—

Chapter End Notes

This... took some time. Sorry it was delayed in posting, life got busy, and it took a lot of back-and-forth for me to feel good about this chapter. Satomi's background might be what I've been, so far, most excited to write. I was listening to a lot of music from Twin Peaks while I was creating her story. Before you guys get too upset, notice I DIDN'T change certain tags. And know that even when things look dire... well, we'll see. I hope to see you guys at the next chapter, and please, let me know what you think even if you weren't a fan.

You can follow me at my tumblr [here](#)! and feel free to ask me anything, I'm here! I'll post a little behind the scenes about this chapter and the others, about music I listened to and just some bits and pieces of insights.

Also, if you guys need some fluff to recover, may I point you towards [The Last Trolley Stop](#)? It's Steter and a fluffy Children's Show AU. For all the times that Peter and Stiles can never hug here, trust me, there are many hugs in TLTS.

Please let me know your thoughts! Thank you for reading!

Chapter 7: The Breathing Experiments

Chapter Summary

His dad would know what to do, Stiles thought. *No*, a voice that sounded like his father interjected, *you're all on your own now, Stiles. The only one to get through this is going to be you. No one else.*

Right. Duh.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This starts with graphic descriptions of the aftermath of violence. I updated the tags as well so make sure to check those.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 904

Peter: 4,185

Deucalion: 6,016

Satomi: 10,762

The first day was measured in hitched breaths and roaring silence. Stiles refused to sit, to eat, to drink, he remained at the very edge of his glass room where he could see the start of the stairs. Every breath was an enraged *push* and *pull*. His breath fogged against the glass, hot puffs of what could I have done differently? If I'd talked to her more, if I'd realized it sooner, if I'd convinced her more, would it have changed anything? Stiles didn't cry. Satomi's absence was like a raw, infected wound that made him itch, a gaping, bottomless maw.

The lights turned off and the day was over. Satomi had still not returned.

"Stiles," Peter broke the silence on the second day, his expression so pained and hesitant that Stiles's anger immediately dissipated into a deep sadness. "She wouldn't have wanted you to wait."

"You don't know that."

Stiles cringed at how petulant he sounded. He crossed his arms and reluctantly pulled his eyes away from the stairs. Peter held his gaze but didn't retort. Deucalion sat this his shoulders hunched inward, his side pressed against the wall he shared with Satomi.

"I do." Deucalion's heaved out breath like it hurt. "I know her the best. She would not see it as a loss. Everyone dies eventually. She just pushed the clock forward."

The air streamed out of Stiles's mouth, so hot it almost burned his lips and tongue. His throat tightened, his eyes burned, and his hands shook. And still, he could not cry.

"She told me why you're being kept here. She told me what they want you to turn into." Stiles swallowed acidic bile even though it stung his throat. "She said... she said she's the reason why that... that the woman keeps holding out hope, she bit—"

A door slammed open. Stiles fell silent, whipping back around. The familiar falls of heavy boots were followed by squishy, wet squelches and thumps. Stiles watched the woman in her mask turn the corner, her posture severe and rigid. Her breathing was heavy, and dried blood crusted on her clothes, clumps of viscera on her boots. Stiles couldn't breathe, even as the woman stepped forward and opened Satomi's door. She had Satomi's wrist in her one hand and dragged her body behind her like a bloody sack.

The three of them watched in silence, none of them breathing or moving as the woman dropped Satomi carelessly to the floor. Her breathing was heavy through the mask, like a rotted machine that was days away from falling apart. Her shoulders hunched and she threw the door shut behind her, climbing up the blood stained stairs in her utility boots.

The moment they heard the door slam shut, the three of them burst into breath and movement.

"What's happened, is she alive? I can't *hear her*—"

"She's not in the best shape," Stiles forced the words out past a nauseating wave of saltwater that flooded his mouth. Peter's breath was ragged behind him, lurching out of his lungs in choked sobs. Stiles breathed through his nose in deep pulls as his eyes swept over Satomi's body. Her eyes were open, one split down the center. Her right cheekbone had broken, her left ankle crushed, and there were more lashes and deep cuts across her body than Stiles could count. Her hair had been sloppily shorn down to the skin in uneven clumps. He didn't look away, not even as Peter threw up in his toilet and Deucalion's questions became shrill. Stiles kept his breathing steady like the winds through a field. "She won't die. She *won't*."

He pressed his hands to the glass. He waited until Deucalion's voice had dropped away, until Peter's ragged breath smoothed over into hushed silence. He waited until the world was the rush of Stiles's lungs, the thud of his heartbeat, and Satomi's body.

"You are whole." He watched as her skin began to knit back together, pressing clotted blood out and onto the floor. "You are alive." Bones and muscles snapped slowly into place, one rubbery sinew at a time. "You are breathing." Her chest lifted in a gurgling, sodden wheeze. She rolled to the side and coughed up a ball of spongy flesh. "These are your new absolutes."

Satomi's eyes lifted to meet Stiles's gaze. He didn't flinch away, not even as her one eye sewed itself back together. Instead, he leaned in close enough that his breath fogged up the glass. Behind him, Peter shouted updates to Deucalion. Stiles heard none of it. He heard Satomi's ragged breathing as her ribs righted themselves, as bone fragments rattled in her lungs until she coughed them out.

Her hand fumbled to press against the glass. Her fingernails had been removed and just started to grow back.

As her body righted itself with one labored breath at a time, Stiles told her all about brightly colored balloons, a grumpy old man with a boy scout, and hummed the whimsical score. He paused when she coughed up more discarded tissue during the healing process, he refused to wince when she'd wipe sticky clumps of dried yellow pus from where open wounds had previously festered. While Stiles's words painted vivid pictures of dogs that could talk, a giant bird with colorful feathers, and a bittersweet conclusion about loss and acceptance—Satomi's body righted itself until she she breathed with no hindrance. She pushed herself up just as Stiles's voice gave out on the last line of *Up*.

Deucalion and Peter breathed behind Stiles, pressed up against the glass. Stiles sighed.

"From now on I'm the only one who gets taken." He stood with Satomi and turned to Peter and Deucalion. "Even if just your room is isolated with the gas, you stand for as long as it takes for it to stop. From now on she only takes me. Understood?"

Every insult that had ever been hurled Stiles's way, every severe glance, criticism, snicker—it was washed away with the way Satomi, Deucalion, and Peter *looked* at him. The way they looked at him... it made it hard to breathe as they nodded. The way they looked at him...

Stiles felt brave.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 937

Peter: 4,218

Deucalion: 6,049

Satomi: 10,795

The gas's hiss came in the middle of their fourth set of suicide sprints that day.

Without a word they stripped out of their sweat-logged clothes. Stiles held his breath and quickly lifted to the tips of his toes on his cot, blocking the gas with his clothes. The others mirrored him, remembering his demand. Sweat crawled down his spine, his knees steady as he let out his breath slowly.

He drew in air, a long and slow inhale that filled his lungs to the brim. He kept sucking in until his eyes watered and his vision blurred. Moving quickly, he shoved the air out of his lungs as fast as he could. It hurt, the first breath was dizzying, which meant Stiles had the right idea. He sucked in air, filling his lungs to their entirety, and then pushed it out with rapid speed.

“*Stiles*,” Peter hissed. “What are you doing?”

Deucalion’s eyes widened at the terrorized anxiety in Peter’s voice. When he began to move Stiles shouted.

“Stop! Don’t move!” Stiles’s teeth caught on his lips, his eyes wild. “Keep the vents blocked, no matter what happens.”

He didn’t ask for them to verbalize their promise. He returned to his pattern of deep, lung-bursting breaths with sharp, dizzying exhales.

When he was little the concept of accidentally killing brain cells and making himself lose the one thing he had going for him, intelligence, had terrified him. He used to cry whenever he’d fall down because if he didn’t have his brain, then what good was he?

In and out. Pull and *push* until Stiles’s vision swam. Until his legs gave out. Until he landed on the ground without breaking his fall, but his fading consciousness took away the pain. For as long as he could think, he kept the breaths coming in slow, then fast, pull then *push*. The gas drifted down, but he heard it shut off just as he lost consciousness.

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Stiles had gotten his first detention when he was fifteen years old.

He’d been in a grueling social studies class, bored out of his mind. His foot jumped and he wondered when his days had become a series of dreaded bullet-points he’d have to meet until his day was over.

Wake up to either an empty house or a quickly rushed goodbye from his father, a hastily made lunch before he ran to catch the bus. Face an apathetic sea of faces with Scott, struggle to stay remotely interested in classes that he could ace in his sleep, and of course top off the day with brutal lacrosse practice drills with Coach while dodging bitter insults from Jackson. All in a day’s work.

His mother’s death left a stain on his name. Scott argued that maybe it was a good thing, because other kids had been bullied far worse. “*You know, they might think it could push you too far.*”

Scott was a loyal friend, but lacked tact. Being ignored, being alone... even having teachers avoid saying his name in class because of the mixture of pity-misery-contempt that would immediately follow— it could be worse. Stiles did his best to remember that. It could always be worse.

He doodled in his margins, wondering what insane speech from the Coach was going to keep him breathing through practice. He had a liking for the *Independence Day* speech, but Stiles would give anything to hear Coach's rendition of Howard Beale's speech from *Network*. Just as Stiles began to think of ways to slip some DVDs in the Coach's bag, Lydia Martin's voice yanked him out of his distracting musings.

"— never do that. I abhor all violence," Stiles rolled his eyes at the word *abhor*. What human being actually used the word *abhor*? He twisted in his chair. At the end of most classes, their teacher would try and encourage moral debates to keep the class talking. The teacher was still wet behind the ears and Stiles could appreciate the enthusiasm, but that appreciation was far from his mind when Lydia tossed some hair over her shoulder in a practiced, perfected motion. "If given the choice I would do nothing."

"Bullshit." Stiles ignored how the entire class bristled and whipped around at his voice. He wondered if they'd forgotten what it sounded like. "Bull-fucking-shit, Lydia."

Jackson called his crush on Lydia *pathetic* and *desperate*. Maybe so, but at least Stiles *knew* her. He knew that she did the same cognitive and IQ tests as him, and her score was high. The kind of high where she should have been taking college courses when she was thirteen. Instead she was in the *pit*. Stiles would have leapt at the chance to skip high school.

What really bothered him was how she *pretended* to be someone she wasn't. To be *dumb*. The familiar burn of acidity in his throat returned when her lips quirked at him, a pitying smile on her face.

"You think reactionary violence is justified?"

Stiles snorted.

"I think we didn't get here on intellect alone. Every one of us has a fight or flight instinct. We didn't progress in our evolution because of our peaceful ways. We killed and fucked our way to the top," Stiles's face was hot, too hot, and he knew he was digging himself a grave when Lydia's mask dropped and her eyes watered. "You'd either run away or you'd fight to survive. Don't bother pretending you wouldn't."

Stiles was sent to the office and had to wait for the remainder of the day before he was escorted to detention supervised by Mr. Harris.

The clock ticked loudly on the wall. He had only been allowed his text books, the rest of his things were in a pile by the door. Mr. Harris chewed his gum loudly and Stiles remembered how anxious he'd felt... worrying about what his dad was thinking, what punishment would fall on him, how angry his father would be. Things that, in just under a year, would be meaningless.

"Hey." A brash voice cut through the silence. Stiles picked his head up out of his book to see... *Coach Finstock* looming in the doorway, his manic eyes glaring at Harris. "Come on, I need Stilinski for practice."

“He’s in detention.” Harris lifted his eyes with palpable disinterest. “That means no extracurricular activities, which includes lacrosse practice.”

Stiles checked the clock and practice had already been going for twenty minutes. His throat was dry as Finstock drew in a long breath and puffed out his chest.

“Stilinski comes to practice, you get to go home early. Win-win.” He turned to Stiles. “Stiles,” and Stiles thought he was hallucinating because Coach *never* used his first name before, “come on.”

He stood immediately, because when Coach made a demand it was only natural to answer. Harris threw his hand out.

“*Sit* down, Stiles.” Harris’s voice had Stiles’s knees buckling, his elbows bruising themselves as he fell back into his seat. Coach lifted his chin up as Harris whirled on him. “He’s not going.”

“I need all my players at every practice, no excuses. That’s the rule, right Stiles?”

Stiles nodded, light-headed.

“That’s right, Coach.”

Harris sneered and rolled his eyes.

“Stiles is on the bench every game. I doubt missing one practice is suddenly going to make him a worthy player—”

A loud *slam* made Stiles flinch. The Coach bashed his fist against the whiteboard and it sent a startling crack zig-zagging across it. The muscles around Coach’s mouth spasmed and Stiles remembered that his mind had been wiped blank in that moment. Coach shook his head, his eyes shining as his lips pulled back into a loveless grin.

“Every person on our team is *essential*. Every person on our team is *worthwhile*.”

Of all the things to make Stiles’s growing bubble of anxiety burst, he never predicted it would be Coach sticking up for him in his own weird way. He was embarrassed when his shocked silence shattered into awkward tears and hitched breaths. His vision blurred, but not quick enough to erase how both teachers turned to stare at him, shocked. He covered his face, his shoulders hunching in because... because...

It hurt to hear Coach lie for him—

Stiles vaguely heard them come to an impasse, Harris threatened to call the superintendent while the Coach backed off after more thinly-veiled insults. Stiles peeked through his fingers and swore he saw blood dripping from the Coach’s fist.

For the rest of the detention Harris refused to look at him or the cracked whiteboard behind him. Stiles watched the sun dip below the horizon, watching cars pull out one after the other. He sat on the curb and when his dad’s tires crunched on the gravel, the stars had come out.

He opened the door for Stiles without a word, taking his backpack and tossing it in the backseat of the cruiser. After Stiles fastened his seatbelt, his father sighed.

“We both know you’re right.” His hand twitched, like he thought about touching Stiles’s cheek or shoulder, but thought better of it. “People just aren’t comfortable talking about it.”

Stiles snorted and turned his head away, like if his father couldn’t see his face he wouldn’t know he was crying.

“That’s stupid.”

“I know.” They drove back home, a route that Stiles had burned in his memory. Every turn, every stop sign, and every pothole was just another step closer to being *home*. “We do whatever we can to survive. Don’t ever forget that, Stiles.”

With every bump in the road was a silent *Don’t leave me* from his father. And every answering whisper of gravel was Stiles’s answering *I promise, I promise, I promise*.

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Days in Captivity

Stiles: 938

Peter: 4,219

Deucalion: 6,050

Satomi: 10,796

Stiles came to with a groan. He smacked his lips together, his mouth bone dry as he rolled onto his side. The stone floor dug into his shoulder and when he sat up he had to close his eyes from the dizzy spell that hit him.

“All right.” Stiles shook himself and when he opened his eyes he saw that his clothes were still in a crumpled heap on his cot. He got to his feet slowly and held his hands up. “Check me over.”

He turned a few times and, like every other time he’d been taken, was in the clear.

“Songbird,” Deucalion was the first to speak, his voice soft and brittle. “Are you okay?”

Stiles let his lips, his head pounding in time with his heart.

“Yeah. I’m good.” He clapped his hands together once. “Let’s start with some lifts.”

Exercise helped chase the migraine out of his head... either that or the pain had increased to such an amount that Stiles could no longer register it. Either way, he felt refreshed as he ran with the wolves, as he twisted and jumped as Satomi lead them through dances to finish off their day. He threw his body back into motion and with every heartbeat grew renewed hope.

When he'd woken up from his time there had been two major differences from the other times he'd been taken, so many that Stiles hadn't bothered keeping track of the long stretches of time that seemed to be sliced away from him in an instant. The first major difference was that he woke with a pounding headache.

The second major difference... was this time Stiles could feel how much time had passed.

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Days in Captivity

Stiles: 953

Peter: 4,234

Deucalion: 6,065

Satomi: 10,811

The four of them were flat on their backs, stretched along the stone floor with their arms out, palms pressed against the cool rock. Stiles's mind wandered as they breathed in unison. Reflection on the things that brought him anxiety... things that had no relation to struggling to make himself faint at just the right moment, whether or not he'd be killed during his bouts of unconsciousness, or if eventually Stiles would be left all alone when the rest of the much older werewolves eventually... expired.

Once that happened, Stiles would most certainly be killed.

He wondered, whenever that happened, if he'd greet his end with a smile... or if he'd fight.

In high school Stiles had worried about girls, tests, popularity, sports, the kind of things that were laughable. He'd worried about whether or not he'd get a prom date, he'd worried about what lacrosse would do to his social status, he worried that his father might never hug him again once Stiles grew too heavy to carry up the stairs—

He snorted.

The werewolves shifted, keeping their breaths steady as they turned to look at him. He shrugged, hearing the question without any of them having to voice it.

"It's just dumb, the things I used to worry about. Like... getting a fucking girlfriend or convincing myself that my crush on Lydia Martin mattered, like it was a part of my identity or something." Stiles felt his throat tighten, like his anxiety had muscle memory. He might not care about these things *now*, but his body remembered. "Everyone seemed so ready to rush and fall in love. But the bullshit kind of love, *high school* love. Doesn't that just cheapen the word?"

Deucalion chuckled.

"It does if you believe in it."

Stiles arched his back until it cracked.

“Not a romantic, huh, Deuc?”

“Not really, no.” The blind Alpha sighed, the way he would when he grumpily would admit to himself that he actually *wanted* to elaborate and trusted them enough to share. “I see it. In other people. When I’d go to weddings, not all of them, but some... I could see that they loved each other. I just don’t believe in it for myself.”

Stiles nodded, breathing through the tightness that gripped his throat. He tapped his fingers against the stone.

“What about you, Satomi?”

Satomi breathed, deep and timeless.

“I was married young. He’s the only man I’ve ever loved.”

They shared a silence. Stiles felt dulled heartache, so faded it was a part of himself, and yet at the same time he knew the sensation wasn’t coming *from* him. Not really.

“The word itself shouldn’t be used lightly, that’s true,” Peter’s voice tugged on Stiles’s left arm, a warm grip that was firm yet kind. “It’s also a flexible word. Love for friends, family, romantic, and even those have their different labels, values.” Stiles turned his head to the side, his cheek cooled by the stone floor. “Puppy love, chaste love, head-over-heels love.” Peter’s face was slack, the lines around his eyes lessening. He looked happy. He *felt* happy, or... Stiles *felt* the warmth that sat in his stomach like a warm clay bed. “I can’t really speak from much experience. The way my sister explained it to me... love, no matter what form, it will come in disguise.”

Stone melted away into the laminate floor on Stiles’s kitchen, how he used to stretch out along it when it was too hot in the summer. His mom would stir fresh squeezed lemon juice and mint leaves in a pitcher filled with ice. He heard the twinkling of her sterling silver stirrer. He heard her low hums, melodies that blurred in and out of each other, never focusing on one song or genre of music. She only ever did it when his father was at work. *It’s bothersome to him*, she said.

His mother had patience for silly things, for all the questions that Stiles had.

“My mom,” Stiles’s throat burned at the thought of those summers, how he never had lemonade after she died. He’d stopped asking silly questions. He swallowed, his face still mashed against the linoleum. When he tried to remember the exact melodies his mother would use to fill their kitchen, he heard nothing. Endless ringing of *nothing*. “Mom said that she loved my dad for all these little reasons. Reasons she didn’t even know was important until later.”

When he tried remembering times when he had a mom and dad *together* as a unit, all he had were vague concepts. He couldn’t remember if they played board games, if they laughed together, if his dad held his hand when they crossed the street or his mom. Memories of his

mom felt like a fading dream. If his father had little things he held dear about his mother, if countless moments had shaped him into something brilliant and bright, Stiles wondered if it vanished with her life.

You're not being fair, Stiles felt the words sour and twist in his stomach. *You have no idea what it's like*.

His crush on Lydia... he knew it wasn't love. Of course it wasn't, how could it be? He was... he had been barely sixteen years old. *Love* was for grown people who weren't pretending to be asleep so that their fathers would hug them. *Love* was a concept that Stiles certainly believed in for other people.

But he was older now, wasn't he?

"I imagine," Peter's voice took away the linoleum and suddenly Stiles was upright, his feet were on crisp black and white tile floor. The heady scent of herbs with citrus undertones sharpened in Stiles's nose. It was a cafe, one that Stiles didn't recognize. It was too polished to belong in Beacon Hills. "I imagine it would be something seemingly random. Unimportant."

Stiles glanced around at the small tables laminated with pressed dry flowers and candles in mason jars. Satomi and Deucalion sat at table to the side, and Peter was, Peter was...

Peter sat at the table one away from the counter and two away from the door. His foot bounced. His eyes met Stiles's and he motioned with his hand. *Go on*. Stiles felt his breath catch, because usually when they'd create something new, a new story, it was one of them leading, one of them telling a story.

They'd never tried *sharing* the reins before.

"Right." Stiles cleared his throat. "Unimportant, sure. You'd meet this person—"

Deucalion scoffed at the table and rolled his milky eyes.

"Man." He winked. "Peter will fall in love with a man."

"Great, a man it is." Stiles snapped his fingers and hoped it wasn't obvious that his heart was racing. "You're waiting here," Stiles smiled at Peter, "to meet a man, and... what is this place anyway?"

Peter's foot stopped bouncing for a moment, a pause in his anxiety.

"Cloveberry." Stiles snorted. Peter rolled his eyes. "Whatever. The teas are absolutely wonderful. It was... it was the place I used to go to, whenever I would..." Peter swallowed, "whenever I had free time."

He laughed, loud and half-frantic even though it wasn't funny. Stiles rocked back on his heels, eyes sweeping over tiles, teabags, and the vintage posters that lined the walls. It was the kind of place that prided itself on making people want to dress up in order to go, that turned its nose up at busted-up sneakers and the word "Starbucks."

It wasn't a perfect place to Stiles. But he could see... how it would be a perfect place for Peter.

"You met someone, randomly." Stiles rocked on his heels. "At a party. That's how people meet people, right?"

"Sure," Peter shrugged as his foot bounced, "my sister throws parties."

Parties.

Stiles hadn't been to a lot of parties. The last "party" he went to was Scott's birthday, but Stiles was pretty sure hanging out with Scott and his mom didn't count. Parties were something Stiles would get later, at college, when he was a real adult. Parties with wine, beer, and booze where apartments were heated with laughter and new connections. Parties with low lighting where every dinner was potluck.

The most he knew about parties was what he saw in movies. Stiles had no idea if he had any real grasp on what parties were like. If it really would be people squeezed together in hallways, talking in each other's ears over music, knuckles bumping around beer bottles... low lighting and whatever chips were on sale at Ralphs.

He could see Peter at a place like that.

Peter was a handsome man. He had strong cheekbones and the more he talked, the more he remembered how he used to be. Stiles could tell, the way his humor had grown more slick over time, or how he'd wink at Stiles when he wanted to share a joke just between the two of them. It was whispers of the old Peter.

Stiles could see him easily. He'd wear a black v-neck shirt with tight jeans. He'd have over three dozen stories in his back pocket, polished and ready with the perfect amount of amusement and humility. He had a way of easily slipping from conversation to conversation, from a cluster of people, to a single person that caught his eye.

"It's because he made you laugh, isn't it?" Satomi spoke from the table she shared with Deucalion. "It wasn't about being charming, it wasn't about who wore their shirt best... it was about how he made you smile."

Peter leaned back in his chair.

"Maybe." His eyes slid back to Stiles. "He'd have to get my attention, somehow. My sister," his smile faltered, "insists that I have eccentric tastes."

With pink and purple lights coming through the blinds, a sunset or maybe odd outside fluorescent lights... Peter Hale the partygoer would cross the room. To the man who got his attention, to the person who brought out the odd, bubbling, and *eccentric* tastes in him. And *Christ*, Stiles was jealous of a fictional person. This unknowing being, did they know that they'd caught Peter's eye as he crossed the room, drink dangling between his fingers carelessly, his smile easy-going, every step smooth, slick, and corrupting like oil.

Splashes of lavender and rose hues stretched across the party and Peter's breath tickled the man's ear, the music swelling and creating the purpose excuse for Peter to get close—

"Sit down." Peter's foot stopped bouncing. "You're making me even more nervous."

Stiles rolled his eyes.

"I can't sit down genius, you're waiting for the man that caught your eye—" Now it was Peter's turn to roll his eyes, a dramatic sigh falling from his lips that sent scarlet heat rushing to Stiles's cheeks. "Oh. *Oh*. Um," Stiles quickly sat down and ignored Deucalion's obnoxious, giggling snorts. "I see. I, uh," Stiles swallowed. "Okay."

Stiles was sweating, and his heart wouldn't stop rushing ahead, fluttering every time he so much as looked at Peter. Peter's foot bounced and *god* why did people ever go out if it made them so nervous? Stiles drew in a steadying breath just as Peter's knocked his knuckles against the wood, making Stiles look at him.

"All right. We met at a party," and Peter's fingers twitched, like he wanted to grab Stiles's hands but stopped himself. "Paint me a meet-cute."

Stiles cocked his eyebrow and relished in how it made Peter's cheeks speckle with pink splotches.

"Oh, you want a meet-cute? I'm going to to give us such a *juicy* one, Peter, it's going to be cute as shit."

Satomi was startled into laughter behind them. Peter cracked a smile, startled, crooked, and eager. Stiles clapped his hands together and rubbed them. He winked and words began to gather on his tongue.

The bite mark on Stiles's wrist throbbed in time to his heartbeat.

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Stiles pushed his bike along one of the many back dirt roads in Beacon Hills. It was the kind of road that had no name, only landmarks. The kind of road that Stiles would only describe as "that road, you know, the one with with mossy, stone wall." It was late spring, the ground was soft, and butterflies darted between beams of sunlight and shadow as Stiles finally came to Kate Argent's driveway.

It was a long paved driveway that was framed by lemon trees. Flowers and herbs were carefully tended to and Stiles pushed his bike uphill until he reached the top driveway. He parked his bike and immediately took the path that would lead him to the shooting range.

"Hey there, Stiles." Kate had opened up the outdoor range in mid April. She wore shorts and a ratty tank-top that had a few frayed threads and holes along the bottom. "What are you feeling today? Shotgun? Desert Eagle?"

Kate loved weaponry in a way that Stiles didn't think he ever would. He envied her in a way, she clearly loved what she did and took the time to keep herself educated on new laws,

legislations, and design specs. Her eyes lit up at new arrivals and Stiles wondered if he'd ever feel that way about anything that wasn't a movie.

"Uh," he shrugged, tempted to look away from her delighted eyes. "I'm not sure. I've kinda... I feel like I've done all I can with the shotgun and pistol."

"Hm." Kate hummed and glanced at her arsenal, all hung up neatly. "Then let's work on precision." She pushed herself out of her garden chair. The weapons were locked in a sleek glass case when she'd open the outdoor shooting ranges. But instead of going to the case where customers would select their weapons, Kate stepped into a private shed. When she came back she held a beautiful hunting rifle in her hands. "Here. Come watch."

Stiles stumbled after her, down to the range. She tapped his shoulder, signaling him to stop. Stiles grabbed protective earmuffs.

Kate smiled and without flinching she shot dead center in all nine targets. She took her time, and the gun recoiled but Kate never winced. Stiles tugged off his earmuffs as Kate lowered her rifle.

"My dad," she exhaled roughly and briefly twisted her face away from Stiles, "God rest his soul, preferred the rifle above all else for its elegance and accuracy." She wiped her eyes and Stiles felt his stomach twist with sympathy, his throat sticky and tight. Kate smiled, bright and wide. "He and I used to play this game where he'd shout out a number, and I'd have to get that number by adding up my shot value in the targets. It kept me on my toes."

She ran her long fingers over the stretch, the flecks of gold with a faded name etched onto it. Stiles squinted and leaned forward to get a peek.

"Atticus?" Stiles glanced up at Kate. "Like Atticus Finch?"

Kate nodded and smiled with pride.

"Very good, Stiles. Yes, this is my darling Atticus." She kept the rifle aimed away from them, but lowered her arms so Stiles could get a closer look. "Atticus was a seeker of truth and justice above all else. And so, when I was given my first proper rifle, I knew I'd name it after him."

They shared a few beats of silence and Stiles reached for her rifle. Kate firmly lifted it from his reach.

"Nuh-uh," Kate winked at Stiles. "Atticus is mine and he packs quite the kick. I'll get you a starter rifle."

Kate ran her fingers through his hair and scampered back to her arsenal. She returned with a more generic rifle. She slid Stiles's earmuffs back over his ears as he gripped the rifle. He felt her behind him, her hands moving his arms and body so that the rifle was snug against his shoulder.

Stiles remembered thinking that he should have *liked* this embrace. He was rarely embraced at home, and Kate was a beautiful woman. But for some reason... his skin recoiled at the contact, tensing and burning as her voice penetrated the earmuffs.

“Keep your breathing steady. Don’t flinch at the kickback. Bend your knees, and focus on your target.” Stiles nodded. Kate didn’t back off. “Deep breath,” Stiles inhaled with her, “fire.”

The first shot kicked back and hit the corner of the target sheet. His shoulder tingled from the recoil. Kate finally released him.

“Not bad, you hit the sheet. Now it’s up to you to get a feel for your comfort and center of balance.”

When his father came by to pick him up, Stiles had gotten the hang of the rifle. Kate clapped him on the shoulder as Stiles loaded his bike into the back of his father’s cruiser.

“Next time,” Kate squeezed his arm. “I want to start playing the numbers game with you.”

His father smiled like he was proud.

....

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 1,507

Peter: 4,788

Deucalion: 6,619

Satomi: 11,365

Stiles’s arms shook as he sucked in long, bellowing breaths. He pressed his clothes to the vents and his knees knocked together on every harsh, rushed exhale. He counted down, every breath he took, making sure to make it past the last time he was gassed. He ignored his throbbing head, the black spots that grew in his eyes. He kept his pressure consistent against the vents, pulling in air and shoving it out until—

Stiles fell forward and was unconscious before his body hit the stone.

He drifted, his head throbbing in time with his heartbeat. He thought of his father, of the ways their silences had grown into dull, endless roars over the years. When he was home, it was like Stiles had his ear up against a conch shell, waves crashing in his ears only it was really just... silence.

His dad would know what to do, Stiles thought. *No*, a voice that sounded like his father interjected, *you’re all on your own now, Stiles. The only one to get through this is going to be you. No one else.*

Right. Duh.

So Stiles kept waiting for the gas, he kept forcing himself to hyperventilate and faint... and for what? An itching under his skin told him that it mattered, the fact that he could *feel* time passing meant he was *onto something*. Even though it gave him a teeth-gnashing migraine... it was worth it because... because...

Stiles blinked and suddenly he could see and everything was in focus.

He wasn't in his glass room.

Teal tiles surrounded him. Water sloshed over his bare body, goosebumps rose on his wet, exposed shoulders. Stiles couldn't move his legs, the most he could do was make his toes twitch. *Calm*, Stiles bit his lip, *keep breathing*. He ate up as much details as he could, the opened jar of sugar-scrub resting on the side of the tub, clumps of his hair on the floor, half-swept up, and the way his skin tingled, the sugar-scrub had been used on him.

The window above the tub was open and sunlight streamed in. Stiles heard birds, insects, and he heard the symphony of the outside. Stiles's breath caught and he turned his head away from the window, his knee jerking under the water. There was someone in the hall, a woman's voice hummed some song he didn't recognize. Her footsteps were getting closer, and as Stiles looked at the door he saw a cracked teal tile that was fixed with yellow grout.

He knew where he was.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, another update! I hope you like it!

And PSA: Updates will be a little more spaced, I'm going to try and keep on top of this, but this year I really need to focus on my personal writing/career. I have this series outlined, but if I take a little longer, just know that I'm not abandoning this, but I really need to dedicate time to the writing I need to do.

I hope y'all can understand. Feel free to say hi and yell at me on my [tumblr](#).

Again, thanks so much for reading and I don't expect a dramatic slowdown, but maybe a few weeks added to my usual monthly updates.

All comments welcome!

Chapter 8: We Dare Not Speak Its Name

Chapter Summary

Nights were the closest thing that Peter and Stiles got to meeting privately. Peter knew it was just an illusion of solitude, that Satomi and Deucalion could easily be awake and listening. But there were nights... when Peter felt a gentle brush along the back of his mind that matched the brush of Stiles's fingers against the bite mark on his wrist. He'd turn over on his cot and sure enough, Stiles would be awake, sitting with his hands against the glass and an exhausted, soft smile curled on his lips.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Days in Captivity

Stiles: 1,573

Peter: 4,854

Deucalion: 6,685

Satomi: 11,431

The last time Peter had been in his house, it had been misty, the air heavy after three days of heavy rain, so it would make sense that the air tasted the same when he brought Stiles, Satomi, and Deucalion to his home.

He worried that he wouldn't be able to recreate it... his home of many years. When Stiles gently talked them away from their glass prison and into some other world, he made it seem effortless, second-nature. Peter's stumbled over his words, clumsy and his shoulders hunched, until Stiles gently whispered, "*Take your time, Peter.*"

So Peter took deep breaths... and let himself remember.

He'd put years of work into the house, into making it a stone home of his dreams. He lived alone, and at the time he believed he was happy.

Cora, Derek, and Laura had room to run around in the woods, laughing and yelping until the moon hung high in the sky. Peter remembered sitting on the porch, paint speckled along his arms as he finished another room in the house, watching his nieces and nephew roll around in the grass. With sweat cooling on his back, Peter hadn't felt anything more than mild amusement. Thinking back now, the memory burned his throat.

The last time he was in his house, he was alone. He'd just become an Alpha, his sister arranging the power to be taken from an Alpha who no longer wanted the responsibility. They'd been relieved, and Peter remembered thinking, *I'll never be so weak-willed*. He had a cup of tea, sitting out on his porch and watching swirls of mist dance in the early morning light. The animals in the forest were already awake and moving, unseen through the mist.

As he sipped his tea, he'd feel more and more sluggish, until it was too late to realize that it wasn't mere remnants of sleep. It would be too late to spit out the tea that had tasted a little too sweet, a little *too* flowery, and it would be too late to try and force himself to vomit up the poison.

Too late, too late, always too late.

Peter had been paralyzed on his porch, in his own house, helpless to react to the snap of branches, to a woman in a mask ready with ropes, and a beast that trailed behind her. He was taken, on a calm morning after a long rain, with the smell of wet earth a mocking serenity as Peter screamed and thrashed in his own mind.

How long was it before Talia noticed? How long was it for a call to be unanswered for her to be suspicious enough to visit? Long enough for his food to spoil and his plants to die? Long enough for a thick layer of dust to cover his house like a forgotten tomb? How long would she wait, how long would she wonder, and how long would she hold out hope that Peter would return?

As his plants decayed and his house grew colder... how long would it take for Derek, Cora, and Laura to forget him?

Take your time, Peter.

He breathed, matching Stiles's cadence until the icy frost that had grown between his ribs thawed.

The wood floor in the Hale foyer creaked under their feet as Peter led Stiles, Satomi, and Deucalion through his New York home. They moved quietly, at their lazy leisure, as Peter gave them *the tour*. Though it wasn't a usual tour, where it's a semi-rushed labeling of rooms and strained jokes of *and please, the paint on the cabinet is chipped, but it's a work in progress*. Peter had given tours like that countless times, empty and meaningless.

Together they walked his home like they were in an ancient sanctuary.

"My sister hated this house. All the stonework reminded her of castles for witches." Peter felt a dull ache in his chest, an old bruise that returned whenever he thought about his old life. "She loved *Snow White*."

Stiles hummed, Deucalion snorted, and Satomi ran her fingers along one of Peter's many tapestries.

Peter remembered loving his house, taking pride in the gothic exterior, the gardens, and the fenced entrance to the long driveway. As he stood inside his home, it no longer felt like

home. Peter moved from room to room like a museum curator, silently recalling how life *used* to be.

Sometimes, when Peter laid awake at night and couldn't keep his eyes closed... he began to wonder if he'd ever lived in a house at all. It no longer felt like he had. His past felt like old photographs, washed out by too much exposure to sunlight.

"Well," Stiles's voice interrupted Peter's spiraling thoughts. He smiled, his cheeks rosy as he bumped his hand against Peter's. "I think it's great. It suits you."

The four of them were not in Peter's house. He knew this. The four of them were sweating and catching their breath on the stone floor as they waited for their clothes to dry. His arms and legs ached the way they did after Stiles worked them hard for hours. Sweat gathered on the back of his neck and down to his spine and hips.

He could smell his own sweat. He was spread out on his back, letting the stone cool him. The rest of them were equally akimbo, breathing in deep, synchronized breaths. If Peter strained his ears, he could hear them. Up, down, inhale, exhale.

Collective hysteria, is what Old Peter would have called this shared experience. *Shared delusions, a desperate distortion of meditation* would be what Old Peter would label their shared travels. Old Peter would have been terrified at the thought of being so unraveled, so stripped down to his bare essentials.

Nothing about it felt hysteric or desperate.

They were in the garden, by the large stone that was surrounded by daisies, bits of moss, and poppies. Deucalion and Satomi gently admired the flower placement, and Peter felt whispers of an old pride grow in his chest. He heard the fluorescent lights hiss and blink out, the four of them had been motionless for too long. No one made a move to try and activate them.

"Hey, Peter?" Stiles's steps were quiet against the soft grass under his bare feet. The wind whispered when he walked and Peter turned, a relaxed smile on his face that Stiles returned beautifully. "Can I ask you something?"

Peter wondered if Stiles knew how much he'd grown over the time he'd been there. Physically, he'd gotten taller, filled out, but... the way he moved, with a grim confidence of someone on death row. They'd all been together for so long that most questions were simply put out in the air, no need to ask for permission.

"Of course." Peter held Stiles's gaze. "Anything."

The Old Peter would have asked for something in return, the Old Peter would never have been able to trust Stiles. Or maybe... Peter liked to think that even if none of them had been captured... that if they'd met Stiles... that they would have seen him the same way. That they would have recognized the pull that drew them closer to him. Old Peter wouldn't have been able to fight the fascination.

Stiles twirled a daisy between his long fingers, lifting it to his nose to smell.

“How did you escape? That night, when you came to my house... how did you manage it?”

Peter blinked, and his eyes burned a wave of shame washing over him. Tears welled in his eyes and with every blink the details of his garden became more smudged, flowers going grey and adopting the texture of the stone they were laying on. His breaths were too short to maintain the memory, and he hated that he couldn't keep them in peace for longer, that his own failures were going to end their shared walk early—

Warm fingers enveloped Peter's hands.

Peter jumped and each point of gentle pressure was like electricity coursing through him. It *stung*, it vibrated all up his arms and rattled his teeth, and when Stiles squeezed Peter's hands all the air rushed out of Peter's lungs—

And then harsh alarms of *contact-contact-contact* were silenced into a soft whisper. A breeze blew through their hair even though the air in their prison was always stagnant. Stiles's fingers gently ran over Peter's knuckles until Peter could breathe. Peter knew Stiles wasn't *really* touching him... but in that moment it was so *real* that Peter was calmed by each long caress over his hands.

“I don't know.” Peter's shoulders slumped. He felt Satomi and Deucalion staring. He wondered if they were disappointed, he wondered if they thought, *I would have done better*. “I can't... all I remember is being aware that the gas had faded... and alone in a house, so I ran. I ran as fast as I could and when I finally caught my breath... I was in your backyard.”

He tried not to think about it... but when Stiles asked, he wished, oh how Peter *wished* he could remember more. He wanted to provide Stiles with answers, with certainty and intellect, but he couldn't lie. He'd been lucky, drugged, and desperate. He hadn't thought of anything other than *run*.

Anxiety tightened around his ribcage. If he'd been *better*, if he'd been *smarter*, if he'd been less of a mindless animal and more of an *Alpha* he could have something better to give—

Stiles tangled their fingers together and chased all thoughts out of Peter's mind. He smiled, a little sad but not disappointed. Never disappointed.

Peter's eyes flew open and the stone dug uncomfortably into his back and he blinked his eyes back into focus. Satomi moved and triggered the motion lights. They all hissed, quickly closing their eyes against the sudden light.

He rolled onto his side, the smell of flowers lingering in his nose. As he blinked colored spots out of his eyes, he saw that Stiles's back was to him, his fingers gently rubbing the slight abrasions that came from lying on the stone for a long period of time.

Peter flexed his fingers. The more he tried to cling to the memory of Stiles's fingers between his... the faster it faded away.

....



Days in Captivity

Stiles: 1,656

Peter: 4,937

Deucalion: 6,768

Satomi: 11,514

The days when Stiles would get taken after being gassed were the longest. There was no running or dancing, it just didn't sit right without Stiles to lead.

Peter sat with his back against the glass. Deucalion often retreated to silence in his room as he used to before Stiles had arrived. Satomi no longer whispered her Absolutes. She gently ran her fingers through her short-but-growing hair, her eyes unfocused.

He felt detached from his body, hovering in limbo until enough time passed and Stiles was returned—

“Can we finally say that we’re having some sort of shared vision experience?” Deucalion’s voice cut through their silence. Satomi froze and she blinked, raising her head to look at Deucalion. Peter’s skin squeaked along the glass as he hurried to straighten up. Deucalion smirked. “I think we can speak freely with each other.”

Peter glanced at Satomi, unsure if he should speak. She took pity on him.

“Yes. We can say that.”

Deucalion stepped forward, his fingers lightly guiding him along the glass. Peter watched the British man’s milky eyes narrow as he took time to choose his words carefully.

“When we go on those walks with him... I feel him. When he touches me, I can feel it.” Deucalion’s fingers trembled as he stroked his beard. “I thought I was going crazy at first.”

So had Peter. Judging by the expression on Satomi’s face, he wasn’t alone. They’d all thought it was a fluke, at first. The final screw had finally come loose. But as time went on and the journeys became more elaborate, Peter knew he hadn’t lost it.

Stiles served as a guide at first, his voice painting pictures of the Beacon Hills he remembered. As time went on... he slowly goaded the rest of them into trying it. It wasn’t just Beacon Hills or rooms in Stiles’s home. Sometimes they roamed the hills of Japan or danced in the glittering ballrooms from Deucalion’s memory.

Stiles’s skin would bruise if he stayed on the stone floor for too long. Occasionally during their sprints, he’d cut his palm and have to stop to wash it out in the sink. He was undeniably human.

But he was human as well as *something else*, something that whispered to Peter when he was asleep. It was always on the tip of his tongue. Stiles was human, but he was also *Stiles*. Stiles had become more than just a name. Thinking about made chills crawl down Peter’s back, his heartbeat increasing with excitement at the unknown and unnameable.

His life had been a series of shallow routines, of pleasures that he never respected. Expensive teas, wine tastings, and garden parties were endured with an eye roll and a pleasant smile. Even his own family, whom he loved dearly... there were times when he’d sigh before a dinner, or hesitate before accepting a hug.

Taking life for granted didn’t begin to cover it.

Peter wondered if the rest of them had made the same mistakes. Deucalion, probably. Satomi, he wasn’t so sure.

Whenever Stiles talked about how his life had used to be, he never thought of it as anything but ordinary. But Peter... when Peter thought back to the night they first met, he’d never forget how Stiles didn’t scream. He’d seen a werewolf, a creature that—to him at that current

moment— didn't exist. And he'd been frightened, but he kept his shotgun aimed steadily at Peter's chest. He'd been sharpened his fear into an eerie, manic mimicry of serenity and control.

It was the same not-serenity that he wielded when he sucked in air and pushed it out to make himself faint. Stiles's eyes watered with the effort, his legs shook, but he didn't stop until his legs buckled and he fell unconscious.

The door slammed open and the three Alphas flinched, turning away from each other as the woman slowly descended the stairs, Stiles thrown over her shoulder in a fireman's carry. Her mask was set firmly in place, her breathing slightly labored on the last few steps of her journey. She slid her keys into Stiles's lock and gently opened the door.

They watched as she slid him off her shoulders and onto the ground so that his head was cushioned by his pile of clothes. Her dirty blonde hair frizzed at the ends as she pulled back, closing the glass door behind her and stalking back up the stairs without a glance back at them.

Stiles's eyes were open, they often were when he was returned to them. But when he blinked his breathing changed. He sat up and stretched.

"Hey guys," Stiles smiled through the pain of the headaches he now experienced when he returned. "I missed you."

He stood on steady legs and pressed his palm against the glass wall he shared with Peter. Peter returned the gesture. His heart squeezed in his chest as Stiles's lips pulled back into a grin.

Whatever Stiles was becoming... had always been there, lingering behind brown eyes. Peter pressed his hand closer, his heart slowing to beat in time with Stiles's.

....



Days in Captivity

Stiles: 1,789

Peter: 5,070

Deucalion: 6,901

Satomi: 11,647

Nights were the closest thing that Peter and Stiles got to meeting privately. Peter knew it was just an illusion of solitude, that Satomi and Deucalion could easily be awake and listening. But there were nights... when Peter felt a gentle brush along the back of his mind that matched the brush of Stiles's fingers against the bite mark on his wrist. He'd turn over on his cot and sure enough, Stiles would be awake, sitting with his hands against the glass and an exhausted, soft smile curled on his lips.

Those nights were often filled with whispers, questions that were almost like normal conversations, like two normal people getting to know each other.

Peter's breath caught at the familiar whisper across his mind, a faint tingle on the back of his neck. He was awake in an instant and turned on his side.

Stiles sat cross-legged on the other side of the glass. His fingers skimmed along the mark, lifting as soon as Peter sat up.

Peter moved slowly in the dark until they were shoulder to shoulder. Peter stretched his legs out in front of him while Stiles kept his knees close to his chest. Sometimes the night would simply be them sharing silence, but at least it was silence that they had *together*. Stiles didn't want the others to see that he still worried his lower lip like when he first arrived, ideas and thoughts spinning in circles in his brain. Sometimes when his legs or hands would shake too much, Peter would simply set a pace for their breathing until Stiles's body went slack against the glass.

Stiles let his temple rest against the wall and sighed, a stream of fog clouding up the glass.

"I hate thinking about what I was like before." When Stiles breathed, his lips trembled and his voice cracked along the edges. "Do you get that feeling? Like... I'm looking back at some other person, some spoiled brat who had no idea how good he fucking had it?"

He rubbed hard at his face, his nails leaving behind thin streaks of white. Peter swallowed, his throat tight and dry.

"I do."

Peter used to... before Stiles came it was all he would think about while he sank into the pit of unending silence and isolation. His memories mocked him, every sarcastic quip and kissed cheek an ugly *leer* at how much he'd squandered.

Just don't drive yourself crazy, Peter didn't say. He saw the sentiment slither through the glass and wind around Stiles's clenched fingers. Not for the first time, Peter wished he could touch Stiles. It was a marrow-deep desire that was agonizing, a deep, endless ache that weighed down Peter's ribs. *I'm sorry*, Peter wanted to say. *It's my fault*, Peter wanted to confess with every beat of his heart.

Stiles sniffed, roughly rubbing his nose with the back of his hand, a few tears slipping off his eyelashes.

"Back in school, everyone was obsessed with getting their first kiss over with. And like, I tried to convince myself it was normal, you know? All this anxiety about it. But it wasn't... what bothered me was that it rarely seemed like it was about people *liking* each other, it was just a part of a checklist." Peter watched, helpless, as Stiles's lips pulled back into a skeletal grin. "Get kissed, get fucked, get married, get kids. Just... something to *do* because we were told they were these points we had to hit."

When Stiles breathed, uneven and tight, Peter breathed with him. He tasted frustration and loss. He pressed his hands on the glass even though no matter how hard he pushed there would never be contact.

Peter had lived the same cyclical annoyances. He loved his Pack but hated the traditional hierarchy. He knew he could lead, but didn't want to upset his sister. So he'd pushed to become an Alpha, yet remain as a Second. He thought they'd challenge tradition. He thought it would be a step toward a better future for the Hale Pack. He thought that... he would never need anyone as a Mate.

"I never cared about that kind of thing," Stiles whispered and when his eyes met Peter's there was an undercurrent of frenzy. "Until now." His lips quivered and his tears fell freely, in long streaks down his cheeks, chin, and neck. "I really," Stiles shuddered, his shoulders slouching inward. "I really want to kiss you."

Elation and misery spiraled within Peter all at once, a dizzying sensation that left him breathless against the glass. He cracked a watery smile.

"I want to kiss you too."

Stiles laughed, thick but it still eased the tension in his shoulders. He shook his head.

"Dude, I've never kissed anyone before. I'm probably really bad at it."

"I don't care." Peter forced the words out, past the grit and dried blood in his teeth. "There's no one else I'd rather be with."

Even if Peter had access to the entire world he wouldn't change his mind. Stiles smiled like he believed him. Stiles pressed a kiss against the glass, and Peter swore he could feel the sensation against the corner of his mouth.

::::



Days in Captivity

Stiles: 2,602

Peter: 5,883

Deucalion: 7,714

Satomi: 12,460

Peter wiped sweat from his forehead, a lingering ache in his arms and spine that always followed one of the longer dance sessions with Deucalion. Satomi's cheeks were flushed and she led them in stretches.

"My husband was a terrible dancer." Satomi arched her back as she laid out on the stone floor. Her smile was bright as she reached her arms up above her until her fingers brushed the

wall she shared with Deucalion. “He would always stumble or grab onto my hip. One time we went careening off into tables.” She giggled and Peter swore that just hearing her laugh shed years off her. “He was so embarrassed.”

Deucalion tapped his fingers against the glass.

“I like your husband. He sounds... adorable.”

Satomi snorted.

“You make it sound like an affront.”

“I’m being genuine!” Deucalion sat up, his mouth laughingly slack. “He’s charming!”

Peter laughed, leaning back to really let it spread to his belly.

“Deuc, the problem is that everything out of your mouth sounds like a thinly veiled insult.” Deucalion flipped him off and Peter laughed harder. “You’re proving my point.”

Stiles giggled and Deucalion’s face broke into a toothy grin. Satomi rolled onto her stomach, holding her chin up on her hands like they were at a sleepover. She sat up with a freed grace.

“He would have liked you.” She gestured to all of them, her smile soft. “He’s shy. He’s too tall to be a wallflower but... once you get under his shell he just blossoms. And I know that all of you would have no problem.”

It was easy, seductive and cruel, to imagine them sitting at Peter’s house. But not *just* them—

Peter had a dining room table in his old house, a dark, stained cherry wood that stretched five feet with a set of chairs. He imagined having to get more chairs to fit his Pack, Stiles, Stiles’s father, Satomi’s Pack, and Deucalion. It would be the fullest his house had ever been, their voices become a dull roar of laughter, shared stories, and endless cups of tea and wine.

Stiles would lean on Peter’s shoulder, his cheek warm and not as boney as it had become. Stiles’s father would straighten, next to Stiles, but would keep smiling as Hiroaki would quietly slip his hand into Satomi’s, continuing a sugary sweet story. Satomi’s daughters would be nodding off, leaning against their mother, and Deucalion would pour himself tea, his face slack without the usual lines of frustrated, misery that Peter had grown accustomed to.

“Well, pardon my... history, but I don’t think my wife will be joining us.” Deucalion’s voice hitched around an ugly laugh. “I’m afraid none of my family will be worth your company. You’ll have to settle for me.”

And even though they’re trapped within glass, Peter can easily see them at the table, Stiles and Satomi reaching for Deucalion at once as Satomi rolls her eyes.

“We’re not settling.”

These kind of fantasies were dangerous, but Peter didn't stop. He'd start a fire in his living room where they'd all lie down on his oriental rug. The food would sit heavy in their stomachs and murmured conversation would eventually fade to snores.

Peter stretched out along the stone and smiled. Deucalion leaned against the glass with a pleased hum and Satomi tilted her head back, awash in the intoxicating, casual pleasure that came with friendly conversation.

Later, Peter would remember that Stiles was quiet, breathing deep and even in his room.

....



Days in Captivity

Stiles: 2,603

Peter: 5,884

Deucalion: 7,715

Satomi: 12,461

Deep, peaceful sleep was interrupted with the sharp sensation of nails *raking* down Peter's arms. He jerked awake, his fingers scrambling to cover the gashes on his arms, to try and stop the blood—

Blinking away white spots of agony, Peter saw that he was fine, even though his muscles still pulsed with the sensation of being *hurt*. Similar guttural sounds of ghostly pain made Peter twist to see Deucalion frantically rubbing at his arms. Air shuddered in Satomi's chest as tears streaked down her cheeks. She held her uninjured arms out in front of her and met Peter's eyes, and he knew that they'd *all* felt it, that they woke up *as one*.

It had felt so real, the adrenalin that had grasped him, the burn in his throat like he'd screamed, and how his skin tore...

Peter caught his breath and on the second harsh *suck* of air, he realized he hadn't checked on Stiles. He whipped around.

Stiles's room was empty. The door was swung open. Behind him he heard Satomi's breath freeze and Deucalion hiss, "*What is it?*" Peter's throat bobbed, a weak wheeze escaping him. *It couldn't have been the gas*, Peter thought hysterically, *we would have heard it. We would have woken up. If it wasn't the gas—*

From upstairs, a bellowing roar from the *beast* made the glass walls rattle.

Chapter End Notes

FAN ART UPDATE.

Again, the amazing, incredible, sweet and just... all around fantastic person [@trashyscarface](#) KNOCKED IT OUT OF THE PARK with the pieces. I made a separate art post [here](#), and once the fic is done I'll do a detailed breakdown of what I requested and why, but not right now to avoid spoilers. Please, go give trashy some LOVE, let her know that you enjoy her art.

All right. Thanks for your patience. This chapter isn't as long... but I hope you enjoy the update! All comments welcome! Come say hi on my [tumblr](#)!

Chapter 9: End of Captivity

Chapter Summary

Stiles pressed his ear against the wood. He focused on the spaces of silence between his heartbeats, until his world of sound narrowed. After three breaths, Stiles heard the familiar growl-gurgle of breaths, the feral breathing that sent slick, cold chills down Stiles's spine.

Chapter Notes

WARNING!!!! This chapter gets graphic in the description of violence and murder. If that's something that will cause you alarm/unease, then I would consider not reading it.

More notes at the end.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)



Time was no longer measured in minutes, but in the space between breathing, the flow of blood in the ventricles of the heart with every heartbeat, and the pull of gravity as the day wore on. Stiles used to check his phone for the time, used to bounce his foot as the seconds counted down in the classroom, always wishing it was *faster-faster-faster*. Time was something to evade, to carelessly check on like it didn't matter.

He laid still on his cot and listened to the Alpha wolves. Their breathing gradually slowed, a descent toward the REM cycle. Stiles waited, counting every breath, every passing moment in a series of moments until he rolled off his cot and caught himself on the stone.

None of the wolves stirred.

Stiles crept across the floor and reached under his sink, to the library card he'd wedged into the small crevice where the pipe met the floor. As his wolves dreamed of sharing dinner at

Peter's home, eating, drinking, and smiling to their heart's content, Stiles moved toward the glass door. The tips of his fingers were bone-white, his tongue poking out between his teeth as he eased the card between the narrow gap of the door. His heart throbbed in his mouth, thudding war drums that grew louder and louder until the card slipped forward and—

The door slid open.

Goosebumps rose on his skin, the abrupt change in temperature alarming. It was colder, dryer, not as humid than it was in his cell.

Stiles took the first step.

Then another.

Timing out his breathing during the gas worked well enough, he'd gotten it down to a precise rhythm and pattern, where he'd drop unconscious and be back and aware again when he was in Kate's arms as he carried him up the stairs. It took a long, *long* time, but Stiles had finally figured out how to stay awake, how to trick his body into passing out early so she stopped the gas. All he had to do was keep his breathing shallow and his weight dead.

Deader-than-dead.

It would leave his tongue numb in his mouth. His head pounded when he'd breathe, and Kate might leave him unsupervised but she was still *awake* and *alert*. Anytime Stiles was gassed, it was with a purpose, mostly hygienic.

The first step would be for her to undress him in her bedroom, then take him to the connecting bathroom. Whatever the gas was, it wasn't meant to knock him out for too long.

Kate expected him to stand, be lucid enough that a subtle touch of direction would be enough to direct him. The first time he woke up in her bathtub, he couldn't move until she asked him to. His limbs were like cement, but at least he could *remember* and think for himself.

Before she had him climb into the tub, she'd shave his head, sitting him on the toilet as she carefully buzzed his hair off. Her hands were often cold when she gripped Stiles's chin or neck to keep still as the blades hummed against his skin.

In the tub, Kate would rub him down with a salt scrub. Stiles had to keep his breathing shallow even when she'd lean into his the muscles of his legs with her palms, rubbing and rubbing bits of dead skin away until he was pink and raw. The water would turn grey, bits and pieces of him floating among bits of dirt and dust.

She'd drain the bath, then use a cheap brand of liquid soap to wash him down. She'd lay down a towel on her bed and would push him down until he was on his back, naked and wet. After she cut his finger and toenails, she'd leave. "*Just air dry,*" she'd always say with an increasingly tired smile.

He stepped onto the second step because the first one squeaked.

Sweat cooled on his back. Hard metal stung his palms when he gripped the railing. Every time he swallowed he tasted copper, fresh air, and salt. Next came the third step, then fifth, all traversed in quick, silent movements.

One after the other, Stiles climbed into colder air until he reached the top of the stairs.

He was in the kitchen.

He'd been in Kate's kitchen plenty of times. When the sun was too bright at the range, they'd go inside and get lemonade and make sandwiches. Stiles remembered the first time he'd ever been in Kate's kitchen, ducking behind his father's legs, too shy to look up at the *pretty Kate Argent*. It had been the first of the summer barbeques, Stiles had been eleven years old. He remembered that there was a lot of people and food.

It became a Beacon Hills tradition that on a Saturday in June, everyone would go over to Kate's house to eat, drink, and laugh. Scott couldn't come because Kate's flowery garden was bad for his allergies and asthma. Other kids were there... but none of them were Scott.

"Come on, Stiles," his father only tried to plea with him once during the first year, *"just try and socialize a little."*

Stiles would tuck himself away Kate's kitchen. All the cooking was outside, so no one ever came in the kitchen.

Stiles would sit, listening to people come in and out to use the bathroom, but Stiles would purposefully sit on the other side of the floating island so no one could see him. After a few hours of listening to summer fun from inside an empty house, Kate came in and slid him a plate full of food with a wink before she went back outside. Over the years it became their weird tradition, Stiles hiding in the kitchen and Kate bringing him food without judgement.

Years later Stiles's toes were quiet against the tile.

No matter how many times he let himself be taken, no matter how many times he hyperventilated at the right moment to induce fainting, he didn't trust himself to be coordinated enough to guarantee escape. So while Kate wasn't watching, while she watched tv or did laundry, Stiles relearned her house. He stole a library card from her desk drawer and kept it hidden in his mouth.

He stepped into rooms that were familiar, gazed out of the long kitchen window that Stiles *knew*, yet didn't know.

It was dark for the most part, eerily still outside. There was no breeze. No birds chirped. Stiles watched his breath fog out across the glass, and turned away before he could get a glimpse of his reflection.

Kate still kept her cooking knives on the far left side of the sink. The blade was heavy in Stiles's grip.

The hall yawned before him. The only light was from the small, glints off the pictures that hung on the wall. It was a hallway that Stiles had walked, that Kate had walked him down to the her bedroom, then her bathroom. There were a few closets, and one room that was always locked during the summer barbeques.

Sometimes, when Stiles had knocked himself out at the right time, the door would be open.

It was where she kept her father. It might have been a study at one point, but the small glimpses Stiles got of it... told him that Kate had repurposed it a long time ago. The walls had been stripped down. It smelled like urine, and dirty, rotted clothes. Sometimes, Gerard would get too close to Stiles when Kate would have him walk to the bathroom. That would be one of the times when he would be left alone.

"Ugh," she had to roughly grab her father, pushing him away. "Come on, dad. Don't be fucking gross."

She'd push him into the dark room on the left side, even as he growled, flaring his nostrils and his cataract-covered eyes milky but dangerous. Whoever Gerard Argent used to be... had been completely erased by Satomi. Stiles would stand there, keeping his breathing shallow and his eyes distant as Kate maneuvered the lumbering beast, his jaw slack and breathing in haunting, wet sucks. There was a table inside with thick leather and metal straps. Stiles had to watch her strap her father down, limb by limb, until he could barely move, his breaths coming in short, frustrated grunts.

That night, the door was closed.

Stiles pressed his ear against the wood. He focused on the spaces of silence between his heartbeats, until his world of sound narrowed. After three breaths, Stiles heard the familiar growl-gurgle of breaths, the feral breathing that sent slick, cold chills down Stiles's spine.

He tightened his grip on the wooden knife handle and went to the room across from Gerard's. The door was ajar, and he slipped inside, silent, in the dark.

When Peter had escaped, he had werewolf strength and speed to aid him... and he still didn't make it. He was caught within minutes.

The way Stiles saw it, there was only one way they could get out alive.

Kate Argent was spread out across her mattress, breathing deeply. She slept on her stomach, her arm slung lazily around a pillow. The sheets had been kicked off the bed. She had on blue checked boxers and a worn shirt, one that Stiles had seen her wear a couple times on the range, a white one that was so worn and weary that whatever phrase had been written on it had faded into obscure speckles of color.

Stiles was stood over her like a spectre, and his entire body roiled in disgust, terror, and dread. *There is **no other way**.*

It was easier than Stiles thought, the slip of the blade into her back, right by her kidney, was like dipping a hot spoon into ice cream.

The moment his knife made contact, air exploded from Stiles's lungs, a guttural, choked scream that had salt flooding his mouth. His fingers stung, and he knew that something inside of him broke. Something soft and small, something that he had been born with, but was now shattered, unmendable.

His brain was on fire, and nothing would erase the feeling of the soft *pop* from the puncture of metal into flesh, the strangled *gasp* that Kate let out, and how her entire body went tense like lightning in the middle of the night.

She sounded like an animal, and for a bone-chilling, hysteric split second, Stiles thought that maybe she'd transformed into a dog. He drew his hand back and she turned with the movement, eyes wild, shining in the dark.

He had to keep going. His knees bumped the bed and he let his weight fall on her, his hand *pushing* the knife into her stomach—

"Hey, that wasn't half bad. Thirty-seven points on your first bout? Pretty good." The summer heat was almost bearable with a heavy breeze. Kate took down the targets sheets and rolled them up, smoothing a rubber band over them. Stiles remembered feeling proud, the weight of a gun in his hands not as nauseating as it had been when he started. "Always keep your first shots on record. Let's go again."

Kate's let out another sound of animalistic disbelief, a *Guh*, as blood pushed out from between her teeth. She looked older, the wrinkles by her mouth more defined. Stiles was so used to seeing her out in the sun, out where the trees were green and the flowers were bright. Now she just seemed... *small*. Scared. The same kind of scared Stiles had felt, struggling to breathe as Peter bled out on top of him, as Peter bit into his wrist like that was supposed to *save him*.

Stiles saw her eyes widen and focus on him, that horrible moment when Kate must have realized that this was really happening. The same feeling, that *same fucking feeling* that Stiles had a long time ago, sixteen years old and every heartbeat another frantic screaming of *is this happening— is this really happening?*

He drew his hand back and thrust it forward again, his eyes squeezing shut at the wet *squelch* —

"I get it. Parties suck." Kate would sometimes sit with him during her barbeques, just for stolen moments at a time, and not every year. Her shoulders were tan, her teeth bright in a crooked smile that reminded Stiles of old movies. He remembered thinking she was cool. Everything was so casual with Kate, how she'd bring him food with a soft smile, a whisper of gossip or a joke that would have Stiles smiling. "But if the food is good, I can endure."

"No." Even that simple word was a struggle for her, popping through her lips with a wet, blood-splattered *splash*. The mattress was already soaked. Stiles had to keep bringing it down, he had to keep going, every exhale from him was stained with a desperate *oh God*. Kate twisted, trying to pull away even though the damage was too great. "No."

Her teeth ground loud in her jaw. Her hands immediately went to Stiles's shirt and her fists hit his ribs hard. Stiles moved his hand higher, to her neck, and he choked with her, he gasped with her—

*"It's okay, Stiles," his father's voice reassured Stiles even though it wasn't okay. As they stood at his mother's grave, Stiles's nine-year-old mind in a spiral of panic because **nothing** was okay. He kept crying, every breath he drew fuel for more tears and his father squeezed his shoulder like Stiles was going to fly away if he wasn't careful. "It's just a part of life," his father held him close, warm and agonized, "Death is just a natural part of life."*

Kate's hands scrambled on his arms, and she dug in her nails and *pulled*.

His skin opened up like paper. Stiles's arms shook from the pain, but he held her down, her shallow breaths growing heavier with every blood-filled inhale... until her body went slack, until the shine in her eyes glazed over... and with every exhale, Stiles realized he'd been gasping *I'm sorry*.

Behind him, in the room with the restraints, came an unearthly *roar*.

Keep moving, Stiles pushed himself off Kate with shaking legs, his chest and arms slick and sticky with her blood. The roars kept coming and Stiles had to look away from Kate, he had to remember to *breathe*. The beast roared again, and Stiles snapped back into himself.

He found Kate's keys to their doors on her bureau and quickly grabbed Atticus off the wall. He checked to see if it was loaded, then grabbed more bullets from Kate's nightstand just as Gerard's door splintered.

Stiles's left hand was heavy with the bullets and keys. His right gripped Kate's rifle.

The beast stumbled through the door. The old body of Gerard heaved in breaths and its nostrils flared, a low, mourning wail coming from its throat. Its eyes swiveled to Stiles, and it opened its mouth full of razor-sharp teeth.

Stiles tried to duck to the right, even though he knew he wasn't fast enough, he couldn't *possibly* be fast enough—

The beast lunged, and Stiles's foot slipped on all the blood. He went down fast, and he felt Gerard's hot breath on his neck as he flew over Stiles, missing him completely and slamming into the bookshelves.

Stiles's fingers dug into the rug and he pulled himself up, breathing wildly and loud as he ran down the hall. Gerard's roars were close, he could hear the claws tearing the carpet, wood, then tile floor. His footfalls were clumsy, his hip hitting the kitchen's island. He yanked the door to the basement open and ran down the stairs, his teeth clattering in his jaw.

He slammed into Peter's glass wall. They were all awake, all screaming his name, but Stiles couldn't look at them. He dropped the keys to the ground and the Alphas roared louder, hysteric, manic, and terrified.

Deep breaths, Stiles swallowed and did his breath to follow the directions that Kate had taught him, many, *many* summers ago. *Every shot you make is a shot you need to envision. Between breaths, when you're most still, take it.*

Gerard clambered down the steps on all fours, his mouth frothing and his eyes leaking tears. He howled, high and wild. *If you're in danger, Stiles*, his father's voice suddenly came to him, clear as a bell, *I want you to do whatever you can to get out of the situation.*

Atticus was heavy, but familiar in Stiles's grip.

He squeezed off the first shot and it caught Gerard in the chest. He fell on his back on the stairs and Stiles slipped more bullets in.

His ribs ached, his mind was on fire, but he kept his breathing even as he walked forward, watching Gerard's chest rise and fall in uneven breaths. The beast whined, high in its throat, and Stiles aimed Atticus at it once more, this time at the head.

He fired.

Gerard's body went slack.

He didn't draw another breath.

There was no swelling of music, no witty one-liner, and Stiles's world didn't fade to black as the credits began to roll. The cacophony faded to just his labored breathing, the three Alphas behind him breathing in sync. Stiles sniffed and rubbed his nose even though it just smeared more blood on his face.

Keep moving. Keep breathing.

The keys were heavy in Stiles's shaking hands. He opened Peter's door first, then Satomi's, then Deucalion's. One by one, they left their glass cells and Stiles had dreamt of this day for so long, he thought of how they'd be laughing, singing, dancing... and yet they hadn't been quieter.

When he turned back to the stairs he saw that Peter had dragged Gerard's body to the side. The three Alphas were quiet, waiting. Stiles went first, step-by-step until all four of them were in the kitchen.

Sunlight poured through the windows. Stiles swallowed and went around the kitchen to the side of the refrigerator. Sure enough, Kate still had a landline phone.

Stiles dragged his fingers over the familiar sequence of numbers that would lead him to his father's cell phone. The Alphas stood by him, not touching him, but sharing his breath as he listened, teeth worrying his bottom lip as it rang.

One ring.

His stomach curdled. Maybe his dad retired. Maybe his dad moved.

After all, he'd lost his wife... and then his son. Why would he stay in a place that reminded him of so much loss? Maybe his dad had moved on, gotten remarried, and maybe Stiles calling him after God-knows-how-long would be the last thing his father needed.

Two rings.

Maybe Stiles should have thought harder about this, because he was covered in drying blood with two bodies that would be hard to explain as self-defense. Even without the fact that he had *murdered* his way to freedom, just what good did that do him?

Three rings.

Stiles's hands tightened on the receiver, his eyes burning. Six hands were on his back and he squeezed his eyes shut because— because what if none of it mattered, what if he was too late, what if, somehow, he was just making it worse—?

"Hello," Stiles's eyes flew open. Six hands tightened their grip on him, holding up up so he didn't fall when his knees gave out. *"This is Noah speaking."*

Stiles's throat jumped. All the air rushed out of him in a painful wheeze. Plastic creaked under his hands. The wolves kept squeezing, kept him upright as he sucked in breath, all the air stuck in the back of his throat.

Stiles heard his father sigh.

"Hello?" This time he was frustrated. Stiles knew that his father had one hand on his hip, the same way he would when he'd get spam calls. When Stiles was younger, his father would smirk at him, roll his eyes and mime someone talking with his hand. Back then, it was easy to laugh at silly stuff like that. *"Hello, is anyone there?"*

"Dad." Stiles forced the words past his humming teeth. *"Dad, dad, it's me."* He heard a burst of air on the other line. Claws had to dig into his shoulders so that he wouldn't pass out. *"I'm at Kate Argent's house. Come get me,"* Stiles shuddered and the tears that had been gathering finally fell. *"Come get me, please."*

He cried, harder than he could remember. He could hear his father saying his name but Stiles couldn't speak, couldn't summon any words other than *please* and *I'm sorry*. He filled his lungs with too much air, he was dizzy, his limbs felt like they were filled with prickling static. He didn't have the presence of mind to feel embarrassment. After everything he did, he couldn't keep it together for one phone call? A phone call he'd dreamed about making?

"Stiles, just stay there, just stay there I'm coming for you."

When Stiles finally got his breath back, he was outside.

His face was covered in mucus, his eyes were puffy, and the sun stung more than he remembered. The three Alphas sat with him on the steps, like they were just enjoying a spring morning breeze. Peter's shoulder pressed against his, and Deucalion sat on the other side, with Satomi next to him. She pressed dish towels against his bleeding arms.

The flowers were in full bloom, their scent sweet a mocking melody on the breeze. Stiles listened to the way the wind moved through the trees, tasted the fresh air with bits of pollen, and rolled a blade of grass between his fingers until all that was left as a green smudge. Birds sang. Insects buzzed. Clouds passed overhead.

The four of them sat, overwhelmed, in silence.

Stiles rested his hands on his knees, his sweat cooling and his clothes and hands sticky with clumps of dried blood. The calm breeze was replaced with the growing sound of sirens.

Rubber tires crunched over stone. Three ambulances and the entire Beacon Hills Police Force rolled into the Argent driveway. Peter stood first and helped Stiles up, Deucalion gently grabbing Stiles's other arm. The four of them stood as the police cruisers slowed to a stop.

Stiles held his hand up to block the unrelenting sunlight from his eyes.

The first cruiser's door opened.

His father stepped out of the car. Stiles's hand fell away and he couldn't stop looking at him, at the new wrinkles, at how there was much more grey in his hair. Stiles must have looked like a *nightmare*. His chest heaved and his dad just *stood there*, looking at him, like Stiles was too bright, like he was something sharp and gleaming.

Stiles swallowed, his lower lip trembling.

"D-Dad?"

His father broke out into a run. Stiles stepped away, and the Alphas' hands fell from him as he ran.

The moment their fingers fell from his shoulders, it was as though the ground *left him*. His axis was in constant rotation, the sky was spinning, Stiles felt like something was tearing deep inside of him and the world was too bright, too big, too open—

He slammed into his father's open arms.

"Oh my God," his father's voice was *right there*, a low rumble against his temple. "Oh my God, *Stiles*."

His father hugged him tight, and more tears fell from Stiles's eyes. He clung back, his thoughts a terrified stream of *don't let me go, please don't let me go, please don't leave me alone, I never want to be alone*. Stiles squeezed tighter, pushed himself closer and his father was saying something, his calloused fingers stroked the back of Stiles's head. The ground was back under his feet. The sun still hurt his eyes. He was getting blood all over his dad's uniform.

Stiles shuddered.

His dad hugged him, so much, so tight, and every point of contact felt like bliss... and agony.

His pulled back and managed a tearful “I love you, Dad,” right before he vomited all over his father’s boots.



Chapter End Notes

And we finally made it outside. Though there is more to go. The road to recovery is a long one.

So this is... I know, not as long as the others, but I really wanted to focus on Stiles for this and to have it be one long continuous stream to really show the psychology behind what Stiles had to do, and just how damaging it was to his psyche. I did my best to create "invisible breaks" when I would bounce between past and present. Either way... it was a fun exercise and I hope you guys enjoyed it too.

Another reason I wanted to do it all in one continuous go was that... it reminded me of Children of Men, where it had a really intense sequence that was a single shot, which was how I imagined this.

Realism is something I care about, especially in a story like this, which is why I was more graphic here than in other works. This story isn't going to be glamorous. It's hard work. It's ugly work. And I hope y'all are enjoying the ride.

The songs I listened to while writing this were [Science and Visions](#) as well as [The Secret World Trailer](#) (because of the song used).

Please, PLEASE, if you read this, let me know what you think, good and bad.

Also, art is by [trashy](#), who is an angel, scholar, and wonderful human being.

Also-Also: feel free to come shout at me at my [tumblr](#)!

Chapter 10: Seven Years to the New World

Chapter Summary

Why did he have to disappear for you to see him? Noah turned his back on the flowers and trellises, his fingers shaking, begging to be clenched into a fist. *You didn't care about him when he was... alive.*

Rewriting history was easy when everyone could feel better because of it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



“Don’t touch anything!” That was the first thing Noah Stilinski yelled to his deputies as soon as they peeled into his driveway. “Don’t touch anything!”

His voice cracked, his legs heavy and lethargic as he ran inside, even though it was too late. The sound of shouting and breaking glass had started minutes ago. Parrish led the other deputies through the house while Noah went around the back, to the blood and harsh indentations on the grass where bodies would have fallen from the roof, out of Stiles’s open bedroom window.

There was blood on the grass. The imprint of *bodies* was on the grass but there was nothing left. His heart pounded hard against ribs, his fingers numb and his vision was swimming. Noah hurried back to the house, where the refrigerator door hung open, where two glasses of water with condensation on the side still rested on Stiles’s favorite Batman placemats.

He walked through his murmuring deputies, to the stairs. Parrish was waiting for him just outside of Stiles's room, to where the door had been kicked in, the wood splintered and frayed like thread.

"Sir," Parrish's voice cracked.

Noah knew that he needed to keep a clear head, that he needed to take a breath and really bring his all to this. But he couldn't stop looking at Stiles's backpack, to the covers on the bed that had been thrown back, to the math homework that still rested on his desk. He'd just gotten a Stephen King book from the library, a colorful bookmark marking his progress.

Slivers of wood came inward from the window, where Stiles had shot... someone who had entered his room. *Someone broke the front window, Stiles and Peter Hale booked it upstairs, where Stiles locked his door, and opened the window. When he took his shot, he was standing on the roof.* After that... that's when things got foggy. Either Stiles fell, or both Stiles and Peter fell. Impact on the grass was obvious... but there was no bodies left behind.

"Sheriff," Parrish swallowed and his throat clicked. "The blood on the doorway," where the bullet had lodged, where Stiles had made *contact* with who was after him. "It's congealed, sir."

Back at the station, he had them looking up the names Peter had dropped, including Peter's. Peter Hale. Deucalion Blackwood. Satomi Ito.

"My name is Peter Hale and I've been— I've been held captive along with two others. Satomi Ito and Deucalion Blackwood are back there, please—"

The man had been close to hyperventilating, his voice raw, desperate. Noah's could hear it, echoing in his ears, and how his son had done his best to soothe this stranger. *We need to dust for prints. We need to comb the indentation area for anything left behind.*

Noah knew the steps he needed to take, he knew how to break down this situation by the books. In cases involving abduction, the first few hours were crucial. Noah *knew* this... but with every breath he took, his shaking hands worsened. The air was thick in his lungs and he sat down in Stiles's desk chair, hard enough to make the wheels squeak.

This... this wasn't happening. He was just dreaming. Things like this didn't happen in Beacon Hills. This couldn't be happening because it was Stiles's *birthday*. They were going to watch *Empire Strikes Back* and work in other movies until he fell asleep and Noah had to carry him up. Post-its on Stiles's desk were cheerily bright, reminders about quizzes, books and movies coming out, and sometimes just random words or equations that Stiles scribbled down to save for later—

This can't be happening. Not to Stiles. Not to me.

"Sheriff," Parrish was shaking him now. "You're getting a call from the station."

"Right." Noah stood even though his head felt detached from his body as he fumbled for his phone. He pressed it to his ear, his face numb. "Talk to me."

“Sheriff, we were looking up the names and our search immediately alerted... well, the names were flagged and I’ve got the FBI on the line for you, sir.” Downstairs, frosting and bits of rainbow sprinkles dripped off the shelf in the refrigerator. *Happy 16th Birthday, Stiles!* had melted into unreadable mush. *“Sir?”*

Lucy from dispatch was waiting. Parrish was waiting. His entire team was waiting. God willing... Stiles was waiting too.

“Patch them through, Lucy.”

.....



Special Agents Shannon Strickland and Jun Kamata landed in Beacon Hills six and a half hours later. They arrived in a helicopter that landed in the lacrosse field at Beacon Hills High, and they were met with three sleek, black SUVs from the FBI branch in San Diego. Noah

was not there to meet Strickland. He waited on his porch as the parade of vehicles parked haphazardly in his driveway.

Beacon Hills High was on lockdown, the children kept in class but they day was spent as an extended homeroom as police officers took aside kid after kid, to try to see about any variations in Stiles's behavior. The recording of the phone call had been copied, so that the Agents, Noah, and the rest of the force could access it.

Everyone was moving, while Noah stood on his porch. Waiting.

Special Agent Strickland was an older man with deeply cut wrinkles souring his face. Special Agent Kamata was younger, his cheeks rounder and his hair long, held up in a ponytail. Kamata was quiet. Strickland... talked, and when he did, his words were like knives.

"Let me get this straight," Strickland rubbed the wrinkles on his forehead, pacing in Noah's living room. "Your son was home alone on his *birthday*? For hours, unattended, and no one else with him?" Strickland was a good head shorter than Noah, but in that moment he seemed to loom over him, his wrinkles deepening with every word. "What, did you have some uncrackable case back at the office? Look at this town, I *doubt it*." Strickland shook his head, rolling his lip between his teeth until it was raw. "Why was your son alone, Sheriff?"

Noah blinked, a hot band of grief wrapped tight around his throat.

"H-He... he doesn't mind being alone. I have to work late sometimes—"

"On his *birthday*? Couldn't swing a day off?"

Kamata had suitcases of equipment and files that he unloaded in the living room, moving the table and turning it on its side to allow more room. He carefully put DVDs back on the shelf, DVDs that Stiles had been watching just hours ago. Parrish crossed his arms, looking away as shame crawled up from under Noah's collar.

"I *said*, my son doesn't mind being alone."

Strickland lips curled, pulling back into a sneer.

"No one likes being alone on their birthday."

Kamata and analysts combed through the entire house with gloved, deft hands. Every room was broken down piece by piece until it was all compiled into data. Stiles's room was an active crime scene, as well as physical objects that were categorized, listed, and accounted for. Strickland listened to the audio recording of Stiles's phone call, had it run through a program to break down every different audio cue.

Noah wasn't naive. There was no evidence of kidnapping, just a break-in and that his son was missing. The FBI weren't here for Stiles. They were here for one or all of the other names that Peter Hale dropped. Jun was on the phone constantly, switching between English and Japanese with dizzying ease.

Strickland clicked his pen in his hands, listening to the recording over and over again, each replay another sharp *stab* through Noah's heart. Kamata joined Strickland in the kitchen, peering over the notes that his partner had taken.

"There are two distinct sets of feet. The big heavy, who was probably doing all the harsh breathing, and it's hard to hear, but there's someone else. Two people broke in, and judging by the breathing from the big heavy... they must have been wearing a mask or had obstruction over their mouth." Strickland sighed. "What do you think that first part meant?"

He rewound the recording and played it, right before the chaos started.

"Will you be able to, uh, hide those? I'm assuming you won't be ready for the questions those will bring."

There was a brief hush, the sound of Stiles breathing before Hale answered.

"You assume correctly."

His son was broken down just like his room. Who did he hang out with? How many friends did he have? How many of those friends were considered close friends? Did he ever date? Boys? Girls? Did he play sports? Did he legitimately enjoy lacrosse? What were his hobbies, his interests, and could Noah please list them in order of importance/enjoyment?

There were so many answers that Noah had to answer with *I don't know*.

Strickland's wrinkles kept getting deeper and deeper until he finally stopped his line of questioning. He opened his mouth, but Kamata's hand on his shoulder stopped whatever words Strickland had been gathering.

Nothing came from interviewing the students other than finding out that Stiles's only friend was Scott. No one else had anything to say about him, their eyes dodging questions and implications was enough of an answer. Even the teachers seemed uncomfortable by his name.

"You don't have an opinion?" Strickland's voice got louder and louder in the halls as he cornered Harris. "Not a *word* on what Stiles Stilinski was like? Did you take attendance? Was he ever here?"

Harris nodded, the whites of his eyes glistening.

"Yes, he was always in attendance—"

"Then what was he like?"

I didn't really know him was repeated until the words lost all meaning. The more they pressed the less they found, until Strickland dragged his hand down his face.

"So we still don't know shit about this kid." He rolled his eyes. "This is going nowhere. We need to bring in the family members of the other victims."

....



The first week was chaos, and the constant movement gave Noah hope.

Two families and one estate representative were being flown into Beacon Hills. Strickland finally gave Noah the full story. In 1990, Satomi Ito had been visiting Washington state and went missing during a conference, and was survived by her husband and two daughters. Deucalion Blackwood was actual British royalty, long down the lineage to the Queen, and had been looking at properties in 2003 in the Smoky Mountains with his wife when he was reported missing. Until the night Stiles went missing, the two incidents were not thought to be related.

Peter Hale, a random missing person case from 2008 in New York, hadn't made it onto Strickland's and Kamata's radar until now.

Strickland put the families up in the Hyatt just outside of town and rented out their ballroom to fill them in.

“Thank you for coming here on such short notice.”

Strickland’s face softened the moment the Ito family walked through the door and he greeted them in Japanese.

Hiroaki Ito, Satomi’s husband, was the only one who smiled. Her two girls were... well, young women who walked at their father’s side with tall, elegant confidence. They managed a small smile when Noah shook their hands, but the oldest, Yomiko, had no affection for Strickland.

The Blackwood family sent a representative of their estate, an older man with a well-groomed grey mustache. He didn’t say much, and noticeably wiped his hand clean after he shook the Agents and Noah’s hand.

The Hales were younger, a little more familiar that made Noah instinctually comfortable. Talia was a woman with a few wisps of grey in her hair, her eyes tired as her two daughters and son. Noah cleared his throat and managed not to slouch when all eyes narrowed on him

“Fifty-two hours ago, my son went missing, evidence points to abduction by at least two people.” Noah glanced down at his notepad, his vision blurring for a few moments before he got a hold of himself. “He called me and said that a man was in the house with him who needed help, and that man identified himself as Peter Hale.”

Strickland cleared his throat, drawing attention back to himself.

“We don’t have a lot to go on, but we do have a recording, where Peter states that he’d been held captive along with Satomi Ito and Deucalion Blackwood. I understand it’s going to be difficult answering some of the same questions, but with this new development, we’re hoping for progression.”

The first week was excruciating, but Noah believed that with every drop of sweat, every minute of sleep lost, would lead him to his son. Every time he had to listen to that damned recording, it was worth it if it meant finding Stiles.

When Strickland played the recording for the families the first time, Talia Hale covered her eyes, though the tears that streaked down her cheeks were easily spotted. The kids fared worse, the youngest, a girl who couldn’t be older than thirteen, made a noise as though her ribcage collapsed.

The Hales confirmed that the voice on the recording was, in fact, Peter. The Blackwood representative seemed... indifferent at best, while the Ito young women whispered to each other, their shoulders tense, as their father smiled.

“I knew it,” Hiroaki’s voice was like a gale over a desert, rattling in his chest as his cheeks flushed, his eyes shimmering. “I can still feel her,” he pressed his hand over his heart, “here.”

“Dad,” Yomiko squeezed his father’s hand, while her younger sister slid down further in the chair.

Every day for three weeks there were rotations of patrols that were made up of volunteers with police force supervisors, Noah always handling the night search which was the largest. The Agents had their plan, and Noah had his because *things like this didn't happen in Beacon Hills*.

Three weeks came and went. The volunteers dwindled. Strickland and Kamata packed up their things and helped arrange for the Hale, Blackwood, and Ito families to be sent back home.

“Wait,” Noah staggered into the Hyatt, blocking the Itos from leaving so he could grab onto Strickland. “Just wait,” Noah stood tall like he didn’t stink of bourbon, like his face wasn’t patchy because he hadn’t shaved in weeks, and like his voice didn’t crack with every breath. “We’re close. You can’t just *give up*. He’d *out there*, my son is *out there*, and you can’t leave until we find him.”

Stiles won't give up, he won't stop and he'll survive, we just have to get to him. Noah had to keep breathing, he had to keep waking up, keep going to work, keep *looking*. He wasn’t allowed to stop, and neither were they. *Things like this don't happen here. We'll find him, set it right.*

“Mr. Stilinski,” Shannon Strickland firmly removed Noah’s hand from his arm. “Everyone here has lost someone. It’s not just you and it’s not just your son.”

The Blackwood estate representative brushed past him with a huff. The Hales avoided his eyes, while Hiroaki squeezed Noah’s hand.

“Don’t lose hope, Sheriff,” Hiroaki spoke slowly and his hand was warm. Noah wanted nothing more than to recoil from the comfort that he never asked for. “As long as you can feel your son here,” he gestured to his heart, “then never stop hoping.”

His daughters sent Noah a look that said they didn’t agree.

Strickland and Kamada left. People stopped turning up for volunteer searches and instead held vigils and made him casseroles.

All it took was three weeks for people to stop looking for Stiles.

....

No one ran against him when it was time to run for re-election. He won in a landslide.

His victory party was spent alone in his kitchen, wearing down the edge of a Batman placemat with his thumb while nursing a glass of bourbon.

....



When his wife died, Noah remembered how his world felt off-kilter, like his sense of balance had suddenly disappeared. Every day was treading water, keeping himself barely afloat so he could care for a child and keep his job. Noah had mastered coasting in the minimum expense of energy, because at that time... he couldn't spare it.

The worst part about losing Stiles was how everything remained the same.

Noah got dressed in the morning the same, came home late at night to reheat dinner the same, and drank bourbon the same.

It felt so *similar* that there were some mornings when Noah would wipe the sleep grit out of his eyes and open Stiles's door with a "come on, time to get up," only to remember that *Stiles wasn't there anymore*.

The first two years were the hardest. Noah had to watch as all of Stiles's peers got to continue living like nothing had happened, like nothing was *missing* from their lives. Prom, lacrosse

championships, and graduation... it all still *happened*, even though Stiles wasn't there.

"I know you're going to grow up and be such a smart, brilliant man," Claudia had told Stiles on one of her more lucid nights in the hospital bed while Noah did his best to keep his breathing steady as he stood beside his son. *"Just because I won't see it,"* she winked and tears rolled down her cheeks, *"doesn't mean I don't know it's going to happen."*

Claudia was wrong. It didn't happen. Stiles disappeared, and he knew that Parrish was too afraid to ask if he was going to hold a funeral. If he was going to have a coffin with no body, a grave next to Claudia with no one laying there.

"Sheriff Stilinski," Lydia Martin's lips curled in the summer sunlight. Her and Scott had been prom queen and king, and Lydia was their class president. She'd been accepted to three different Ivy Leagues. "We set up a foundation in Stiles's honor and raised enough money to start a community garden on the school."

That was supposed to make Noah happy. Noah smiled. Lydia smiled.

Why did he have to disappear for you to see him? Noah turned his back on the flowers and trellises, his fingers shaking, begging to be clenched into a fist. *You didn't care about him when he was... alive.*

Rewriting history was easy when everyone could feel better because of it.

Lydia wasn't mean to Stiles, she mourned him. Jackson didn't bully him relentlessly, would a bully be at every fundraising event, would a bully work tirelessly in Stiles's name? The freshman wing of the school was renamed after him. Teachers now would never forget him. Everyone *knew* Stiles and they had loved him... if all the posters, flyers, dedications, and murals were to be believed.

....

As long as the Sheriff didn't stink of booze then he had been an attentive and loving father.

....

Routine was key.

Get up, take a drink, shower, brush his teeth, take another drink, use mouthwash two times, put on his uniform, and go to work.

Work was easy.

Nothing happened in Beacon Hills.

Go home, kick off his shoes, take a drink, start coffee, turn on the news for background noise, clean the living room, make sure the curtains don't cover the windows, take another drink, vacuum, put new sheets on his bed, pour coffee, take another drink.

If he kept his house clean, if he let in a lot of natural light, everything would look normal. If he made sure that shadows couldn't appear, then everything would be all right. If he used an electric razor then it never mattered if his hands shook or not.

The news was white noise, a dull hum. A constant reminder that the world kept turning.

Life moved on.

....

After three years, Noah Stilinski had a headstone engraved and placed next to Claudia's.

He donated most of Stiles's furniture, desks, old office supplies, and put his books and movies in a box and shoved it in the closet. He kept the bed. He told himself having a guest bedroom would be useful.

Noah couldn't remember the last time he had guests.

....



Noah woke up an hour before his alarm went off. He sat up in his bed, his heart racing and he took deep breaths, pushing his hand on his chest. *I must have been dreaming*, Noah thought, though the images were fuzzy, already slipping through his grasp like water.

He rarely had dreams. Sleep was a void that never lasted long enough before his alarm went off, pulling him back into his home. His reality. His routine.

But not that night.

Noah rubbed his eyes. His breath rattled in his lungs. He'd been... running. Or chasing something? He'd been under a lot of physical stress, his heart beating wildly out of control and breathing like he'd run a marathon. Noah couldn't remember seeing anything, doing anything... but he'd never forget the looming *horror* that overwhelmed him. He looked down at his arms, a ghostly sense of deja vu gnawing at the back of his mind. *In my dream... did something hurt my arms?*

He didn't go back to sleep.

Mist drifted over the front porch, numbing the tips of Noah's toes as he sat out with his coffee. The whole world was quiet, so quiet that Noah's ears started to ring, so he went back inside, turned on the news, and began his routine— just a little earlier than usual.

Get up, take a drink, shower, brush his teeth—

Just as Noah spit out frothy toothpaste and saliva into the sink, his cell phone rang.

No one ever called him. Slowly, Noah had stopped going over to Melissa's house, had stopped going out for drinks with Parrish. He would happily converse with folks at the grocery store, but it never led to anything more to the benign pleasantries. *Bullshit pleasantries*, Stiles used to say. No one wants to be friends with a father whose son who went missing, who was never found.

Noah had no idea how Stiles died, who took him, if he was alive for very long, or if it was quick and meriful. And the whole town *knew* that Noah had to live with that mystery. There was no denying that when a kid goes missing and a body is never found... that anything could have happened to them. All the fundraisers, community gardens, and bake sales wouldn't change that.

His phone rang again, and Noah picked it up, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. It was a local number, but his phone didn't have a lot of contacts left. *Just let it go to voicemail*, Noah thought. It was barely six in the morning. Surely... it could wait.

But you're the Sheriff. His phone kept ringing as Noah stepped out into the dark hallway. *Someone is calling for the Sheriff.*

"Hello, this is Noah speaking."

There was nothing on the other line, but when Noah strained his ears, he could hear... breathing. Heavy, uneven breathing, and the sound of squeaking plastic. He waited, counted down from ten, and still the person didn't say anything. Noah's jaw tightened in annoyance and he sighed.

"Hello?" He put his hand on his hip, rolling his eyes even though there was no one around to watch him do it. "Hello, is anyone there?"

"*Dad.*" Noah froze. For a hysterical moment he thought *this a prank caller*, or maybe he misheard, maybe he was still dreaming and any moment he'd wake up in a cold sweat, heart racing and muscles tense. "*Dad, dad, it's me.*" Noah's back hit the wall, his eyes swimming with tears because *it was*. He'd forgotten Stiles's voice but once he heard it, once Stiles had to *clarify* between rushed breaths, he *knew, of course he knew*— "*I'm at Kate Argent's house. Come get me. Come get me, please.*"

Noah was already running, stumbling into his uniform, grabbing his keys because Stile was sobbing on the line, every heavy heave of breath a frenzied *I'm sorry, please, I'm sorry* that was going to drive Noah mad.

“Stiles, just stay there,” Noah’s voice was steady, somehow, as he slammed his front door behind him, not caring to take the time to lock it. “Just stay there I’m coming for you.”

He kept his phone on speaker, again, and called out the whole force, again. This time...

This time Noah had three ambulances accompany them. Within fifteen minutes, Noah was at the front of their last minute motorcade as sunlight streaked down through the trees. It was unfair, how brilliant and bright it was outside as Noah led them into Kate Argent’s long driveway, driving past the shooting range, gardens, rock paths, until they reached the end, until they reached—

Noah Stilinski got out of his cruiser, the sun warming his skin for the first time in over seven years.

Vaguely, he heard the others get out, medics hurrying with equipment, antiseptic, and gauze. Parrish breathed out an *Oh Christ*.

On the stoop of Kate Argent’s home was Satomi Ito, Deucalion Blackwood, Peter Hale, and Stiles Stilinski.

The three other missing people all held Stiles up, they all took pieces of his weight as he held his hand above his eyes, to shield himself from the sun. Noah wondered what his son saw, how much Noah had surely changed.

What he saw... would haunt him for the rest of his life.

His son was thin, unnervingly pale, and his arms and chest were covered in blood, some spots so thick that they were still wet. Long cuts ran down the outside of his arms starting at the elbow and went all the way down to his wrist. He was taller. His shoulders were broader. As thin as he was... it was clear that he’d filled out.

Seven years.

Seven years.

“D-Dad?”

Noah took a step. Then another. And another, until he was running, until he was sprinting to meet his son, to touch him and make sure he was real—

....



Vomit crusted and clumped on Noah's ankles and boots.

Parrish and the officers were in Kate's house, the paramedics were gently cleaning Stiles's arms, wiping as much of the blood off his skin as they could. Birds sang, insects shrieked, and everything was so *vibrant* as Noah stared at his son, re-remembering his face, how it had changed.

The others, Satomi, Peter, and Deucalion, were quiet, letting themselves be evaluated by the medics, providing their arms for checking their pulses, and opening their mouths when asked. Their eyes, Noah noticed, never looked away from Stiles.

"Sir," Parrish whispered. "Sir, Kate's body is in the house. There's another... we can't ID without further testing. And... in the basement," Noah heard Parrish's throat click, "there are... glass rooms."

Stiles lifted his head up and his eyes met Noah's. Eyes that Noah never thought he'd see again.

"Parrish, I need you to stay here," Noah held his son's eyes. "I need to get Stiles and the others to the hospital. But keep in touch, take pictures, do your best not to disturb the scene."

Behind him, as Noah walked back to his son, he heard Parrish's firm "Yes, sir."

The gravel crunched under Noah's boots. His shadow stretched long ahead of him and when he got close enough, Stiles grabbed his hand and *squeezed*, hard enough for it to hurt. Noah didn't wince. His son's throat jumped, his shoulders jumping. He looked sick, but he refused to let go of his father's hand. Noah squeezed back, gently running his thumb over his son's knuckles.

"Sheriff," one of the paramedics spoke quickly, "we need to get your son to the hospital. The sun exposure is not good, he's malnourished, and we need to start testing as much as possible to determine the best path to... recovery."

His son's hand spasmed, but he still didn't let go. Stiles kept sucking in air in little huffs, tiny *ah-ah* percussive bursts, his lips cracked and white.

"And the others?"

The others who hadn't said a word. The others who gazed at his son as though he were some sort of deity.

"They'll need to be observed as well."

Behind him, Parrish was taping off the Argent house. The paramedics waited, and somewhere in Noah's desk, he still had Strickland and Kamata's numbers. He took a step closer and carded his fingers through Stiles's unevenly shorn hair.

Stiles yanked his hand away and more vomit dribbled out of his mouth.

"I'm sorry," tears rolled down his cheeks, "I'm sorry, Dad."

"Stiles," Noah was pressing down the unending alarms that were blaring inside of him, sirens that wanted to pull him in a million different directions until he was nothing but streaks of viscera on the ground. "Stiles, it's okay. We just need to get you to the hospital, to help you get better. I'll ride with you."

Stiles nodded, but his eyes were distant, he kept rubbing his mouth, his head, his own hand where Noah had touched him. Noah didn't have time to cater to the neverending *Oh God oh God oh God* inside of him that threatened to drown him. He quickly glanced at the three ambulances.

"Stiles and I will be in one, Satomi Ito and Deucalion Blackwood in the other, Peter in the third."

The paramedics nodded, but the moment they started to move, Stiles shook his head.

“No.” Stiles stood, the blanket that had been wrapped around him falling off his shoulders. “No, they need to be with me.” The others turned at Stiles’s voice. “We need to ride together.”

“Stiles,” Noah tried to touch him again, but Stiles jerked away. It wasn’t like when he’d been an angry teenager. It was like when an animal was injured. It was like Noah’s touch was *hurting* him. “Stiles, you can’t all fit.”

His son kept shaking his head, yanking his body away from the paramedics.

“They’re *mine*,” the moment he screamed, the other three lunged for him, pushing past the paramedics and first responders with shocking speed. Noah and the paramedics went for Stiles, holding him as he writhed, his voice rising to an unearthly shriek, “I need to *be with them*, don’t take me away from them—”

“Sir, he can’t be moving this much, he’ll need to be sedated—”

Noah nodded and, to their credit, the paramedic didn’t hesitate. As the others struggled to restrain Stiles, to keep from hurting himself in an effort to get to the others, who were also fighting to close the distance, a paramedic quickly filled a syringe. They were gentle and quick, injecting it into the back of his shoulder.

Stiles stopped screaming. His eyes rolled into the back of his head as his body went slack.

Peter Hale, Deucalion Blackwood, and Satomi Ito fainted the moment Stiles’s eyes slipped shut.

The creeping unease returned. The more Noah hesitated, the longer the others would have time to question what the *hell* had just happened. He cleared his throat.

“Load them up, let’s get them to the hospital.”

Sheriff Noah Stilinski didn’t have time to worry, wonder, or ruminate. He climbed into the back of the ambulance, watching as the paramedics fixed an oxygen mask over his son’s mouth. He turned to close the doors behind them.

Kate Argent’s house cast a shadow over them. Yellow police tape fluttered in the wind.

Noah pulled the ambulance doors shut with a curt, “Let’s go.”



Chapter End Notes

Wooooooo. Here we are. Again, so sorry for the long wait, it's been crazy, I've been traveling and focusing on my professional projects, so thanks for your patience, I hope the update is worth it. Come say hi on my tumblr, artwork is by trashyscarface, who is incredible!

Please comment :) Even if you didn't like it, I'd love to hear from you.

Chapter 11: Consequences of Consciousness

Chapter Summary

Noah glanced down to see a large scar on his son's inner right wrist. Two ragged semi-circles, the lines not smooth at all, and the door opened right as Noah realized they were *teeth indentations*.

A bite mark.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Near the end there are semi-graphic descriptions of how Stiles escaped, from a more clinical POV.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)



One moment Stiles was screaming for *his* Alphas, for *his* Pack— and the next he was slowly regaining consciousness on a hospital bed.

They're mine still burned in his throat. *I need to be with them, don't take me away from them!* The words had been fire, a roar, a *demand* that needed to be fulfilled. When he spoke them, he felt stronger, like his arms hadn't been clawed, like he hadn't just murdered two people, like he hadn't ripped the four of them out of their glass prisons and dragged them into a world...

Into a world that had forgotten about them.

Steady *beeps* helped him breathe in a steady rate, breathing slowly to squash the hysteria that still lingered beneath his skin. He kept his eyes closed.

Just start with the little things, his father used to say. *Focus on the tiniest details, latch onto it and don't let go until you're ready for more.*

The thing was... Stiles wasn't sure he'd ever be ready.

Machines whirled around him, he felt the slight tug of an IV in his vein, the thin mattress felt like a cloud, and sheets were pulled up to his neck. When he breathed the air tasted so different, more clean, fresh, not humid and weighed down by the smell of his own sweat and lingering waste. The gashes on his arms itched and burned. The skin felt strangely tight. *Stitches*. His legs and feet were bare. Somewhere close, someone struggled to breathe evenly. Stiles could hear them swallowing sobs near the end of every inhale. Emotion rattled in someone's lungs.

He opened his eyes.

Sure enough, he was in a hospital bed that had been adjusted so that he was at an angle, anticipating that he'd want to be sitting up when he woke. The IV was connected to his right arm, and on the left side of the bed was his father. He'd pulled up a chair but was hunched over, his elbows on his knees.

The curtains were drawn. None of the others were in his room.

Keep breathing, Stiles told himself even as he glanced at the door, even as he wondered where the Alphas were. Did they go to the same hospital? How much time had passed? Had their families been called already? Did they...

Did they want to see him?

While his father kept his head down, Stiles clenched his fists in the sheets. He wanted to tear them off, drag his IV with him, start shouting in the hallways, *Peter, Satomi, Deucalion* until they answered, until they came for him. Until they could be together again. The desire was savage, primal, and it bled through Stiles's teeth. His hands shook from the effort it took to hold himself back.

Hysteria... hysteria would not get him what he needed.

He swallowed, his tongue bone-dry.

"Dad?"

Metal shrieked on tile as his father flew back, his head jerking up. His face was red and splotchy.

Stiles couldn't stop staring at how his dad... had aged. He had to keep reminding himself *it's Dad. That is my Dad* as his father stood up, his hands jerking forward, then retreating. Being careful to not touch him.

"Stiles," his father gripped the bars on the side of the bed, the plastic creaking under his palm. "*Stiles*, oh my God. I'm sorry, I'm," and Stiles had to stay calm because if he started freaking out, he wouldn't be able to see them, but his dad was *crying*. His dad was crying, his

fingers twitching and reaching out but his dad knew now that... that he couldn't touch him. *But I want you to*, and Stiles started to cry. *I want you to, it just hurts*. "Stiles, I'm so sorry."

Tears streaked down Stiles's cheeks, his breathing came in broken bursts.

"It's okay." It wasn't. "It's okay, dad." His father needed to hear those words. Stiles remembered enough to know that. His head throbbed and he wiped his eyes clumsily with the sheets. "I'm here... so... it's okay now—"

"No." His father's shook his head, his voice surprisingly stern. The tears stopped, the hitched breaths stopped, and his father shook his head, solemn. Resolute. "It's not okay, Stiles. I wasn't... I wasn't good enough."

He's right, a voice snarled deep inside of Stiles, one that sounded a lot like Deucalion. Stiles swallowed the flare of blind rage the threatened to claw out of his mouth. He gently took his father's hand into his.

Every point of contact was like needles against his skin, stinging like glass in an open wound. He tightened his grip on his father's hand, the muscles jumping in his arm and neck as he fought back the pin-pricks of *wrong-wrong-wrong* that rang across his mind like sirens.

His father froze like an animal after a branch snapped somewhere far off in the dark. His throat bobbed, the whites of his eyes shining as Stiles tightened his grip over his father's knuckles.

"Stiles, if it hurts—"

"I'm fine." That was not true. His father made a sound like he knew that, like he was about to say it, but Stiles shook his head. "If it's just my hand, it's okay."

Stiles concentrated on his hand, on the calluses beaten into his skin over years and years of hitting his palms against rock. Gripping for sprints, slapping for dances, and gently rubbing in the middle of the night like he could transform the stone into the carpet in his bedroom. He looked down at his fingers, how they were so much longer, spreading over his father's skin like a spider.

The sensation of needles lessened from the agonizing roar to a buzz. He pressed his fingers down harder on his father's skin, on the skin he never thought he'd touch again. His chest hitched and he held his breath until the spasm passed. Stiles finally lifted his gaze to his father's.

"If you're going to... take a statement," Stiles swallowed, keeping his grip firm on his dad's hand no matter how badly his fingers shook, "I'll probably need a lawyer."

His dad's shoulders slumped forward and his lips pressed into a thin, cracked line.

"Stiles, you're my son. I won't testify against you."

Stiles let his eyes wander over his father's face, under the circles under his eyes, the way he was sluggish. If Stiles had only been out for a few hours... then his dad had been given a lot

to digest in the meantime.

“It... it doesn’t look good, does it?” Stiles lips curled, though he wasn’t happy. He felt delirious, shaking, spread out too thin. “What was left back at Kate’s house.”

Stiles had only been thinking about escape. He thought about the immediate obstacles and how to get rid of them, and taking the risk even though the chances of a total success were not in his favor. Because if he died trying... at least he *tried*. At least he did *everything* he could.

He didn’t think about how it would look. He didn’t count how many times he stabbed Kate, but it was a lot. He didn’t bother thinking of clean-up. His flesh was still under her fingernails. Her blood coated her bedroom walls. Gerard didn’t have a face, but he had two gunshot wounds. They would be able to tell that Stiles hadn’t stopped at the chest wound. He reloaded. He made *sure*.

“You did what you had to,” his father put his other hand on top of Stiles’s. It felt like salt on a wound. “Stiles, you did everything you could to get out.”

“Yeah.” His head was stuffed full of cotton. “Yeah well, that’s going to be up to the jury.”

At least it will all fall on me, Stiles had time to think, his skin still singing with needling unease in his father’s grip. He glanced towards the door. Some voices were raised, approaching loudly. None of them were his Alphas. His father’s jaw tightened at the noise.

Time was no longer on Stiles’s side. He had it in abundance when he was back in his glass room. He could do anything he desired, he could talk and move freely in his own mind... he had all the time available. He felt it wriggling away from him, slippery and strong like an eel. Stiles’s right hand shook and he closed it into a fist.

“So,” Stiles’s voice cracked too loudly for his dad to buy his already weak smile, “who do you think is going to get here first: the lawyers or the law enforcement?”

A clock ticked away loudly on the wall. His dad had a watch. Stiles struggled to relearn just how fast time moved as the door to his hospital room was opened. As it turned out, the answer to Stiles’s question was:

Both.

....



Special Agent Shannon Strickland had gone about his day like it was any other. He arrived to the home base on time, and slid a green tea latte across his partner's desk. Even though Strickland had been doing it for years, Jun still smiled, the only time anyone could see the younger man's dimples. They had a pile of paperwork to complete, as well as preparing for the next budgetary meeting—and that was when their secretary ran in, her eyes wide.

"Sirs," Diane's knuckles were white when she gripped the door. *"Sheriff Stilinski is calling in. He says,"* she swallowed, *"his son has returned, and he's brought Peter Hale, Deucalion Blackwood, and Satomi Ito with him."*

Jun had grabbed both of their go-bags before Strickland had stood up, and they both ran out of the door as Strickland barked, *"Diane, get us on a plane to Beacon Hills!"*

The plane ride felt like an eternity, even though it was just under six hours. They were provided a black government-owned SUV, and they were on the highway minutes after they

landed. They drove until the city sprawl eased out into greenery, until the roads grew long and curvy, until they sped past a sign that read *Welcome to Beacon Hills*.

Beacon Hills.

The town that seemed eager to forget a sixteen year old boy. It left a bad taste in Strickland's mouth. He saw his partner's posture get more and more tense as they pulled into the hospital. One of the Sheriff's officers was waiting for them and they were escorted inside.

"We've kept them separated, right now we've been focusing on the damage," the officer quickly informed them in the elevator, "and figuring out the best way to recovery. They've been unconscious for the time being."

As the elevator hummed its way higher, Jun couldn't help but let his curiosity get away from him.

"The boy was really the one to get them out?" The officer nodded. "He's only sixteen."

"Twenty-three." The doors opened and Strickland stepped off with his partner. "He'd be twenty-three now." Strickland swallowed, the bright sunlight coming in from the windows making him uneasy. Kamata wrung his hands once, the most nervous he ever allowed himself to look. Officers were stationed outside of each room. *They look spooked*, The thought sank and curdled in his stomach. He spoke quickly to his partner. "We need to talk to Stiles first and hopefully have them unite as a group for a statement and briefing on the timeline of events."

Their shoes were clipped and crisp against the hospital tiles. Usually, when Strickland laid out a plan, Kamata would spring to organize it, he'd take over a large room, get water or tea, and have different audio recorders set up. Some visible, some not. The moment they passed the first room, however, Kamata's movement was halted by a group of men who burst out of the room.

"Excuse me," and just with two words Strickland heard his practiced region-neutral accent. With a glance at his suit, well-styled hair, manicured nails, and dark circles under his eyes—Strickland knew he was talking to a lawyer. "Who are you?"

He walked out of the room with three other men and another woman. All attorneys. Strickland didn't have long before the door closed, but he saw a man sitting up in his bed with heavily scarred eyes, his hands folded neatly on his lap. *Deucalion Blackwood*, he thought as Kamata and he pulled out their badges in sync.

"I'm Special Agent Strickland and this is my partner Special Agent Kamata." When he tried to keep moving, the head attorney threw his arm out. Strickland was tempted to break it off, the long flight demolishing his patience. "We are here to collect the statements of the victims."

"And we are here to ensure that their rights are respected." The man took his arm away and they walked together, exchanging harsh glares. "The Blackwood Estate is invested in protecting their own, and our services have been," he paused, his eyes slipping to his peers

for just a brief flicker before he returned his gaze to Strickland, “expanded to include Satomi Ito, Peter Hale,” the man’s jaw tightened, “and Stiles Stilinski.”

Strickland and Kamata stopped outside of Stiles Stilinski's hospital door, the guarding officer wisely making himself scarce the moment he saw the dark cloud that passed over Strickland’s face. He turned, ignoring the perverse thrill at watching the attorneys freeze.

“I don’t know how you were able to get here so fast, and I don’t how the Blackwood Estate was informed enough to send you here.” He leaned in closer into a cloud of expensive cologne. “But I *will*.”

Strickland knocked twice, but didn’t wait for an answer. He pushed the door open, letting Kamata in first, but stepping in front of team of attorneys who were insistent on following.

Seeing Sheriff Stilinski again was as unpleasant as Strickland had anticipated. He’d aged harshly, his hair mostly grey with shocks of white sprinkled in, his eyes worn and weary, weathered into dull splashes of green. It was tempting to sneer at him, to raise an eyebrow to convey just how *little* Strickland thought of him... but he didn’t have time.

His attention was better served on the more impressive man in the room.

Stiles Stilinski.

He sat up in his bed, and while his hand had been in his father’s, he gently pulled it away so he could fold his fingers in his lap.

He was skinny, gaunt even, but his muscles were lean, like tight remnants of sinew clinging to a starving animal. His skin had silver-pink patches of psoriasis spotting it, his fingernails were thin, but when his eyes lifted to Strickland, they were clear. Unwavering. A facade of calm that thinly covered years of terror.

“Stiles,” and the name was oddly heavy on Strickland’s tongue. It tasted like ocean air at dusk. “It’s good to finally meet you.” He held out his hand and Stiles took it. He had rough calluses on his palm and fingers, rougher than Strickland’s. The handshake was short, and he immediately reached for Kamata who was happy to greet him as well. “I’m Special Agent Strickland, this is Special Agent Kamata.” He paused, relieved for the first time in over thirty years. “But you can call me Shannon if you like.”

A throat cleared behind him.

“We are attorneys provided by the Blackwood estate for you, Mrs. Ito, Mr. Hale, and Mr. Blackwood.”

The Sheriff was stunned, his mouth slack and his eyes blinking slowly. But Strickland didn’t care about the Sheriff.

Stiles’s eyes flickered over to the attorneys and his lips twitched into a barely-there smile.

“Okay.” His voice was deeper than it had been in the recording, weathered, quiet, and piercing. “That makes sense.”

Does it, Strickland was tempted to ask, but he restrained himself. Instead, he gently let his fingers brush against the railing on the side of Stiles's bed.

"We'd like to collect statements from the four of you, together, as soon as possible. We just," and after thirty-four years of steadily working, hoping, remembering— his voice cracked. "We'd just like to understand how and why this happened."

Stiles brightened and Strickland noticed it was right when he said *together*. His hands went to the bars, his fingers white from how tightly he gripped them.

"Can we do it now? I'm ready."

His jaw was tight as he struggled to sit up, his body quaking and his father's hands jerked, moving to steady him but immediately retracting. Not touching him. Stiles's teeth peeked out from behind his lips, like a hint of a knife in the dark, a shark under rough waves. His right hand shot out to grab the IV stand, the wheels squeaking as he dragged it closer, pulling himself upright.

The back of his hospital gown was open. Sweat glistened on his back, on each unnervingly knobby vertebrae. The patches of silver-pink dry skin continued down his back. The white cracks at the corner of his mouth that split into his lips were red, raw, and when Stiles took a breath, Strickland saw the inside of his mouth was red.

"Stiles," the Sheriff was helpless to act, forced to remain at a distance for reasons Strickland didn't fully understand yet, "Stiles, are you sure? You don't have to—"

"I'm sure." Stiles bent his knees and hissed. "I'm *ready*."

One of the attorneys cleared their throat.

"Deucalion has been set up in the largest room available." Strickland turned to glare at them, but not before he caught the huffed chuckle from Stiles followed by a whispered *of course he has*. "It would be a suitable location."

Kamata turned to them.

"I'll start prepping the room."

Strickland nodded and turned back to Stiles.

"I'll get the others ready. When I come back, it will be to bring you just down the hall, okay?"

Stiles nodded, rigid and tense.

"Okay." His arms relaxed but he kept his grip on the IV stand. The color slowly dripped back into his face, already his cheeks were less sallow. "Thank you, Shannon."

Just by saying his name, Stiles had reached inside of him, an invasive, kind, impossible touch that Strickland almost recoiled from. The young man hadn't moved, but Shannon swore he'd

felt a hand close over his heart. He nodded, and went to work.

....



“The good news is that... it was fairly easy to get a handle on the best path of recovery for Stiles.”

Really, that just meant that Noah had to ready himself for a lot of *bad* news. Seven years in captivity with no overt signs of ever being taken outside left him severely deficient in vitamin D, as well as other key nutrients that left his skin dry in patches, his nails brittle, and his lips cracked.

For the foreseeable future, whenever Stiles went outside, he would need strong sunscreen and dark sunglasses.

Since it wasn't clear how Stiles was fed, they were going to have to rely on a liquid diet until his tooth enamel was strong enough to handle soft foods. He might not be able to eat a regular meal for a year. Maybe longer. When he bathed, he would need sensitive soaps without any artificial aromas. His skin was dry, but also his environment had been humid, musty, with bacteria eager to chew away at the raw bits of skin they could find. Every morning and evening he would need to shower and apply antibacterial and antifungal cream.

Oddly, Stiles's teeth were in better shape than the nurses had initially feared. While the enamel needed to recover, it was clear that heavy care was taken when it came to Stiles's mouth, often enough to keep his teeth from rotting out of his skull. Still, he would need to use sensitive toothpaste and a soft-bristled toothbrush until the dentist suggested otherwise.

The nurses warned him that Stiles would be sick for several weeks while his digestive system adjusted to a different diet. His skin would have to readjust to the softness of a mattress. He might not be comfortable in most furniture since all that was in his living space for the past seven years was a sink, a toilet, and a cot.

And that was just the physical. That was just Stiles's *body*.

Mentally... was another story entirely.

Post-Traumatic Stress was guaranteed. But the problem was, Noah would have no idea how to handle it until Stiles started to show signs. Maybe he'd need wide open spaces, maybe he'd need familiar rooms, or maybe the concepts of walls were so abhorrent that he wouldn't want to be inside ever again. There was no way to know.

Separation was also an issue.

Hot shame crawled up his neck when the nurse asked what their routine had been before he'd been taken. He had to watch her eyebrows lower further and further until the wrinkles on her forehead were deep. He wasn't around, but he had a full time job to worry about. He was a single father. Sheriff had to be elected so keeping up a rapport with the people was important.

He didn't mind being alone.

The words were bile, slimey, sticky, and slick on his tongue. The nurse frowned, and the blanket of delusion that the entire town had wrapped itself in, the blanket that convinced everyone that Stiles had been a beloved member of the community that everyone *missed*—was ripped from him.

Noah was exposed.

"That might change now, Mr. Stilinski."

Her tongue and teeth clipped around his name like she wanted it out of her mouth.

For seven years, Stiles was never alone. For seven years, he had constant company with these strangers, but surely now they were close. Stiles had been sluggish outside of Kate's house.

His responses to the medic's questions, to Noah, were always a half-step behind, like he was trying to communicate to them underwater.

But when it was time to move, when it was time to separate them...

Stiles came to life with a roar, with fire in his eyes and loud commands screamed across Kate's yard, reaching for his fellow prisoners—

Separation was... not advisable. But recovery would need them to be... independent of each other in the long run. The nurse made it seem like a gradual process, as though it would be like easing Stiles into a warm bath.

She hadn't seen him fighting the medics with everything he had, how he hit his calloused palms against their jaws, how his whole body flung itself forward to get to them, to get them *to him*, and how the other three had responded in kind. Throwing themselves headfirst against any and all obstacles.

One by one, Noah helped tie up the back of Stiles's hospital gown. His son was silent, standing with his bare feet on the cold tile. Splotches of angry red patches were on his toes and ankles. He remained perfectly still and at first Noah thought he heard a distant radio, but then he realized Stiles was whispering with each inhale and exhale.

One, two, three four. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

He counted his breaths, keeping them perfectly even. Noah finished up the last tie, ignoring how his knees ached when he straightened.

Draped in the white hospital gown, Stiles looked like a ghost. His pale skin only grew paler, his bitten-red lips like a bloodstained streak on his face. His shoulders were boney, their sharpness obvious under the thin sheet. His son didn't look back at him, he remained facing forward. Counting his breaths. Waiting.

Noah wanted to take Stiles away, to grab the IV and just *go*, back to his house, slam the door shut, dig out Stiles's old DVDs from the closet and just have him be okay. A fool's dream, he realized the moment he first heard Stiles scream, his voice deeper, his eyes harder, and blood caked on his skin.

Outside, someone walked toward them. Noah knew it was Strickland, he recognized the cadence. Stiles straightened, and Noah glanced down to see a large scar on his son's inner right wrist. Two ragged semi-circles, the lines not smooth at all, and the door opened right as Noah realized they were *teeth indentations*.

A bite mark.

"Stiles." Strickland filled the doorway. He'd aged well. He wore wrinkles like battle scars. Age had not weakened him. "Everything is ready."

His son was taller, broader, stronger. Unimaginably stronger. Noah still had the picture of the boy he remembered fresh in his mind. Stiles who complained about lacrosse. Stiles who rode

his bicycle to Scott's house every weekend. Stiles who laughed loudly at jokes in movies he'd seen a thousand times.

This new Stiles was a man. He stood tall, even when he had to grip his IV stand. His feet were bare. His hair was shorn. The wheels on the IV stand squeaked as he slowly made his way to the hall. Strickland was about to close the door when Stiles stopped, and finally looked back at Noah.

His eyes were deep and dark.

"Can my dad come?"

Noah could tell Strickland wanted to say no. To slam the door in Noah's face. Stiles looked back to the Special Agent.

"Of course." He held the door open. "Right this way, Sheriff."

The hallway was empty except for one officer by the stairwell. Stiles's first step was unsure, and the rest were faster and faster, almost beating Strickland to the door, the wheels on the IV stand struggling to keep up. Strickland opened the door.

The attorneys, Special Agent Kamata, Peter Hale, Satomi Ito, and Deucalion Blackwood were inside. Noah watched as his son went still in the doorway, his shoulders tense. Noah couldn't see his face, couldn't see what kind of expression painted it as he gazed at the room. He took a step forward, and then ran, almost knocking over his IV stand to get to them.

He threw his left arm out and the three of them were there to meet him. Satomi hugged him, full-body, and Noah tensed waiting for the nausea, for Stiles to violently wrench away—

It never happened.

Stiles sighed like he was in a dream, his thin arms pulling Satomi close, his cheek pressed against hers. He was whispering, talking too fast for Noah to hear. She kissed his cheek, and he returned the gesture.

"About time, Songbird," Noah picked up from Deucalion before he drew Stiles in for an embrace, his cheek pressed against Stiles, his nose dragging along his neck, just a hair too long, too close, making Noah's face hot. Deucalion kissed Stiles's cheek. Stiles returned it.

Peter Hale was the last one. Stiles's left arm was tight around Peter's neck, his face pressed into Peter's shoulder, into his neck. If they spoke, Noah couldn't hear them. Peter's right arm fell to Stiles's waist, holding him close. His eyes were closed, like touching Stiles made him reach a meditative state. This embrace... Noah felt as though he'd walked in on something private.

They were in a room full of people, but the way they touched, the way Peter's left hand gently touched Stiles's right wrist... it felt like they were alone.

Peter kissed Stiles's cheek, his smile wide, making the wrinkles at the corner of his eyes deepen. Stiles returned it, and when he took a step back, his face had the most color in it

Noah had seen since he returned.

“I was so worried,” Stiles sounded younger, his voice losing its brittle edge as he touched them. Smaller touches, on the arm, squeezing their hands, brushing their shoulders. “I thought,” the door closed behind Noah and he could see Stiles’s face, how his lower lip wobbled as tears fell down his cheeks. “I thought you’d be mad at me.” Stiles didn’t cover his eyes the way he used to when he’d cry. He kept his face open to them so they could see his elation. His worry. His misery. “I had to get us out. I had to.”

The attorneys shifted uncomfortably in the corner of the room. Kamata offered Stiles a box of tissues. He had several on his desk. Chairs were set up, and the four of them sat down. Strickland took his place in front of them, pulling up his own chair so he was at their eye-level. Noah made his way to the back by the attorneys.

“Let’s start from the beginning.” Strickland switched to Japanese as he smiled at Satomi. “*Satomi, I believe that would mean you.*”

....



By the time they were finished with everyone's statements, it was dark.

Jun Kamata sat in hospital's courtyard. The walls of the room crept closer and closer the longer the victims went on. Satomi restricted to a world where she had no one to speak to and her captors only spoke English. Thirteen years later, someone joined her in an adjoining room, a glass barrier between them.

Deucalion. Blinded, and he only knew English. He had to feel out his room, and over the course of six years, he learned Japanese and Satomi learned English.

Then Peter Hale arrived. From the sound of it, they had accepted their fate. To die in the glass prisons, under the will of a captor who never informed them of why they were chosen. They barely moved. They ate when the hunger pangs grew too painful. They rarely spoke.

Then Stiles arrived.

Heavy footsteps made Jun straighten on the bench, adjusting his tie as Shannon opened the side door. He lugged a box with him, of photos, evidence, anything found at the crime scene that the Beacon Hills Police were more than happy to make copies of. Jun couldn't bring himself to smile at his partner. Shannon sat next to him with a long sigh.

"What a fuckin' day." Shannon always had a way with words, a vulgar sincerity that Jun envied. Shannon rested his elbows on his knees, his back hunched over. "I wish I smoked. I need a cigarette."

Jun's lips twitched and he slung his arm over Shannon's quivering shoulders.

"I like that you don't smoke. It's healthier." Jun watched the tips of Shannon's ears flush pink. A moment of levity was a relief from what weighed them both down. Shannon leaned against him, his breaths evening out. They sat there, basking in shared silence as the sky darkened, stars twinkling above them. "It's strange to be back."

Beacon Hills. A name that darkened their office whenever it came up in paperwork. The first break in a case in twenty-seven years and the entire town proved to be unhelpful. Nothing made sense. Three adults taken from three different locations in the US, with seemingly unrelated backgrounds, and their break was in some random town in a state that was, until that point, unrelated to any of the missing persons.

The boy that was taken, who had been smart enough to call his dad and get a shot off at one of his captors, seemed to be a ghost.

The entire town seemed to not know his name and were uncomfortable answering basic questions. Even his best friend, when he saw his peers lacking any information... said the same thing as everyone else.

I didn't really know him.

When it was Stiles's turn to speak, he did so carefully, but his words were revealing. He formed a routine, he forced his fellow prisoners to speak, to engage with him. He retold stories from the movies, shows, and books he'd consumed, sometimes stretching them out for days as ways to pass the time... to not go mad. He fiddled with his hands, and it when it finally came to the end of their time in captivity, Peter reached down to hold it.

Forcing himself to hyperventilate, feigning unconsciousness, all to hide a library card in his mouth to use later.

The rest... Stiles did not deny. It would be hard for him to try, no matter what the Blackwood legal team thought.

Kate Argent's body had been found in her bedroom on her bloodsoaked mattress. She'd been stabbed thirty-seven times. Each puncture wound showed clear signs of distress. Stiles's hands must have been shaking with physical and mental effort.

The body in the basement was Gerard Argent, which they were able to piece together from his fingerprints. But the body had been in a strange state of decomposition despite the

evidence that he himself had been moving. *What a fucking nightmare*, Shannon had whispered when he first took a look at the pictures.

“Diane is calling the families.” Shannon straightened, dragging his hands down his weathered face. “They should be here first thing in the morning.”

Jun stood, brushing his shirt off.

“Let’s get to the hotel. We need rest.”

With a final curse, Shannon straightened, box under his arm and the other digging his keys out of his pocket.

Tomorrow was another day, and they’d need their strength.

Chapter End Notes

Art by [trashy!](#) Come talk to me on [tumblr!](#)

Thanks so much for your patience, guys. Life has been really stressful, my work is beating me down and my apartment has been going through work that has been showing the landlord's true colors... so life has been hard. Thanks for understanding.

Anyway, I hope you guys like the update. Please let me know how you feel. Thank you!

Chapter 12: Family and Friends

Chapter Summary

“This could be the last time the four of us have privacy for a... very long time.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Their voices were raw and hoarse by the time their group statement had been collected.

Stiles clasped Peter's hand tight, so tight that his knuckles were white and his the muscles in his wrist jumped periodically. Peter kept his grip gentle but firm, holding Stiles until he relaxed, until his shoulders lowered inch by inch and his breathing went from stuttered bursts to a mellower push and pull.

When Peter had first regained consciousness in the hospital, his body was paralyzed with panic, an endless tsunami of questions choking the breath out of his lungs.

Did we really make it out? How did I get here? Where are the others?

Where is Stiles?

Has my family been called? Can I leave? How will I get back home?

Where is Stiles?

Have the police started questioning the rest of them? Did Stiles's father begin a proper investigation? Who would call Talia?

Where is Stiles?

The IV in his arm kept him immobile, and the machines by his bed were deafening. By the time Special Agent Strickland and Special Agent Kamata had come to collect him for their group statement, Peter had nearly wept with relief. He was sure he looked ragged, his beard and hair wild, his skin scrubbed clean enough to make it itch, and he held it together long enough to see the Alphas, long enough to meet their eyes, to gently touch their hands.

Satomi's skin was cool water, while Deucalion's was crushed velvet. Together, they waited.

When Stiles arrived Peter finally felt whole, just by looking at him. Embracing him was a balm. A cool touch that washed away the tremors that had gripped his fingers. He drew Stiles in close, his fingers brushing over the scar tissue on his wrist, his nose nuzzling the prickly hairs on his recently shaved head. When Peter pressed his lips to Stiles's cheek, over the same spot that Deucalion and Satomi had kissed, he heard Stiles's heartbeat kick up a half-step, a warmth filling Peter like drinking hot chocolate after centuries of winter.

He clung onto that feeling when Stiles's voice trembled around the details of Kate's activity. About being naked, vulnerable, and alone while she cleaned him. Peter squeezed Stiles's hand, recalling the taste of his sweat on his lips when he confessed to the two murders.

"There was no other way." Stiles's shoulders were high, his back slouched and the circles under his eyes had never been darker. *"I had to get us out."*

The army of attorneys behind them whispered while the two Special Agents had been gradually growing paler around the collar. Strickland cleared his throat and Kamata switched off his recording device.

"Thank you." Strickland was a short mountain of a man, his eyes sharp and resolute. "We'll have your families here by the morning. Psychological treatment will be provided, since I can say it's to better understand the situation. I can iron out the details with you later."

He stood and the attorneys stood with them, the Sheriff too.

Stiles remained seated, his shoulders still tense.

“Can we,” his voice warbled. He licked his lips, running his tongue across the split, bleeding cracks. “Can I have a few minutes alone with Peter, Satomi, and Deucalion?”

Peter did his best to keep himself still, to not let any expression bloom across his face. Though, judging by the long stare from Kamata and the Sheriff, Peter was out of practice.

The Sheriff frowned, his eyes darting over Peter, Satomi, and Deucalion quickly before settling on his son. The attorneys were deep in conversation, walking out of the room, while the FBI agents lingered. The Sheriff, who Peter had seen countless times on their “walks” with Stiles, seemed so different in person.

His wrinkles were deep. Stress soured his scent.

“Stiles,” his voice was eroded, dry and brittle, “don’t you think rest is most important?”

Peter heard the plastic creak under Deucalion’s hands and Satomi’s carefully measured breaths. Stiles’s right hand trembled in Peter’s grip.

“Just ten minutes. Please.”

The Sheriff shifted his weight, the acidic *stress* in his scent rising. Peter squeezed Stiles’s hand, and he saw the older man notice the movement. It made his heartbeat increase, the muscles in his jaw tighten. If Peter let go of Stiles’s hand it would look even worse. Deucalion’s teeth ground together and Peter knew that the other Alpha was a breath away from shoving the Sheriff and Agents out of the room and slamming the door shut behind them.

“Five.”

Stiles sighed, his head dipped down low before he lifted his gaze.

“Okay. Five.”

The Sheriff’s eyes were glassy, his entire body tense.

“I’ll be right outside. If you need me, just say the word, okay?”

Stiles nodded, and the Sheriff followed Strickland and Kamata out of the door. The moment the door shut with a soft, metallic *click*, Stiles was on his feet, his grip tight in Peter’s hand and he reached for Satomi and Deucalion. The three of them surrounded Stiles, their breath on his skin, their scents mixing with his.

Being outside, being *free*, was good. Peter knew this. He knew it like he knew the sky was blue, like he knew his own birthday. It was a fact. Being in captivity for so long, freedom was less of a fact and more of a dream. And now that dream, which Peter hadn’t *allowed* himself to acknowledge, was real.

Trembling in his arms.

Stiles pulled back, his eyes bright, his breathing quick.

“This could be the last time the four of us have privacy for a... very long time.”

Stiles had his hand in Peter’s, the other resting over Deucalion’s heart. Satomi’s arms were loosely slung around Peter and Deucalion’s hips, holding them steady.

Five minutes.

Deucalion traced over Stiles’s face with his fingers, feeling every raise of bone, every break in the skin, every razor-thin cut on his lips. He ran his fingers through Stiles’s hair, a caress that was gentler than Deucalion had ever allowed himself to be. Satomi kissed his knuckles, the bridge of his eyebrow, and his left shoulder.

Peter never knew he could cherish another person in a romantic sense until that moment, until he smoothed over Stiles’s pale cheeks, until his fingers pressed against his bite mark, making the connection between them flare, bright like a flower on the first day of spring. Stiles felt it too, Peter saw it in the fleeting rush of pink in his cheeks.

They only had *five minutes*.

Peter did his best to ignore the looming *this could be the last time*.

“Do you still want that kiss?”

The clock on the wall didn’t stop, the second-hand circling around and around.

“I told you,” Stiles’s smile tremored. “I’ll be really bad at it.”

And I told you, Peter knew he was heard by the rest of the Pack, *There’s no one else I’d rather be with*.

With Satomi’s hand on Stiles’s shoulder and Deucalion’s arm around Peter’s waist, he leaned forward, drawing Stiles close. He watched Stiles’s eyes slip shut just before their lips connected.

Stiles’s first kiss shouldn’t have been after seven years of captivity, trauma, and two murders. His first kiss shouldn’t have been in a hospital with his father and two FBI agents waiting outside. It was hard to imagine Stiles the way Stiles *should* be, young and carefree. His first kiss should have been at a highschool party, under the bleachers, or backstage before a play.

His first kiss should have been fumbling and fun.

The reality was that Stiles’s first kiss left behind tastes of blood. Peter pulled back, a slight amount of space to breathe, before Stiles reeled him back in, his fingers digging into his shoulders. Peter ran his tongue over Stiles’s too-dry, too-cracked lips.

Stiles is expectedly clumsy. Peter soothed his tongue alongside Stiles's, tasting his affection, his worry, his determination. Stiles made a soft noise, a whimper that sent a flood of warmth through Peter's bones.

Three sharp knocks at the door interrupted them.

"That's five minutes," Stiles gently extracted himself from Peter's grip seconds before the door swung open. The Sheriff's eyes swept over the Alphas before resting on his son. "You need to rest."

Stiles was the first to leave, followed by Peter and Satomi. The officers ushered them to their rooms. A few nurses waited for Peter, to hook him back into an IV, to adjust the pillows on his bed. They were careful to avoid any deep conversation other than pleasantries. *How does that feel, Mr. Hale? Are the sheets comfortable, Mr. Hale? Don't forget to drink some water before bed, Mr. Hale.*

By the time the lights were dimmed and his room was empty, Peter could barely keep his eyes open. He sank back against the pillows, his eyes slipping shut with seductive ease.

He felt them.

His Pack.

Their presence was not as strong as it had been in the glass rooms, but he still *felt them*. Deep in his chest, he knew they were with him. He leaned into the feeling of Stiles's fingers drifting across his palm.

It was the deepest sleep that Peter could ever remember enjoying.

The next time he woke, it was in gradual increments. Sunlight warmed the room. Fresh flowers almost covered up the tangy scent of rubbing alcohol. He could no longer feel Stiles's fingers.

"Mom, don't worry about the flowers. They're fine."

"The leaves are just," a sharp exhale of annoyance made Peter crack his eyes open. "I'm going to a different florist."

She was... radiant, her amber hair glowing in the morning light. He could hardly see anything else as she fiddled with the vase by Peter's bed. He heard other heartbeats, but it was a young woman who spoke next.

"No offense, mom, but I think those flowers are the best you're gonna get, at least in this town."

"God, there's no *service*. We really are in the boons."

A different woman spoke, and Peter sat up, his eyes open. His sister reeled back and Peter's throat was tight, his eyes taking in his sister and the three strangers in the room. *Not*

strangers, he reminded himself. His nieces and nephew had grown, so much he almost didn't recognize him.

"U-Uncle Peter—" the youngest woman, *Cora*, stammered. "Are you okay?"

Despite the warm sun on his skin, filling the room with punishing light, he felt numb and cold.

"No." He answered immediately, in too much shock to do anything but comply. "But I hope I will be." Talia sucked in long breaths, Derek and Laura held themselves up against the wall, both of their faces grey. He struggled to smile. "Can't I get a hug?"

Talia moved forward but immediately stopped herself.

"The doctors said," she wrung her hands, her shoulders tight, "that due to your prolonged captivity, physical contact might not be the best idea."

Peter rolled his eyes.

"I don't care. Even if it hurts, even if I need you to stop, I want it." He opened his arms. "Get over here." He swallowed. "*Please.*"

This time, his family didn't hesitate.

....



When Satomi slept, she dreamt of Japan.

She walked along the hills of her home. The breeze was light, the trees provided enjoyable shade, and the plants flourished. If she closed her eyes, she could taste approaching rain.

It was a perfect replica of her home the way she remembered it. If she were to be there now, she was certain it would be different. She wondered if her house remained, if trees had been cut down, if plants had migrated. As she walked through rose-tinted memories, she felt whispers of her Pack, footsteps that followed her though she remained alone.

Stiles touched the center of her back.

“This could be the last time the four of us have privacy for a... very long time.”

Satomi leaned back into the phantom touch. She didn't turn around, because she knew that he would not be there. She remained facing forward, taking in the details of her home.

When they were back in their glass prisons and Satomi was restless, they'd dream together. Be soothed *together*.

They were no longer in captivity. As she gradually came to consciousness, Stiles's touch receded, like a tide pulling back from the sand. Rolling green hills and whispering rivers faded away. Satomi became aware of the feeling of a mattress beneath her, warm sun on the sheets, and someone breathing by her side. It had been decades... but she recognized the cadence of breath, the shift of weight, the sound of fabric clinging to a tall body.

Her eyes flew open and met Hiroaki's gaze.

Without a moment's hesitation they embraced, both of them moving at the same time. They fell into each other and Satomi pulled him close, not caring that he was half sprawled across the bed, one of his hands resting on her pillow while the other wrapped around her waist.

He kissed her same, a little shy, a lot delighted, and Satomi thought her heart was going to break, she had *missed him so much*. The time she'd been away, she'd learned to section off her memories, to keep her husband present but not *touching* her... or else she'd go mad. His hands were gentle, keeping her close, breathing her in, and when she pulled back for air, he followed, stealing small bites of affection.

She pulled back enough to really look at his face, at how he'd aged, how his wrinkles cracked across his face like fissures in marble. His eyes were so warm, and she cupped his face, her thumbs running over his cheeks. She never wanted to forget how he felt, how he felt *with her*.

"*I missed you*," Satomi spoke in her native language, her eyes bright as she brought Hiroaki in for another kiss. "*My love, I missed you*."

He shuddered in her arms. His breath was hot and wet against her shoulder, tears slipping down his nose and dampening her gown.

"*I felt you*," her darling's voice broke, his cheek warm against hers, "*I knew you were alive. I knew*."

Satomi gently drew back, only to realize it wasn't just her husband in the room.

Two women stood, hovering between the door and the bed, as though they weren't sure whether to approach or flee. They both looked at her with a mixture of disbelief, confusion, and hesitant hope. The older of the two cleared her throat, her eyes bright.

"M-mom?"

Satomi's hands ached as she held her arms open.

"Yomiko," her breath hitched in her lungs, "Azumi, come here."

They hurried to their Alpha, to relearn how to hug a mother they barely knew.

....



Deucalion woke to the fleeting sensation of Stiles's fingers dragging across his forehead.

His team of attorneys and two newcomers were present in his room.

"Good morning, Mr. Blackwood." Harold, the head attorney, stood at the foot of the bed. "A representative of the estate has joined us."

Deucalion nodded, looking in the general direction of the expensive cologne. The representative cleared their throat.

"It's good to meet you, Deucalion. I'm Arthur Cornell. You might remember my father, Theodore."

"We called him Teddy," Deucalion rasped.

Teddy had been old when Deucalion knew him, his impressive moustache white and perfectly groomed. The Cornell Pack had been a part of the Blackwood legacy for centuries. His old life returned to him, memories that he'd tossed aside were suddenly back, in bright colors even though he could no longer see.

"I understand that you insisted that your attorneys also serve Mrs. Ito, Mr. Hale, and Mr. Stilinski, is that correct?"

The attorneys kept quiet as Deucalion growled.

"I did."

Papers rustled. Deucalion heard Arthur lick his thumb to turn a page.

"It says here that two murders were committed. And, if I'm not mistaken, Stiles Stilinski confessed to those murders."

"Arthur," Harold interjected, "the evidence was clear as to who committed the acts whether or not Stiles admitted it or not. Self-defense should be easily established."

"The woman was stabbed thirty-seven times." The paper crinkled slightly. "That seems excessive for self-defense."

Deucalion snarled, his vision bleeding red as he lurched forward in his bed.

"That *woman* kept us in prison for decades. I don't *care* how she died. Anything would have been too merciful." Every breath brought on the stench of adrenalin. He ran his tongue over his fangs. "The estate paid for the best legal representation, this should be a walk in the park for them." He turned towards Harold's shuddering breaths. "You've already been compensated for the added clients. What progress have you made?"

Harold swallowed, his throat clicking.

"Self-defense is our main push, and we can establish that the four of you were living in fear on the day-to-day, so a premeditated act was necessary in order to guarantee your safety." Harold cleared his throat. "The next of kin in the Argent family could, of course, press charges, but I think that the pressure from the town and the backlash that could cause will... dissuade them. Either way, there will still be a trial."

Deucalion struggled to keep his breathing as the red faded from his eyes.

"I don't care how you do it, but Stiles will *not* go to prison. Understood?" A chorus of yes, *Mr. Blackwood* was his answer. The attorneys left and then it was just Arthur and whoever was with the representative. Arthur cleared his throat and stood. The other occupant stood with them, their strides were shorter. They were younger. "How did they get here so quickly?"

"The estate had bribed members of the force in the town you were initially taken from, and then Beacon Hills when the investigation got a new lead thanks for Mr. Stilinski's call to his

father. The moment the Sheriff called in the order to retrieve his son, we were notified and we started making arrangements for your legal and financial protection.”

Deucalion hummed and he gestured vaguely where the other person breathed.

“Who are you?”

“Um,” the voice was distinctly young, and shy. “I’m Isaac Lahey.”

Deucalion’s eyebrows jumped up at the young man’s distinct American accent.

“I don’t recognize your last name.”

Arthur gently touched the sheets by Deucalion’s thigh.

“Isaac was one of the many Blackwood wards that have come through a charity program for troubled youths. It was set up in your name.”

The clock ticked loudly on the wall. Outside, doctors and nurses bustled from room to room. Families and Packs were reunited. Deucalion drew in a long breath, fighting the urge to clench his fists.

“What’s the next step?”

“Discussions of financial and living options should happen in a more secure space,” Arthur’s voice lifted, and Deucalion didn’t need eyes to know that the representative was wrinkling his nose at the sight of the hospital. “Preferably one that’s more inhabitable.”

Deucalion rolled his eyes.

“Then your next assignment is to get me the fuck out of this hospital.”

∴∴∴



Stiles watched the moonlight crawl across the hospital tiles before bleeding into grey morning light.

His father went to sleep within in the first hour, his head resting on the night table. His hair was more grey than the soft, dirty-blond that Stiles remembered. His hands had more wrinkles, deeper callouses.

His breath had the same smell, of mouthwash struggling to cover bourbon.

What other things had changed? Did he still have his room? Would his house seem smaller? When he went back to his house... would he recognize it? Would he ever be able to truly return home?

Stiles reached out for stability. Peter's hand. Satomi's back. Deucalion's face. Touching them quieted the questions that Stiles had no way of answering. As his Alphas slept, he stayed with

them. Soft touches, brief moments of *I'm here, I'm with you*. He lulled them into a peaceful sleep, though he never let himself slip into their dreams.

If his father woke up, Stiles could come up with a million excuses. The patches of psoriasis on his skin itched. Sleeping on a mattress was *too* comfortable and felt alien. The sounds of the hospital, even at night, were too loud. Not being able to hear his Alphas breathing next to him was unnerving. The sensation of Kate's blood, hot and slick against his fingers, still remained.

All of those were half-truths.

If I fall asleep... there's a chance I haven't made it out. That I'll wake up behind glass.

He remained awake until the night turned to morning.

An older woman stepped in, a nurse, and it took Stiles an embarrassingly long series of moments before a name fell from his name in a bewildered wheeze.

"Mel?"

His voice cracked all over the place, too dry and brittle. His dad jerked up from the night table, fast enough to make his neck throb. In the other rooms, Stiles still lingered. He knew how Hiroaki lips felt like against his cheek, he knew how tight Cora Hale could hug, and he even knew that the Blackwood representative had heavy, obnoxious cologne. His lungs burned and he let his grip on the Alphas loosen.

White-hot physical contact on his arms made Stiles jerk, a guttural groan leaving his mouth. Melissa pulled her fingers off of his arm.

"I'm sorry, Stiles," and she *sounded* exactly as Stiles remembered. Warm and familiar, like the smell of reheated coffee in the morning. "Did I hurt you?"

The instinctual response was for Stiles to insist that *no*, of *course* Mel hadn't hurt him. Her fingers had been a feather-light pressure, the same way she used to touch him when she'd wake him up if he'd fallen asleep at Scott's on a school night. Back then, Stiles remembered how he used to wake up, groggily thinking, *Mom*, before he was fully awake. He remembered how that gentle touch would have him feeling lighter..

Now it burned.

"No, I mean— yes, but you didn't mean to. It's just," Stiles rubbed his fingers over the points on his arm where she touched him, just a few inches above where the stitches ended.

"Physical contact is... difficult."

Her lips pulled down into a worried frown, and Stiles felt his heart splinter.

"I should have thought, I'm sorry, Stiles—"

"No, it's— I want it." He shuddered, and he heard his dad choke down fresh sobs. "I do, I want it but..."

“It’s okay, Stiles.” She picked up a spare pillow from the chair and laid it over Stiles’s lap, over his upturned hand. “How about this?” She pressed her hand on the pillow, just as lightly as she had on his skin. And Stiles *felt it*, the pressure muffled but no less *real*. Instead of a sharp *flare* of *contact-contact-contact-contact-contact*, it was an itchy awareness. “How does this feel?”

His shoulders shuddered and he returned the pressure, pushing his hand up just hard enough so that Mel could feel it.

He hadn’t cried during his statement, he hadn’t cried when he woke up without his Alphas... but the feeling of Mel’s contact, muted and *almost* normal through the pillow... it was just like Mel to see a problem and not *fixate* on the issue, but instead offer a simple solution.

Stiles nodded, a few quick jerks of his head before tears tore down his cheeks. He yanked his hands out from under the pillow, covering his face even though there was no *hiding* from anyone anymore.

In the other rooms down the hall, his Alphas were slowly being made whole, and Stiles... Stiles wanted to be with them, but also didn’t want to weigh them down. He desperately wanted to gather them in his arms, to take them away, somewhere, *anywhere*, where he could be with them freely.

Free to talk, touch, and laugh without...

Without any of the mess that came with living.

He choked down bile and pressed his palms hard against his eyes until white spots appeared. *I’d be throwing them into another prison.*

“I want,” Stiles hiccuped, “I want to go home.” He took his eyes away, his vision struggling to focus. “Please.”

Time moved like molasses. Slow and syrupy. Mel had brought him clothes. Scott’s clothes. *He’s a bit broader than you are, but these should fit. I’m sure he won’t mind.* The first thing Stiles thought when he unfolded the sweatpants and t-shirt was that they were *so big*.

I’m big now too, he reminded himself as he stripped off his gown with one hand. He vaguely heard Mel quickly close the door and his dad say his name, but Stiles focused on pulling on underwear with ease. The sweats were freshly washed, they had an artificial *fresh* scent to them that stung his nose.

Sliding them on was surreal. They were *Scott’s*. Stiles hadn’t thought of Scott in years. Had Scott thought of him?

The shirt was worn, a hole under the left armpit and a frayed seam above Stiles’s hip. Mel was right, it was loose around his chest and shoulders. Scott’s shoes were big. They felt strange on his feet, and he struggled to not immediately kick them off, to rid himself of the foreign sensation of rubber and material covering his toes.

Doctors checked him over, handed him thick packets about the IVs he'd taking, about the vitamins he'd need, the creams, soaps, and nutrients that were necessary to his recovery. Special Agent Kamata promised that he would be in touch, that a psychologist would be provided to help Stiles, Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi process their trauma. Special Agent Kamata walked with him to the elevators, both of their eyes drifting to the three doors where the Alphas stayed.

Closed, but full of family, reunions, and a future. Stiles bit his lip, the pain of his teeth digging into soft tissue grounding him, helping him turn his head forward, towards the elevator.

Mel and his dad walked him out of the front doors and Stiles saw that the entrance way of the hospital had been covered in cards, flowers, stuffed toys, and wreaths.

“What is all this?”

Bright cardstock fluttered in the wind. The flowers were fresh. The cards barely had any writing on them, but the shallow well-wishes piled up, so high and thick that they almost blocked the walkway. His father made another aborted motion to touch him, like he wanted to steer Stiles forward. Mel hesitated, wringing her hands for a half-second before she exhaled.

“It's well-wishes. From your friends.”

Stiles blinked.

“What friends?”

His father's cruiser was new, the leather seats were shiney, the controls were digital, pretty blue LEDs bombarding Stiles with information about outer temperature, inner settings, and radio or satellite options. Stiles bucked himself in, clutching the packets of his recovery close, and his dad turned on the radio before he pulled out onto the road.

Every song that played was ones that Stiles had never heard.

....



Scott McCall woke to warm skin under his hands and dark hair tickling his nose. Birds chirped just outside of the window, and light kept trying to peek through his eyelids. He nuzzled closer to her, wanting to chase the floaty euphoria that sleep provided... but it was too late. He was already awake.

He kissed Allison's bare shoulder and twisted around on the small bed to fumble for his phone on the nightstand.

He sat up, sliding his fingers along the screen, but it remained black. Scott rubbed his eyes, tapping his thumb on the screen until he realized it must have died in the middle of the night.

"Shit."

He rolled out of Allison's childhood bed as gently as he could manage before he brought the covers back up to her neck. She murmured his name, and Scott kissed her cheek before he pulled on tank top.

The Argent house was a few hours north of Beacon Hills. It was three stories with navy-blue wood sides, red shutters, and a sleek black shingled roof. The house was at the bottom of a grassy hill, with stone fences that lined the driveway and weeping willows that whispered their long tendrils along the windows.

He hurried down the stairs, keeping light on his feet, only to sigh when he saw that Chris was already in the kitchen.

“Damn it.” Scott grinned, shaking his head at Chris’s raised eyebrow. He waved his dead phone at him before he plugged it into a charger on the wall. “I set an alarm and everything, but my phone died.”

Chris chuckled.

“Convenient excuse.” Chris Argent was older, with bits of silver mixing in with his dark hair, but his eyes remained warm. He was intimidating, as most father’s of girls that Scott dated tended to be, but Scott couldn’t imagine a better man to be his future father-in-law. That morning, Chris had already started coffee which meant Scott was in charge of breakfast. They had a game going, seeing who could wake up and make it to the kitchen first. It was fun, it made Scott eager to call them his family. “I even got the eggs and flour out for you.”

The morning was like any of the other mornings Scott had spent at the Argents house. Scott had lost count of how many times he’d visited, from the start of college to the present day. He moved through their kitchen with confidence, knowing where everything was stored, how Victoria liked her tea and how Allison took her coffee.

Even when his mom would come join him, she just fit with the Argents naturally.

Pancake batter sizzled in the pan when Allison and Victoria shuffled into the kitchen. Chris gave them tea and coffee. Scott served breakfast.

If anyone were to ask what they’d talked about that morning, what the benign yet pleasant conversation had consisted of, he wouldn’t be able to remember. He remembered how Allison’s engagement ring felt when she held his hand, he remembered the hum of approval from Chris when he bit into his first bite of pancakes.

Breakfast conversation was always fleeting, a catch-up of the week, of their lives.

It feels like being in an orange juice commercial, his mom had said after her first visit. Scott had laughed.

It wasn’t until later that he thought maybe she hadn’t meant it as a compliment.

Maple syrup slid over his tongue and teeth. Bits of chewed up dough and sliced banana weighed down his stomach. Allison’s hand was warm on his knee, her expressions becoming more animated the more coffee she drank. Chris refilled Victoria’s cup with a sharp lemon blend. Scott grabbed his phone and powered it on.

Three sharp knocks fell on the front door. Hard enough to wipe away the lazy rhythm of the morning.

Allison turned in her chair. She was closest to the hall, and she stood, a small wrinkle between her eyebrows.

“I got it.”

Sunlight warmed the kitchen in golden light. Outside the summer wind blew through the willows. Allison's bare feet were soft against the wood, and she disappeared from sight when she stepped into the foyer. Messages poured in on his phone, buzzing and buzzing until Scott had to fumble just to keep it quiet, quickly typing in his passcode. His fingers shook, and he entered the wrong sequence. The door handle turned, the *creak* of it swinging open made something cold gather at the back of Scott's neck.

His skin tightened over his muscles. A cloud passed over the sun and the shadow made Scott shiver. He finally got the code right and his screen unlocked.

He had four voicemails, three from his mom and one from Lydia Martin. *Lydia Martin*, Scott swallowed. He hadn't thought of her since high school, hadn't talked to her since the brief and curt “Good luck,” at graduation. He had sixty Facebook notifications, forty-seven text messages, twenty-four missed calls.

Lydia Martin's was a constant presence in all of them.

Muddled voices dragged Scott's attention from his phone to the foyer.

“—*not* saying you can come in, understand. Please hold on.” Allison backed up so she was in their line of sight. “Mom, D-Dad?”

Her voice cracked, her eyes wide. Chris and Victoria moved fast, their chairs squeaking against the tile. Scott felt sluggish, his phone still buzzing, numbing his palm. He stood slowly, his legs suddenly aching as he followed Chris and Victoria to the door.

An imposing older man stood in the doorway. Even though he was shorter than Scott, his shadow seemed colossal. He was dressed in a suit and tie, his expression grim as he held out an FBI ID.

“Christopher Argent,” The agent didn't phrase it as a question, his eyes finding Chris with ease and confidence. “I'm Special Agent Strickland,” he flipped his wallet shut and slid it in his inner suit jacket pocket. When his jacket pulled back, Scott saw the *gun* in his holster. *Is this really happening*, Scott thought, his phone still buzzing in his hand. He caught Allison's eyes, his hand finding hers. “I am here to discuss your sister Katherine Argent. May I please come in?”

The smell of coffee and pancakes still lingered as Chris nodded, stepping to the side to allow Strickland in. The agent's shoes made the wood creak beneath him. His eyes swept over the kitchen table, at how the sunlight was tinted lavender from the thin curtains.

“If you’d like, we can discuss this privately.” Strickland didn’t shift his weight or cross his arms. He remained perfectly still. “It’s sensitive.”

“Everyone here is a part of my family,” and Scott felt a jolt of warmth pool in his stomach. “Come on, we still have some hot coffee left.”

Chris led them back into the kitchen where it suddenly wasn’t as warm. Scott didn’t sit, instead leaned against the counter. Allison sat down, her eyes never leaving Strickland. Victoria reached for the coffee pot but Strickland held up his hand.

“No thank you. I’ll be brief, Mr. Argent. Your sister Katherine is dead. Your father Gerard, who I understand has been deceased for several decades, was found recently killed on the scene. Katherine appears to be responsible for the kidnapping and captivity of Satomi Ito, Deucalion Blackwood, Peter Hale, and Stiles Stilinski, the longest stretch of captivity equalling thirty-four years—”

Scott squeezed his eyes shut, the name hitting him square in the forehead like a fist.

Stiles Stilinski.

His phone buzzed. Lydia was calling him. He had five new texts from her. His mother had left another message. Fifty new notifications came in from Facebook.

“Stiles,” the name spilled over his tongue like pus from a wound, a sour *pop* from years of neglect. He opened his eyes, his vision blurred and the colors muted as the agent slowed his speech, turning toward him with a slightly raised brow. “Stiles is... Stiles is alive?”

He felt the Argents turn to look at him, at the way the blood fell from his face, leaving him grey and swaying. His tongue tasted like ash. His phone kept chiming and buzzing until he had another low battery warning.

“Scott?” Allison was out of her chair, she was looking at him but Scott couldn’t meet her eyes, he couldn’t mean *anyone’s* eyes. “Scott—”

He didn’t bring Allison to Beacon Hills that often. He never went to high school reunions. He rarely visited home except for the holidays, and he never called to meet up with anyone in his class when he *was* home. It was easy to never mention it, to just shrug off the *oh, staying here for the break again, Scott?* It was easy to talk about high school in sweeping generalizations. It was easy to *never think about it*.

His sweat felt like thick paint clinging to his skin, dragging itself down, down, *down* as he dropped his phone. The back cracked open, the battery slid somewhere under the oven. The screen had definitely cracked.

Facebook notifications were easy to click and ignore. *Jackson Whittemore recently posted in your group **Stiles, We Miss You**, Lydia Martin recently posted a photo in your group **Stiles We Miss You**—*

If he never went back to Beacon Hills High, he never had to see the mural of Stiles's face, the community garden with a gold plaque by the gate with his name... if he never looked it was easy to just forget. To forget the smell of fruity perfume, the feel of manicured nails digging into his arm as Lydia Martin whispered *Scott, remember what we talked about*.

"Yes," the Agent frowned. "Did you know him?"

They were looking at him the same way Lydia and Jackson had looked at him all those years ago, like he was a wild animal, frightened and maybe a little dangerous. It had made him feel awful then, and it was no different now. It locked up his throat, it pushed tears past his lashes, and it pulled the air from his lungs until nothing remained.

His knees hit the kitchen floor. His fingers clawed at his throat. *Am I trying to get air, Scott thought with masochistic delirium, or am I strangling myself?*

He fainted before he could find out.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter! I hope you guys are still in for the recovery ride. I'm not an expert in law enforcement/investigations but I tried my best to keep it grounded. This chapter was... hard, but necessary, as all the other ones in the past were. I hope... yeah, I just hope you guys like it. As always, let me know what you think!

Art is by the fantastic [trashy](#)! If you guys need some fluff pick me up, I just completed [The Last Trolley Stop](#). It's like warm soup and grilled cheese on a rainy day.

Come say hi to me on [tumblr](#)!

Chapter 13: When He Walks, He Walks With Company

Chapter Summary

Other times, Stiles was brutal in his requests to have constant company. Whenever he did speak of his time in captivity, it would inevitably make Noah recoil. Shrink away. Be tempted, *so tempted*, to pour a glass full of whiskey and keep drinking until the horror of what happened in *his own town to his own son* wasn't as bad.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: There are some graphic descriptions of a corpse, psychological damage and attempts at recovery, descriptions of past non-consensual non-sexual intimacy, and descriptions of past murder.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Everything about his house was different.

Stiles kept one arm wrapped across his stomach, the other limp at his side as his father held the door open. He toed off Scott's sneakers and left them by the door, the strange sensation of wood and carpet under his feet making him shiver. The creak of the door closing and locking behind him was the same, but...

The carpet had changed. His dad got a new couch, and the shelves of DVDs and video game systems were gone. The house smelled different, like cleaning products and open air. He took small steps, his father walking ahead of him.

"Um, it should look pretty familiar."

His father had his arms full of clothes from Mel, and his eyes darted to every detail in the house, trying to remember when furniture had been replaced. How much had changed, and how much did his father just assume had always been there?

The new couch was soft, not quite velvet, but not cotton. He ran his fingers over the grooves from the stitching, relearning what cloth felt like.

The kitchen had been repainted. There was only one placemat at the table, and it was striped, blue and white like it was out of a beach-themed catalogue. Three bottles of whiskey were tucked away under the cabinets, next to the spice rack and dish soap.

The screen door was now glass. The granite countertop was cold, not smudged with sticky fingerprints.

The refrigerator was full of food that Stiles wouldn't be able to eat for months.

"Stiles?"

The linoleum was the same. Stiles crouched down and pressed his palm to the floor. How long did it take for his dad to throw out the Batman placemats? How long did he try to keep the faded green couch where Stiles and Scott would sleep on the weekends, never managing to stay up past midnight?

How long did it take for Stiles to truly disappear from Beacon Hills?

"*Stiles!*"

Stiles flinched, his neck jerking to the side so he could look up at his father.

"What? What is it?"

His father shuddered, his face pale.

"I called your name."

Stiles pushed his hands down on his knees. He followed his dad up the stairs, his young face reflected back at him from the framed pictures on the wall. Each step creaked. His father paused outside of his room. Outside of the door that didn't have holographic stickers plastered to it anymore.

"Stiles," his father's hand hovered over Stiles's shoulder before he pulled it back. "I turned your room into a guest bedroom."

Stiles turned the knob and pushed the door open quickly. Sure enough, everything was different. His desk and bookshelves were gone. His bed was different. He took a step onto the bare wood floor. It creaked in the same place.

"I'm sorry," his father sobbed behind him. "I'm sorry, Stiles."

Seven years, Stiles reminded himself. He was taller, stronger, and he was still alive. He relearned the space, he relearned the smell, and he relearned the new mattress, the feel of it under his calloused hands. When he lowered himself down to the sheets he smelled laundry detergent.

He sat up and when he turned towards the doorway, his father was there, his shoulders quaking as tears streamed down his cheeks. *I'm sorry*, he kept wheezing, his wrinkled hands covering his eyes. *I'm so sorry*.

It's not your fault is what Stiles should have said. The words were on the tip of his tongue. He'd said that phrase countless times before he was taken, and his father had repeated it back at him. Seven years was a long time to wait.

“I should shower,” was what came out of Stiles’s mouth instead.

His father hiccuped and stepped to the side. The shower curtain had changed, as well as the bathmat. Stiles twisted the knob and his shoulders jumped when water hit the tile, loud and unfamiliar. His brain *knew* the noise, but he hadn’t experienced it so close... and within his control... in years.

He stuck his hand under the spray and the pain was immediate. He jerked his hand back, hard enough that it hit the towel rack. His dad made a noise behind him and Stiles took a deep breath before he held his hand under the water again, his lip bitten between his teeth until he tasted blood. He lasted forty seconds longer.

Water dripped onto the tile when Stiles yanked his hand back. His breaths heaved in his chest and his father cleared his throat behind him, his voice rubbed raw.

“Stiles,” his name came out cracked and broken from his father’s lips, “maybe you should try a bath instead?”

The memory of water sloshing over his thighs while Kate would scrub him down inch by inch made bile rise in his throat, threatening to bubble and burst out of his mouth. The off-key songs she’d hum when she dragged her fingers through his hair, the “*that’s right, Stiles, nice and easy,*” when she’d pull on his arms to get him to stand up from the bath. Stiles had to keep his eyes forward, had to *not react* as she’d towel him off, getting on her knees to drag the fibers over his thighs, his hips, his—

“No.” Stiles swallowed the wave of nausea. “She bathed me,” he stuck his hand under the spray again. “I don’t want a bath.”

Tiny needles dug into his skin, plucking the grooves of dirt and bacteria from his pores with watery barbs.

He pulled his shirt off and pushed his pants down, two quick and efficient motions he’d used for years when the Alphas would wash their clothes. His dad sucked in a harsh breath. Either at Stiles’s lack of modesty, the marks on his skin, the patches of decay and antibodies battling infections...

“Can you stay with me?”

Stiles turned towards his father, his fingers pressed up against the tile wall. His father stood, his eyes red-rimmed and his hands pressed to his hips. Stiles *knew* that asking his father to stay in the bathroom with him wasn’t normal. He *knew* what the world had been like before. His skin jumped with the shower’s *sh-sh-sh*.

“Stiles...”

His dad’s frown was twisted, uncomfortable. The temptation to take back the request was intoxicating. A spiral of *just be normal* that Stiles would happily drown in. Breathing in how he *used* to be until his lungs seized, until his muscles jerked, until he was choked dead. How he used to be...

Moving in silence, solitude, with the ongoing lie that everything was *fine*... it was no longer an acceptable lifestyle.

“Dad.” Stiles wheezed. “Every time I close my eyes, even if it’s just to blink... I’m afraid that I’ll be back there. Or it was all a dream, or that I didn’t get to her fast enough and she survived, or that... or t-that there really is no hope and I’ll wake up and...” Stiles smiled though it wasn’t because he was happy. It was just a muscle spasm that pulled his lips back as his eyes fluttered, tears rolling down his cheeks. “And I’ll just be back. And there is no hope. And I won’t ever escape. And I’ll just... die of old age.”

He kept wiping his eyes but it didn’t matter, the tears kept coming as water kept rushing and the world kept turning. His dad made a noise, maybe he said something, or maybe it was just that, *noise*. Guttural. Animal. Stiles kept his eyes to the tub. To the water. Rushing.

Noise helped. Noise was better than echoing silence.

“The scariest part, Dad, is that those moments when I let my eyes close for just a second, I think maybe it’s all right. I’ll be back there... but at least I won’t be alone.” He gripped his right wrist and squeezed, his fingernails digging into scar tissue as he dared a glance at his father. “I don’t want to be alone anymore.”

His father dragged his fingers down his face, leaving behind white lines of ghostly pressure. Stiles had seen his father do that before, whenever he asked for something that he couldn’t give.

“All right,” his father sighed, putting down the toilet seat so he could sit. “All right, Stiles. I’ll stay.”

Stiles’s chest rose in short bursts, and he took his hand away from his wrist. He nodded, wiping his eyes with his arm.

“Thank you.”

He turned and stepped into the razor-sharp spray.



....

Stiles's hair was damp when he sat down on the new couch. He wore Scott's clothes and his dad went digging through closets to get Stiles's favorite blanket, the one that his grandmother had knitted.

His father dragged a plastic container to his feet.

"This is what I could dig up without taking too long." Stiles pulled the box over the carpet until it bumped against his bare toes. "There's more in the basement." Inside were... old things. DVDs. Books. Games. Things that Stiles used to adore. His fingers slipped over book jackets. Plastic casings. "Let's try this one."

Star Wars IV: A New Hope.

Stiles knew his father hoped to trigger something, like seven years of isolation could be fixed with a film he knew by heart. *Just snap back into place*, Stiles heard the plea. The music made his throat close, the fuzzy shots of desert... all of it he knew. He *knew*.

“This was how I helped time pass.”

Stiles closed his eyes and put himself at the mercy of the terrifying void. He breathed inside that dark place, as the movie played, his father next to him, and he reached. Reached out, in the dark, until he felt...

When he opened his eyes, three pairs of eyes opened with him.

“This is what the movie is supposed to look like.” Stiles kept his eyes on the screen as the score swept over tangerine sands with vast stretches of space above the horizon. “I used to tell stories,” he glanced at his father quickly, “to pass the time.”

Stiles remembered the movie, but watching it now... it seemed so flat. The score, while beautiful, wasn't the same as how his throat burned from descriptions, from doing voices, from jumping up when the action got going. He kept his eyes on the screen to share the experience even as his throat tightened.

“They hadn't seen it before, Dad. Weird right? No one had seen *Star Wars* and I thought... I thought that it was such a good story that retelling it... while it might not live up to the actual *movie*, it could still be fun.”

A shared experience. A way to get them talking to each other. To keep them engaged. Bed sores hadn't been Stiles's only worry.

If he didn't speak, if he didn't exercise his brain then there would be damage that he wouldn't be able to mend with protein and exercise. When he spoke, he used his hands, he struggled to find descriptive words and the Alphas would pitch in, would grow tense with suspense, a *and then what happened* always on the tip of their tongues.

“I made it last.” Stiles smiled, his lips trembling. “I made it last for days.”

He watched, he breathed, and he thought *I thought this would feel better* when the credits rolled. He closed his eyes. His Alphas closed their eyes with him.



....

Jun Kamata had always enjoyed puzzles ever since he was a boy. Finding each piece, connecting it to its partner, it was meditative. He enjoyed order and his apartment was in perfect feng shui. Every equation had a balance, every motivation, no matter how mad, had a driving force. A catalyst.

Life is bullshit and chaos, Shannon would say when a case stretched too long. Jun admitted to feeling the strain from time to time, but no matter how exhausted, his response would remain the same.

Balance will always restore itself.

Kate Argent's house had been documented thoroughly. Her body, as well as Gerard's, were in the morgue. Pictures had been taken, evidence collected, and floor plans were drawn. Still, as Jun walked through the halls, the buzzing *unease* worsened.

The investigation team had been carefully reduced to the Sheriff's most trusted staff, which was why Jordan Parrish walked with Jun down to Kate Argent's basement.

Parrish always shuddered at the sight of the glass rooms. For Jun, it was the smell that he'd never get used to. Humidity mixed with sweat and waste. He snapped on latex gloves.

As Strickland drove to Kate's brother's house, Jun and Parrish went over the components to each room. Automatic lights, except for Stiles's cell. Feeding tubes that would dispense MRE pellets every twelve hours. Three of the cells would get six pellets.. Stiles's cell only got four.

"Kate Argent didn't know Deucalion, Peter, or Satomi. After the statements and digging into her personal files she had *no relation* to any of them." Jun pressed his gloved hand against Stiles's door. "The first contact she had with those three were the days she took them." Parrish joined Jun at Stiles's cell. "She *knew* Stiles. She was friendly with him. Yet his cell is deficient in comparison to the others."

Stiles Stilinski's abduction was not planned, that much was clear. The additions to his cell were recent and rushed. Even the gas line was shoddily added on, and the fumes were significantly less than his other captives. Kate Argent had planned meticulously for every captive there... but she hadn't planned for Stiles.

The fluorescent lights glittered in the glass.

"Let's get back to the morgue, Stickland will be wrapping up soon."

"Yes, sir," Parrish nodded.

It was obvious that Stiles, Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi had not provided the whole story. That much was clear from small glances to the side, pauses between transitions from topics... the *how* was obvious, but not the *why*.

Why would Kate Argent target these random people? Satomi, who had just been visiting from Japan, Deucalion who was scouting out properties, and Peter who was an unmarried man and a beloved Uncle to the Hales. None of them were related in any conceivable way.

Jun had a feeling that they knew *why* they were taken.

At the late hour, the morgue was empty. Jordan paled when his eyes wandered to the drawers where the bodies were kept.

"I can take it from here, Parrish." Jun sighed. "Go home. I'll see you tomorrow."

Parrish smiled, sheepish and relieved.

"Goodnight, Mr. Kamata."

If Shannon had been there he would immediately bit back with a "*That's Special Agent Kamata to you, officer.*" Jun merely bowed his head.

"Goodnight, Parrish."

Jun waited under the harsh fluorescents, standing alongside the long stretches of examination tables. Within a half hour, Gravel crunched outside and Shannon pushed into the morgue.

“Hey.” Shannon’s familiar broken-glass-in-a-blender voice was like a warm bath after a long day. Jun immediately felt his body relax, the tension that had slowly wound in his shoulders and spine washing away until he was slack. “Where are do-good deputies?”

Jun’s lips twitched at Shannon’s obvious distaste.

“I dismissed Parrish. He did enough today.”

Shannon glanced to the windows one last time before he walked quickly to lessen the distance between them. Shannon’s hands were firm on Jun’s shoulders as he pulled him into a harsh embrace. Jun’s eyes slipped shut, his hands pulling Shannon closer. Even though Shannon was a good head shorter than Jun, he still felt bigger, and Jun had no qualms about losing himself for a few, coveted moments.

“Missed you.” Shannon’s breath fanned over Jun’s shoulder. “Could have used you today at the Argents. You have a better bedside manner than me.”

Jun chuckled, the first time he’d really smiled that day.

“I have better all-around manners than you.” Jun pulled back. “How did it go?”

“About as well as you’d expect. They had no idea. I don’t think they’re going to be interested in pressing charges or being involved in any sort of trial.” Shannon grimaced and crossed his arms across his chest. “Funnily enough, Scott McCall was there.” Ah, Stiles’s supposed best friend when he was a boy. Jun remembered. Shannon cocked his eyebrow. “He’s engaged to Chris’s daughter.”

The fluorescents hummed above them. Jun opened his bag to remove small gas masks, tossing one to Shannon.

“What was his reaction to the news?”

Shannon strapped on his mask.

“He had an asthma attack and threw up. If anything, that’s a pretty strong motivation to not press charges against Stiles, to keep their daughter’s future husband happy.”

Good, Jun didn’t say because it would be unprofessional. Instead, he opened the two drawers, rolling out Kate’s cold body as well as Gerard’s. Kate was naked, covered in stab wounds, only one of which had a clean and precise entry while the other thirty-six were obviously given by someone deeply distressed. Other than the wounds, Kate’s body was ordinary.

Jun said nothing, merely guided Shannon’s gaze with his gloved hands to Gerard’s body.

The head was deeply distorted, most of it was gone due to the shotgun. His chest had an equally big hole in it, the first shot that Stiles took. Shannon’s breath came in carefully

measured beats. In for four. Out for four. Jun counted with him silently, his hands gently touching Gerard's body.

To his rotted organs.

To the black, congealed blood that was less liquid and more gelatin.

To the fingernails that were hardened, perhaps calcified, to an inhuman density and sharpness.

The few teeth that were salvaged were unlike any human teeth that Jun had ever seen.

When Stiles had killed Kate, it had been a great physical and mental burden. That much was obvious, not only in his statement, but in the distribution of the wounds. They were frantic. Panicked. Jun recalled how Stiles bowed his head, tears sliding down his cheeks as he whispered, *"It was a necessary evil."*

Gerard Argent's body had two wounds. A perfect shot to the chest in head, with only a few seconds between shots. Kate had been a member of the community that Stiles had known. Even though he had planned his escape, killing her had not been easy.

When it was time for Gerard, the shots were smooth. Even. Calm.

Jun moved his hands quickly, off the body, and signed to Shannon, in case anyone or anything was listening.

When Stiles killed Kate, he was killing a human being. Shannon waited, his breath pausing as Jun quickly glanced back to Gerard's corpse. *The way Gerard was treated was almost...*

He stopped his hands. Jun trembled, his breaths shuddering in his lungs. He took a step back from the bodies. He couldn't say it. He couldn't even *sign it*. Shannon quickly pushed the two bodies back into the drawers, locking them and peeling off his gloves. Jun fumbled with his mask.

"Come on." Shannon jerked his head to the side. "I need some air."

That was a lie. Jun needed air, but it was hardly the first time Shannon took the weight from Jun's shoulders. They walked quickly until the night air cleansed them.

Jun liked puzzles. He enjoyed searching for every piece, tracing over the connecting factors, colors and themes bleeding from one fragment to the next.

Beacon Hills was a small town, one that wasn't particularly special on the surface. Jun had seen countless towns that were similar, that moved and breathed in the same way. When they'd first been called out to this town, Jun had assumed it would be like every other small town visit: quick and forgettable.

The lights in the parking lot flickered, a weak barrier against a looming darkness.

If Beacon Hills were a puzzle, it would be one made out of broken glass. It felt like the citizens were struggling to keep the shards close to them, no matter how deeply each piece dug into their skin.

A town that was happy to forget about a sixteen year old boy.

A town where a dead man chased that boy.

Gerard Argent was long dead. That was much was clear by the decay in his body, but the pictures of Kate's house didn't lie. The footsteps, the fingernail marks... Stiles did not manipulate that body, he did not make a macabre puppet. Stiles was *chased* and then he put down Gerard with two shots, one in the chest and one in the head.

Like an animal.

"What time does the psychologist get here?"

Shannon's hand found his in the dark.

"She lands at six-thirty, should be rolling into town around eight."

"Good," Jun leaned against Shannon, unable to hide the wire-tight trembles that writhed across his skin. "That's good."

Shannon let Jun's hand slip free, but not before that same hand pressed against the small of his back.

"Come on, let's get out of here."

Jun couldn't say *thank you*, because it would be unprofessional, but Shannon smiled like he heard it anyway.



....

Time had changed.

Stiles knew that time was measured. In seconds. Minutes. Hours. He could still read a clock and he could know the *time*, but that measurement meant nothing.

Time had started at the harsh *click* of the automated lights. Time was the harsh breathing between sprints. Time was the accented *one-two-three-four* from Deucalion when he'd lead them in a waltz. Time was jumping and twisting to Satomi's movements, named after animals and mountains. Time was not about counting and keeping a numbered record.

Time was shared.

Now Stiles was alone and he had no one to share his time.

His skin was sticky with lotion. His legs were numb as he sat on the porch, his eyes protected with thick sunglasses. He had just sat down and at the same time he'd been sitting forever. He had just started to stare at the grass, but he'd always been watching. The greens that shifted, bled into each other, rubbing with a hush every time the wind blew. If he looked closer he could see bits of dirt peeking out, he could watch beetles crawl over leaves, he could smell pollen carried across the breeze.

The lingering taste of his food paste clung to his teeth. Mashed up protein and vitamins that were a step up from the MREs he'd been eating for the past seven years. His stomach had finally adjusted so he wasn't running for the toilet an hour after eating. Stiles had eaten at the kitchen table while his father made toast, looking guilty as Stiles's stomach growled at the smell of butter.

Stiles felt... numb. He felt like his body had been separated into pieces and he had no connection to his limbs, his head, he was just adrift. It wasn't awful and it wasn't pleasant. It just *was*.

The sun crept towards Stiles's bare toes.

Maybe he'd always been here, sitting on his porch as the world roared around him.

Or maybe he'd never been there at all.

“— hear me, Stiles?”

Stiles's body came back together and he turned to look up at his father. His father who always had wrinkles between his eyebrows, who worried, who had gotten more grey hairs in the past few days than he'd gathered in his life. Stiles's knees popped when he stood.

“Sorry.” He said that word so much it was starting to lose its meaning. “I didn't hear you.”

“Don't— don't be sorry.” His dad held out his hand and Stiles took it, squeezing his fingers even though it hurt. “It's not your fault.”

His father held open the glass door with one hand.

“There's someone here to see you.” Stiles lifted his eyes up, and sure enough there was a slender figure in the living room. Stiles's eyes adjusted to the indoor lighting. “A doctor.”

“You mean a psychologist.”

He took off his glasses, blinking white spots out of his eyes as his bare feet passed over linoleum, wood, then carpet. The psychologist was a woman with a lithe body and a warm smile. She wore her hair in a long braid that slung over her shoulder.

“Good morning, Stiles. I'm Doctor Susan Vendegast, but you can call me Susie.”

Stiles held out his hand and she took it, a short squeeze and shake that stung but didn't linger. He wrung his hands, his eyes darting back to his father for a moment.

“You can call me Stiles.” His lips pulled back into what he hoped was a nice smile. “I’ve never done this before.”

“Well,” Susie had a leather bag with a golden buckle. “I’d like to speak with you, one-on-one, in a space that makes you comfortable. For our group sessions, it will be you, Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi in a similar space. Together, with me.” She smiled with a self-deprecating slant as she opened her bag. “There is paperwork, of course, but it’s fairly straight forward.”

Stiles picked the porch because he preferred to be outside, while his father sat in the living room. The kitchen was between them, but Stiles wouldn’t have to raise his voice if he needed to get his father’s attention. Stiles noticed that she’d taken off her shoes and wore loose pants and a simple tank-top. Without her professional bag and paperwork, she could easily be mistaken as a guest.

Stiles read over each page several times, stopping for definitions and clarifications. Especially the confidentiality agreements.

“Doctor-patient confidentiality will only be broken if I believe you are a danger to yourself or to others.”

Stiles held the pen in his hand.

“You really work for the FBI?” He had her badge in his other hand. “You just... don’t seem like it.”

Susie laughed.

“If I was that stiff I don’t think I’d be much help.” She shrugged. “How we’re framing my work with you and the other captives is that psychological healing is necessary to fully cover the case and make progress in figuring out why this happened.”

Stiles stared at the signature line.

“Am I legally recognized as an adult?” Stiles bit his lip, air scratching the inside of his lungs like sandpaper. “I was taken at sixteen.”

Susie hummed.

“Good question.” She cleared her throat, straightening her back. With a simple shift of her shoulders Susie went from a guest to a federal agent. “If you were isolated with no other human contact, then no. While you couldn’t touch your fellow captives you could *speak* to them. According to the reports that Strickland and Jun provided, they were impressed that the four of you hadn’t physically and mentally deteriorated.” Her eyes were a calm green, like a dusty chalkboard in an empty classroom. “You kept them going. Through speech and daily routines, I’d say you’re a big reason that they didn’t majorly regress.”

A nauseating mixture of pride and shame weighed down his stomach.

He signed it, his fingers white around the tip of the pen. They both sat on the steps of the porch, Susie's legs crossed while Stiles stretched his out so that his toes brushed against the grass. Time was measured in seconds, minutes, and hours.

Time was his throat bobbing around air. Time was Susie's long exhale. Time was Stiles's fingers rubbing along the seam of his shirt.

"I don't know what to say." Stiles ducked his head down. "I don't know how to start."

All the dangerous things he *couldn't* say immediately came to mind. The answers that the agents weren't necessarily looking for, or would believe, but *would* answer their questions. He pressed his thumb against the scar on his wrist, a steady pressure until the surrounding skin was white. He had to say something, he had to at least try to get better or... or he would be crawling into a grave.

"Let's start with something you want."

Stiles rested his elbows on his knees, his back hunched over. He glanced at her, his shock wiping all the worries from his mind.

"What?" His throat clicked. "What I want?"

"Yes." Susie smiled like being around Stiles wasn't revolting and difficult. "Therapy is about goals. When I'm dealing with a survivor, particularly one who understands necessary pragmatism, starting simply is beneficial. What do you *want* from this therapy, Stiles?"

Stiles took his time to really *think*, to simplify his goals into three simple wants.

"A complete recovery is impossible, but I want to do as much as I can to... make it. In society. I want a GED." Stiles released his grip on his right wrist. His fingerprints lingered and he swallowed at the sight of Peter's bite mark. "And," Stiles met Susie's unwavering gaze, "I want to be well enough to have a romantic relationship with Peter Hale."

It's not dangerous, Stiles had to himself from pleading.

"Those are very reasonable goals, Stiles."

Stiles let out an overwhelming exhale of relief, tears sliding down his face. For the first time since he got home, he felt the second-hand ticking on the kitchen clock.



....

Noah quickly turned off the tea kettle a few seconds before it could start whistling. He took it off the stove, using a potholder as a shield between the handle and his palm. Steam warmed his face as he filled the third teapot.

“That’s the last of the mint.” Noah slid the tea cozy that Claudia’s mother had hand-knit them over the pot before he carefully carried it to the living room. Special Agent Strickland, Special Agent Kamata, the Hales, the Itos, and two representatives of the Blackwood estate were all crowded in his living room. Derek, Cora, and Laura and laid claim to the couch, while Talia sat on the side arm of the couch, her jaw tight. “Who needs a refill?”

Yomiko, Derek and Jun raised their cups.

Noah had to dig out spare chairs from the basement, hastily wiping them down and dusting off cobwebs. Two plastic folding chairs for the Blackwood representatives. Three

mismatched wooden chairs for the Itos, one with a wobbly leg. Strickland and Jun sat on the floor and Noah hovered by the couch.

When they'd all arrived, Stiles greeted them all by name and a handshake, even the Blackwood representatives. Arthur Cornell had gone rigid the moment Stiles touched him. When Stiles met Arthur's wide-eyed gaze, he smiled before moving onto Isaac. Isaac had seemed flustered, but pleasant. Arthur had a look that Noah had seen before, mostly at crime scenes.

Repulsion, awe, dread.

Stiles had color in his cheeks and was quick to assure them how nice it was to finally meet them.

Doctor Vendegast herded Peter, Deucalion, Satomi, and Stiles outside after fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes of shaking hands, of Stiles touching each person in the room for over twenty seconds without a single flinch. Fifteen minutes of Stiles not needing to be introduced, he already knew the faces and names of everyone in the room. He'd barely spoken a word to his fellow captives other than the warm hugs... yet he still knew their family.

The glass door slid on its rollers and Doctor Vendegast stepped inside.

"A promising first group session," Doctor Vendegast smiled as Jun and Strickland stood up to greet her. "They've earned twenty minutes to themselves."

Talia Hale's smile was thin, barely a courtesy before her eyes slid to the glass door. Noah had set up a small fire pit. The light danced over the kitchen floor. If Noah strained his eyes, he could make out his son's silhouette reaching across his captives, the firelight shimmering off his teeth.

"Will you be able to continue therapy if we go back to New York?" Doctor Vendegast's smile faded. Talia's shoulders rose a few inches, her back straightening. "Living out of a hotel room isn't practical. Peter needs to be *home*—"

"I'd imagine everyone would have to stay until the trial is over." All eyes in the room turned to Isaac, the young man who, up until that moment, had remained engulfed in a nervous silence. Arthur raised his eyebrow while his young charge continued, his elbows resting on his knees as he opened his palms, his long fingers opening out like a spider. "What? Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi are witnesses."

Talia crossed her arms.

"They are *victims* of a crime. It can't be more clear-cut."

"For Peter, Deucalion, and Satomi— you're right. It's cut-and-dry." Isaac straightened his back and squared his shoulders. "Stiles—" Isaac's eyes flickered up to Noah and he swallowed, shrinking back. "Well, they didn't just *walk* out of there."

Talia sighed, sneaking a glance up at Noah before returning her eyes to the door. To where her brother had his hand in Deucalion's hair. Silence grew between them and the only person who seemed truly comfortable in the room was Hiroaki.

He sat between his two daughters, his tea resting in one hand with the bottom of his cup on his knee, and his other hand on his leg, palm facing upwards. He was so calm, eyes attentive but sincere, that he seemed out of place, crammed in shoulder-to-shoulder with the other family and the representatives.

The agents provided as much information as they could about the possibilities of a trial and time frames. Talia and her children were eager to return to the east coast, to refamiliarize Peter with his home.

The Blackwood representatives were tight-lipped with whatever goals they had set for Deucalion. They appeared to have endless money and patience. Arthur carried himself with strict authority, while Isaac was more shy, eager to please with any request. Both of them were infallible in their politeness.

Even the Ito daughters were tense, Yomiko avoiding Strickland's gaze while Azumi kept her eyes to the floor, her shoulders slouched inward around her cold tea.

Hiroaki radiated an absurd amount of peace that just the sight of him sitting in Noah's living room was obscene. He belonged outside, in smoother-than-silk sand, a meditation room, a zen garden, *anywhere* but the tense, cramped, and slightly humid living room where Noah wrung his hands. Hiroaki's eyes slipped to the side, to the glass door leading to the porch.

Satomi, Peter, and Deucalion were sitting on the grass, and Stiles sat in front of them, his back to the fire as he faced them.

Questions burned in Noah's mind. Everyone looked at his son differently, for their own reasons, but the people in his living room weren't just rubbernecking. Arthur's fear was reflected in Talia, the tension she had in her muscles when Stiles's hand slid over hers. Yomiko and Azumi hugged him, thanking him with hoarse voices, and Hiroaki....

Hiroaki hugged Stiles like he was an old friend.

Sometimes when Noah looked at his son, he saw someone who was barely hanging on, like the threads holding Stiles to the world were slowly breaking. He'd lose track of time, he'd forget what he was doing mid-task, and there were times when he couldn't hear Noah no matter how loudly he called Stiles's name.

Other times, Stiles was brutal in his requests to have constant company. Whenever he did speak of his time in captivity, it would inevitably make Noah recoil. Shrink away. Be tempted, *so tempted*, to pour a glass full of whiskey and keep drinking until the horror of what happened in *his own town to his own son* wasn't as bad.

Then... there were times that Noah had barely noticed at first.

A drag of fingers along the grooves of wood on the porch. How Stiles would sometimes... change the way he walked, where for just two steps it would seem like he was making space for someone else. When he allowed himself to sleep, his fingers always lingered on the bite mark on his wrist.

The more Noah noticed, the more questions he had.

Do you notice your loved ones changing? Do you remember what they were like before? Do they move differently? Does it seem like... even when they're alone, someone is with them?

Noah's finger gripped his cup tightly.

Why do you keep looking at my son like that?

He swallowed down the questions, wincing at the ugly taste left behind in his mouth. He cleared his throat.

“Would anyone like more tea?”



Chapter End Notes

It's been a very busy few weeks and I wanted to get this out before I went away all weekend. I hope it's worth the wait. My roommate moved out and it's been an adjustment... both good and bad.

Anyway, let me know what you think!

Chapter 14: Ripple Effect

Chapter Summary

It had been two weeks since the motorcade of police cars and ambulances had woken Finstock up out of a dead sleep. Two weeks since word got out like a wildfire in the middle of a drought that *Stiles Stilinski was back*. Two weeks since Beacon Hills, a quiet little town where the most excitement were fireworks held on the Fourth of July— and then suddenly it was as though a geyser had been opened.

All the secrets and shadows had spilled out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stale coffee lingered on Finstock's tongue.

Mid-morning light cut through his blinds. The tips of his toes were cold, but not cold enough for Finstock to shuffle back to his bedroom for thicker socks. He sat in his wooden kitchen chair. He licked his thumb, slipped on his reading glasses, and pulled the morning paper closer to him.

Week Two: Inside the Terror Beneath Beacon Hills

“Christ.” Photos of Stiles Stilinski's house and blurry shots of the other victims going to and from their hotels splashed across the front page. Finstock shook his head and swallowed the twist in his stomach, quickly turning the page so he didn't have to look at it anymore. “Fucking vultures.”

It had been two weeks since the motorcade of police cars and ambulances had woken Finstock up out of a dead sleep. Two weeks since word got out like a wildfire in the middle of a drought that *Stiles Stilinski was back*. Two weeks since Beacon Hills, a quiet little town where the most excitement were fireworks held on the Fourth of July— and then suddenly it was as though a geyser had been opened.

All the secrets and shadows had spilled out.

Kate Argent had been responsible for the tragedy seven years ago, of a young boy disappearing and later pronounced dead. Finstock had gone to the memorial service held at the school, he'd stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the staff and kids who cried, who lit candles and wailed for the friend they lost. A friend they'd never talked to. A student they never called on in class. A lacrosse player who spent every game on the bench.

He'd stood and said *nothing*.

What would he say? That he was *any better*? That he was the one saving grace of the school? Yeah *right*. He had been just as complicit, just as dead-eyed as the rest of his colleagues who hadn't wanted to help in the investigation. They wanted things to go back to the monotonous cycle, to go back to pretending everything was fine. That they had done their jobs exceptionally. They could milk this tragedy for funding, for more school wings, a garden, a plaque, all named for the dead kid who had bought it for them.

Finstock retired when Stiles's class graduated.

There was only so much putrid bullshit the human body could take.

He turned the page because if he looked too long at the pictures, if he read more of the grisly details that the journalists had been able to dig up—the more his hands would shake. Guilt. Anger. A hollow, immature desire to point in his colleagues faces, to drag each and every one of those kids back to Beacon Hills and *show them* just what happened when they decided to rewrite history.

Instead, he barely left his house unless it was to get groceries. Even then, he couldn't avoid the haunted faces, the way folks were quick to jump, to avoid each other.

He whipped a few eggs together, tossing in pepper and dicing up garlic and onions as he opened his refrigerator for some milk and butter. He'd have to back to the store again soon. His pan sizzled as he poured the egg on, the smell of breakfast, toast, and coffee helping him forget about the newspaper.

Someone knocked on his door after he flipped his omelette the first time. At first Finstock thought he'd been hearing things, until they knocked again. Three times and *firm*.

"Shit." Finstock fumbled with the burners. "Hold on a second!"

He moved the pan off the flame and gave it another flip, grinding his teeth. *Fuck*, it was going to burn. He grabbed his robe off the back of his chair, slipping it on and tugging down his t-shirt. He straightened his sweatpants and hurried to the door.

The Sheriff stood on his porch.

Finstock's grip on his door slipped, his irritation melting away into numbed confusion. He blinked, just to make sure he wasn't hallucinating, maybe the onions had clouded his vision, but *no*. Noah Stilinski was there in full uniform. It wasn't even noon.

"Good morning." The Sheriff shifted, his lips stretched into the saddest attempt at a smile that Finstock had ever seen. "Can I come in?"

"Sure." Finstock stepped to the side. "I'm in the middle of breakfast, so uh, just one second." The Sheriff closed the door behind him, toeing off his boots by the door as Finstock finished up his omelete. "Do you want anything? Coffee? Toast?"

Finstock looks down at the holes in his socks, the singed part of his robe sleeve when he'd been cooking with a bad hangover, and felt self-consciousness throb in the back of his head.

“No... actually,” Noah ducked his head, and even that sheepish action wasn’t a show of weakness. Not in that uniform, “if you’re making another pot of coffee, I’ll have some.”

“Yeah, that’s just what I was doing,” Finstock lied, dumping the old coffee into the sink. “No problem.”

The Sheriff sat in Finstock’s chair with a sigh, his shoulders hunched as he rested his elbows on his knees. Finstock awkwardly leaned on his counter, the coffee maker hissing. There was more grey in Noah’s hair, more wrinkles too.

Finstock wasn’t hungry anymore.

“Stiles wants to get his GED.” Noah dragged his hand down his face, pulling at his aged skin and stubble. “He never had a chance to... well, you know.”

“Yeah.”

Finstock ground his teeth, crossing his arms over his stomach. The coffee maker stopped. Neither of them made a move to pour themselves a cup. Clouds moved off the sun and the light in Finstock’s kitchen sharpened.

“You... you’ve tutored on the side before, right? I heard that,” Noah waved his hand, “around.”

His first, and all the way down to his tenth instinct was to back away and say *No*. No, no, no. Because Finstock wasn’t a gawker, like the rest of the town who caught glimpses of the Sheriff or the other survivors. He wasn’t a fucking vulture with a camera and twenty questions waiting to be shouted at the backs of his targets.

He was *retired*.

He might be a loud stubborn asshole, but he wasn’t irresponsible. Stiles needed *help*. He needed to recover. Finstock didn’t have the qualifications to... to do anything remotely helpful.

Still, his tongue stuck in his throat as Noah looked up at him, his eyes shining bright in the morning light.

“He said that he used your drills.” Finstock felt revulsion crawl down his throat like oil. “Your lacrosse drills. The ones you had him run at practice. He said he didn’t want to get bed sores.”

Normally, Finstock’s memory was spotty. Vague retellings of stories without any solid dates. But *bed sores* brought him back, ripped forward with hooks until he right *there*, on the grassy field, his whistle hanging around his neck and his throat burning from yelling—

“Do you know what happens to people who don’t move around? They get bedsores. Have you ever had a bedsore? It’s awful, they’re terrible, I sincerely hope none of you little brats ever have the experience of getting one. And that’s what I want to drill into your heads— always keep moving.”

Finstock splashed water onto his face.

“I’m not,” Finstock dragged a hand towel over his mouth, water dripping from his lashes and nose. “I’m not trained in any kind of... social work or dealing with someone with Post-Traumatic Stress, Sheriff.”

“We have someone for that. She’d vet you, of course, give you a debrief,” and Finstock’s stomach lurched at that ludicrous and horrifying word. *Debrief*. “But... you don’t need to worry about that. He has someone helping him. She’s with him now,” Noah checked his watch, “which gives me a few more minutes with you.” Noah stood up, the chair squeaking loudly on Finstock’s tile floor. “You’re someone he recognizes. I think... it would be good for him to see someone he knows, in a familiar context.” Noah looked toward the door, his lips pulled into a pained grimace. “I know it’s a lot to ask. I just,” Noah’s hand flew to his mouth. To stifle a sob or choke down vomit... maybe both. “I just want him to get better.”

The problem was... no one in Beacon Hills could claim to be guilt-free. Finstock had stood by the faculty and lied with them. Stiles Stilinski went missing on his birthday, which he’d been spending home alone.

It was an open secret that the Sheriff was a functioning alcoholic, but it wasn’t as if someone was going to scold a man who lost his son. Did Finstock have his *own* feelings on the way Noah had treated fatherhood before? Sure.

But this wasn’t about Noah Stilinski.

It was about Stiles. And Finstock had let that kid down once. He wasn’t about to make the same mistake twice.

“Okay.” Noah’s head snapped back to watch Finstock rub his hands with a towel. “When do we start?”

....



Isaac Lahey realized that his new job was going to be a lot of problem-solving and listening.

He kept the tea cups full, he helped Deucalion into new sweaters and slacks, and he prepared meals in the house that the Blackwood estate had leased in Beacon Hills until the trial was over. Isaac didn't have a mind for legal knowledge. He still *listened*, refilling cups and making copies of updates from the lawyers, recording summaries that Deucalion would listen to before bed.

Isaac had been teaching himself Braille, and had begun teaching Deucalion the basics.

Deucalion had guidelines for a living space when they were able to check out of the hospital. It needed to be at least two stories, his bedroom must be on the second floor, the driveway must be gated, and it must be in Beacon Hills.

Arthur stayed at a hotel on the outskirts of the town.

“I hate this place.” Arthur sneered, overlooking Beacon Hills from the rental home. Isaac said nothing, watching Arthur load his briefcases into the car. “Keep an eye on him. Give him anything he asks for and everything he needs.”

“Of course, Arthur.” *It’s my job*, Isaac always had to bite back from saying. “I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

Arthur nodded, digging in his pockets for his keys before he looked back at Isaac.

“You’ll be my eyes and ears, even after this is all over, right Isaac?”

Isaac was hired to be *Deucalion’s* eyes and ears. He nodded, swallowing bile as Arthur pulled out of the gated driveway.

Deucalion recounted his steps inside the house, muttering under his breath as he counted his steps from room to room. His cane tap-tap-tapped out each measurement. Isaac stayed quiet, cleaning up the teacups and plates, reorganizing the papers, and started cleaning the dishes.

The Deucalion Blackwood Foundation had been a haven for wolves without a Pack, who had been abused and abandoned by their Alphas. Isaac had been grateful for an escape from his father, he didn’t *care* about shared dormitories or bland meals. *Anything* was better. After a few years of staying within the DBF, he learned to listen. Their allowances were meager, but information was *much* more useful.

He learned that the Alpha the foundation was named after had disappeared.

Rumors were wild and varied from Deucalion fleeing the responsibility of nobility, to his own wife murdering him in the Tennessee mountains. No one was sure, and none of the staff or officials from the Blackwood Estate ever commented. *Kidnapping* had never been a possibility. *Alphas* didn’t get kidnapped.

Soap slid over the cups and Isaac rinsed off the last bits of cutlery before he dried his hands.

The rest of the night would be spent reading memos from the attorneys. Isaac had laid out towels by the bath and he’d washed and fluffed the sheets on Deucalion’s bed. Isaac turned to see Deucalion standing in the doorway.

“Oh Christ,” Isaac jumped. “You scared me.”

Deucalion’s milky eyes narrowed, his seemingly permanent frown deepening.

“Try your hardest to get used to my face as quickly as possible. You’ll have to see a lot more of it.”

“That’s not,” Isaac sighed and followed Deucalion as he took another pass at counting his steps around the house. “I didn’t hear you.” Deucalion snorted and Isaac followed him, up the steps, and down the hall to the bathroom. He listened to Deucalion count, to his cane tapping long the wood that turned into white tile. “If you’d like,” Isaac caught Deucalion’s clothes before they could hit the floor, “I can read today’s memos for you while you’re in the bath.”

Deucalion waved his hand, starting the bath and keeping his hands under the water as he adjusted the heat.

“Sure. Might as well.”

Isaac helped Deucalion into the bath, holding onto his arms and slowly lowering him into the water. He pulled up a stool and sat close to the tub.

“Would you like to try a bath bomb this time, Mr. Blackwood?” He watched Deucalion frown, his mouth moving silently around the words *bath bomb*. Isaac cleared his throat. “They’re a ball of... fragrance and minerals. It fizzes when you put it in the tub. People say it’s good for your skin but I think it just smells nice.”

Deucalion snorted.

“Sure. Surprise me.”

Isaac picked one that had pine moss in it, a subtle but strong scent. Not flowery, but not musky and masculine. Green fizz bloomed in the water and Deucalion made a soft noise in the back of his throat, his hands slowly moving to touch the source of the bubbles.

The memos were similar to the ones from last week. The next of kin in the Argent family had been notified. As of the present date, they had not moved to press charges. The District Attorney was going to meet with a few judges, and if the tone of the near tabloid-like coverage of the event was anything to go by, Stiles had the public support and opinion backing him.

If he was prosecuted within the full extent of the law, Beacon Hills might break out into riots.

Water sloshed around Deucalion’s knees, green fizz lingering on his skin. He lathered up soap between his palms and washed up his legs, between his thighs, and under his arms. Isaac put his papers away.

He rubbed his throat, his fingers pressing against his neck as though he could push the soreness away. The sound of water was relaxing and Isaac slumped forward.

“Stiles will be okay.” Deucalion jerked in the water at the name, his opal eyes wide. Isaac drained the tub and took Deucalion’s hand in his, offering him a towel with the other. “I don’t think you have to worry about the trial.”

“I’ll worry as much as I deem appropriate.” Deucalion toweled himself off. “This is the *least* I can do.” He grimaced, shoving his arms into the sleeves of the robe that Isaac helped him into. “I wish I could do more.”

Deucalion counted the steps to his bedroom. Isaac pulled back the smooth sheets, waiting patiently as Deucalion got comfortable on the bed. He pulled the sheets and blankets up to Deucalion’s shoulders.

“I know Arthur thinks I’m being sentimental.” Isaac froze. His hands fumbling on Deucalion’s shoulders as his blind eyes met Isaac’s. “He’s got us out. That *should* be enough

of a reason to help him.”

Isaac’s throat tightened.

“I know, Mr. Blackwood.”

He felt ashamed. He straightened Deucalion’s pillow and gave the sheets another fluff. Deucalion was quiet, his eyes still open as his body eventually relaxed against the pillows. The second night they’d spent in the house, Deucalion had muttered, *“I’m afraid I’ll sleep into such a deep sleep I’ll never wake.”*

Isaac didn’t sleep that night.

Deucalion shifted, letting out a long breath and nuzzling back against the pillow, shifting so he laid on his side so he faced Isaac.

“Isaac,” Deucalion’s voice was soft, like drinking tea while being wrapped in velvet. “Have you ever heard of a True Alpha?”

Isaac shook his head.

“No. What is it?”

Deucalion closed his eyes, pulling the sheets closer to his chest.

“Maybe I’ll tell you. Some other time.”

Milky eyes slid shut. Isaac quietly left the room, shutting off the lights before he closed the door.

....



Life had gone on in the past thirty-four years. There was no time to wallow and succumb to a miserable madness that would eat away at him until nothing remained. Hiroaki wore his grief like delicate cufflinks, brilliant in their elegance and importance. He never remarried. Never considered it even once.

Satomi had been it for him. He knew the moment he met her eyes across her dinner table all those years ago, when he'd broken a bowl at the strong *need* that had blossomed in him. It was as though he were a garden, seeds laying planted in wait, until he heard her voice, until her concerned eyes swept over him. It was as though sunlight had nestled inside him.

After she was taken, that warmth never left.

Hiroaki knew it was possibly dangerous and immature, but he believed his wife was still alive. If he could still *feel* her, certainly she was alive.

His daughters left earlier that morning, after many assurances that *yes* it was okay and that *yes* they were going to call every night.

The hotel Agent Strickland and Jun had set them up in was on the outskirts of Beacon Hills.

Satomi sat on their bed, her face turned toward the window. The moon was almost full. Hiroaki sat behind her, taking her full weight as she turned into his chest. He thought that maybe it would be awkward, that being away for so long... would leave him forgetful in how things had been.

Satomi moved the same, held him the same, and kissed him the same.

Catching up on everything was... impossible. He knew she was still uneasy around technology, the only comfort came from pictures Hiroaki could show her from the missing years.

Photos of their house in Washington, their daughters through the years, and just... random things that Hiroaki had collected. Flowers. Tiny ceramic figurines. Bits and baubles that collected, changed, and rotated throughout his house over decades. In turn, when sky was dark and it was just the two of them... Satomi would tell him about her time within the glass walls.

Dancing, waltzes and the old rituals that had been passed down the Ito clan. Sharing sweat and breath with her fellow prisoners, moving until they would collapse onto the rock, gasping for air.

She told him of how they'd take long walks, how they'd travel hundreds of miles despite not moving an inch. They'd take turns using their voice to carry them somewhere far away.

Satomi told him, the night before when they were both too tired to keep their eyes open, about when she died.

"I had done what I believed... to be the reason I stayed alive. I let her take me, and I knew that it would be my end. And she took her time. She was thorough. I think she only brought me back to them to punish them."

But that hadn't been her end.

Air was pushed back into her lungs with a new set of Absolutes.

They kept the windows open, letting the moonlight creep across the bed sheets. Hiroaki relearned Satomi's body, his fingers featherlight down her spine, back up her side, down to her stomach, and down her legs. Up and down, over and under, matching his breathing with hers. She trembled.

The next afternoon was another group session at the Sheriff's house.

They never spoke aloud about the trial, though it weighed on all their shoulders. Satomi had hugged Hiroaki tight after the previous session.

“If Stiles is convicted, he won’t let himself be imprisoned again. He will find a way to take himself off the board.”

Hiroaki held his wife close, feeling her heartbeat under his palm. They slipped into unconsciousness together.

He believed in her, and he believed in the True Alpha.

....



The room service at the hotel left much to be desired. Well, it didn’t matter to Peter, everything tasted like paradise, but Talia thought the runny scrambled eggs were disgusting. She didn’t say it, though she was sure her wrinkled nose made it obvious.

Cora was sleep in the adjoining room. Derek and Laura had to leave to get back to work.

Peter pushed his eggs around his plate. He'd been chewing the same mouthful of toast for the past twenty minutes. The first time Talia had asked why he didn't eat, Peter's response had been, "*He can't eat real food yet. I don't deserve to.*" She hadn't asked again.

In a few hours they'd meet with the Itos in the lobby and head over to the Sheriff's for a group session.

"Peter," he *finally* swallowed as he looked at her. "I'm with you." She held out her hand until he took it. "You're not alone. Whatever it is," *whatever makes you not eat, whatever makes you toss and turn in your sleep, whatever is keeping your eyes so empty and long*, "I'll face it with you."

That was how they used to be.

Peter put his fork down, his index and middle finger trembling. A few of the guests milled around in the pitiful courtyard. Their voices floated up to the balcony, blended together into a roaring ambience.

"It was my fault." Peter's grip was tight, but he couldn't bring himself to look at her. He stared at the concrete and chlorine. "That he was there. I went into his house and he spoke to me, and... when she came back to get me I should have killed him. *I know I should have*, and I wanted to, Talia, I did, because it would have been better than... her doing it."

Talia felt the small hairs on the back of her arms stand on end at Peter's twisted form, at how his shoulders hunched inward while his lips pulled to the side.

"Peter, no one blames you for that—"

"I know." He shuddered. "I know."

Sunlight parted the clouds. Birds chirped. The breeze was warm and kind. His fingers were dry and warm in Talia's palm. A few children shrieked and splashed in the pool.

"I bit him." Talia's eyes widened as Peter's closed. "It was the only way I could think of... so she would take him. If I... if I gave him a bite and said that he was my mate."

She hadn't noticed. Not that the young man made it easy. It was difficult to look away from Stiles's face, a gaunt, haunting spectre with harsh lines. *He must have done it with human teeth*, Talia thought as Peter rubbed his mouth with his free hand, like he could still taste Stiles's blood between his gums.

"It didn't mean anything. He didn't want to die." Peter's fingernails left thin red lines behind on his skin. "I hated myself for it. He was going to rot away with me... trapped with us just because he asked me to keep him alive. If I *hadn't*, if I'd killed him like I should have—I would still be there."

The Hales always settled their debts, whether they be monetary or otherwise. Talia prided herself on that, which was one of the *many* reasons why Stiles made her so uneasy. All the money in the world wouldn't be enough.

The words “Thank you,” seemed so small in comparison to the shadows under Stiles’s eyes, the redness in his gums and the pink patches of raw skin that littered his body. “Thank you,” was meaningless in the face of the glorified baby food that Stiles still had to eat.

“I love him, Talia.”

Weathered and weary skin slid from her grasp. Talia found his hand again and gave it a reassuring squeeze even as her brother’s shoulders shook, his breath coming quick in his chest. She ran her thumb over Peter’s knuckles and breathed with him.

....



Everything changed on a Thursday.

The first clue was that no one was allowed off the busses for a whole hour even after they’d pulled into the Beacon Hills High driveway. It was easy to laugh and start yelling that they

might as well just turn the bus around and go home. Usually the bus drivers were eager to roll their eyes and sigh with exasperation with a “*yeah right, kid,*” or a “*settle down.*”

Scott remembered...

That morning the driver’s fingers gripped the steering wheel so tightly that the leather creaked under his palms.

It was funny at first, but then quickly kids stopped laughing and were texting each other. The taste of milk lingered on his tongue from his cereal that morning as some girl turned around and said, “Casey thinks it might be a bomb threat.” She popped a big pink bubble of elasticized sugar. “Do you think Harris will call off his quiz?”

When the bus doors finally opened, the crowd paused in moving forward because of how many police officers were there, arms crossed, eyes stern. Scott twisted, looking back to try and find Stiles.

They were ushered into the gym and no one was allowed to go to the lockers.

Sneakers squeaked on the waxed wood floor. No one was laughing anymore, not even the dumbest bullies. A few people texted their parents. Everyone seemed to agree to find their first period classes and group together, so Scott sat in front of Lydia and Jackson on the bleachers, eyes glued to the door.

All their teachers were there, their arms clasped behind their backs or crossed over their chests.

By the time the last kid was guided in and the doubled-doors swung shut... Stiles still hadn’t shown.

A barling trill made everyone cover their ears. Finstock took his whistle from his mouth, somehow looking exhausted even with his wild eyes and hair.

“Everyone *listen up!*” A few giggles peppered the crowd, a habit that was common whenever Finstock took charge. Usually he was fine with it, but not that morning. His lips pulled down into a grimace. There were two men in suits next to him. He blew his whistle again, sharp and long. Spit flecked against the floor as Finstock spit the bit of metal out of his mouth. “These two men are with the FBI.”

That made everyone stop whispering *real quick*. Scott’s skin had gone cold when the two men had their badges out and held up, a quick challenge and assertion of authority.

“We’re here because your classmate, Stiles Stilinski, has gone missing.”

Everyone was separated by their classes and they were moved to sit on the floor until they were questioned, separately, one-by-one. Scott fumbled for his inhaler, his throat tight and his eyes swimming.

Stiles was there *yesterday*, and didn’t it take more than *one day* for someone to be missing? Shouldn’t the police take care of a local crime not the FBI? And a person like *Stiles* didn’t

just *go missing*.

Things like that didn't happen in Beacon Hills.

He remembered smelling sharp perfume. A sophisticated scent, the kind that *stung*, the kind of maturity you could buy. It was the smell that came before the manicured nails gripping his arm. It was Lydia Martin speaking to him for the first time in his life. It was her and Jackson, the most popular kids in their grade, asking Scott if he knew what was going on.

All he did was wheeze.

Lydia's hand was on his back, and Scott kept sucking air into his lungs, tears dripping down his nose as Lydia spoke, low and close to his ear.

"Scott, things like this don't happen in Beacon Hills. Think about it, all this is going to take too long. It might even delay our school year, and depending on how long it drags out, our graduation."

Think of your future, she said. *How well can we really know anyone*, she asked.

Just over seven years later, Scott sat in the local diner, his back to the door and his foot bouncing on the sticky linoleum. He warmed his fingers around his second cup of coffee. The windows were dark, the occasional headlights sweeping across the glass. Brief bursts of cool air would come with every jingle of the bell above the door.

The more he waited, the tighter the knots in his stomach and shoulders became. He drank coffee even though he hadn't been able to taste anything for weeks. His fingers were numb when he checked his phone, another message from his mother about her lending his old clothes to Stiles, asking if that was okay.

Frigid air blew across his neck, carrying a cutting scent of poise across his nose.

Scott clenched his fists.

Chapter End Notes

I tried to get something ready before the holidays. I hope this is okay. I was most excited for Finstock's section (surprise to anyone? No?) and had originally planned to close with it... but it felt better to open with someone that fresh and removed before delving face first back into the victims.

This... well, it might be a little rushed. I just wanted to get you guys something before the big break, and it's been a stressful few weeks at work since everyone is trying to wrap up projects before the holidays. I hope it's not too distracting or detracting.

Art is by the INCREDIBLE [callmechikki](#)!

I'll still be active on tumblr for the time being, but there are other ways to find me. [Here](#) you can see a little breakdown of other places to find me and other things I do in relation to these fics. [So click on over](#) to get the full rundown!

Chapter 15: The Meaning of Mine

Chapter Summary

The reward for progression was free time. Susie would go inside and leave them to their own devices for a half an hour. Those were the cherished windows in time when Stiles could steal hugs, squeezes, and kisses. But it still had to be within reason. It had to be easily disengaged or socially acceptable. A hug around the middle, a pat on the back, a kiss on the cheek.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: consensual sex with consensual bystanders/spotters/physical and emotional support.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Glenn Hanifan had been the reigning judge in Beacon Hills Municipal Court for the past thirty-four years.

Folks who didn't live in small towns seemed to assume that it was a quiet life, that every day was a postcard of existence. Beautiful, repetitive, and benign.

Domestic abuse, DUIs, trespassing, harassment, vehicular manslaughter, the list was not unlike other towns, and it was like a smaller, more concentrated pool compared to a city. Anyone who lived in Beacon Hills and bought into the idyllic nonsense was just burying their head in the sand.

Applejack whiskey glittered in a glass, the taste of it lingering on Glenn's tongue as District Attorney Whittermore burst into his office late in the evening.

"Oh good," Mr. Whittermore wiped sweat from his brow, "you're still here." Patches of sweat speckled his shirt and his eyes were wild. "You need to throw out the Stilinski case."

The whiskey was a slow burn down Glenn's throat as he leaned back in his chair.

"Do I?"

Mr. Whittermore's face fell. That night was the most expressive Glenn had ever seen him. Whittermore tended to be a man who valued polite smiles and practiced pleasantries. It suited

their job well, and up until that evening, Glenn had never had any issue with it. *I'm part of the problem*, Glenn thought as a bitter sting shooting across his gums.

Think of the town's reputation were the first words out of Whittermore's mouth.

Beacon Hills. It had a high employment rate and beautiful nature preserves. The public schools were blue ribbon rated. New wings were built in Stiles Stilinski's name, just two years after he'd disappeared. Money was easy to acquire, especially when there was a heartbreaking local tragedy acting as the benefactor.

Think of the backlash our community would face if Stilinski went to prison.

The same community that had an annual candlelight vigil in the garden by the school. The same community that were happy to paint murals, write cards, and leave flowers, but was *not* happy when their lost, loved citizen returned. A dark shroud covered the township, casting a shadow that made people afraid to leave their homes, terrified to make eye contact at the grocery store.

Think of the foreign implications if we punish the savior that brought the Ito woman and Blackwood heir to freedom.

Mr. Whittermore worked himself up into a fervor, one that Glenn was accustomed to seeing in a courtroom. Glenn let him talk for a few minutes. The moment Whittermore paused for breath, Glenn sighed.

"You haven't mentioned throwing the case for Stiles's sake." Whittermore's jaw snapped shut with a sharp *click*. Glenn poured more whiskey into his glass. "The Argents signed a notarized statement of their intent to not press charges. The FBI are close to wrapping up the case and shipping off the last of the evidence." Glenn rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I believe that it would be a great tragedy to exercise the full extent of the law against Stiles Stilinski."

It had been months since Stiles Stilinski reemerged, since Kate Argent and her previously believed-to-be-deceased father were found dead, and since Beacon Hills had been turned upside down. Kate Argent had been a pillar of the community, active in charity drives... and at the same time she'd been a monster.

With such a revelation, no one wanted to look too closely at their neighbors.

Tomorrow Glenn would draft up a press release, something quiet, modest, to do his best to not contribute to the tabloid madhouse that had camped out on the streets. *Maybe this way*, Glenn thought with grim hope, *that young man can breathe a little easier*.

"I can not tell you how many messages I've received from people all over the world." Glenn shook his head. "I can count on one hand how many countries have *not* contacted me. One was a member of the British Royal Family, Mr. Blackwood's second-cousin, apparently." He finished his whiskey and grabbed his coat off the rack. "None of them brought up any of your points."

Whittermore wouldn't meet his gaze as Glenn slipped on his jacket. Voices from all over the world were still in his voicemail, pleading in various languages and tones... that Stiles be allowed to live free.



....

Lydia Martin valued practicality and logic above all else.

She attempted to contact Scott once she heard the news, and when he didn't pick up, she called Jackson. Jackson, while alarmed, didn't panic. Lydia was glad that Scott hadn't picked up the phone the first seven times she called. She needed someone who was detached, someone who wasn't emotional.

Emotion made Scott McCall's fists clench at the local diner. He'd filled out, his shoulders broad and his muscles toned. *You look good*, would have been the first words out of Lydia's mouth if she'd run into him at the grocery store or at a reunion, bringing him in for a hug and

a kiss on the cheek. She never thought she'd see Scott again except for those awkward run-ins during the holidays, and even then she had a feeling Scott would find a way to avoid any sight of her.

"May I sit?" Lydia gestured to the empty booth seat across from Scott. He nodded, a tight jerk of his head. "Thank you."

Lydia had shut down the In Memoriam Facebook page they'd set up in Stiles's name years ago. She'd already filed paperwork to change names of scholarships and charity drives.

Scott's body might have improved, but his eyes had dark stains beneath them. His lips were dry and cracked. Hair stuck to the sides of his face.

"So," Scott's shoulders hunched inward, "you're here to do damage control."

It wasn't a question.

"Yes." She didn't have time to drag things out. "Jackson spoke to his father about convincing the judge to throw away the case. I don't imagine it should be hard, but it won't matter if the Argents decide to press charges."

"They won't." Lydia raised an eyebrow. Scott's cheeks spotted pink while remaining pallid in other areas. "They *won't*." Scott shuddered. "I was there, when... when they were told."

Ah, yes. The wonders of social networks had informed Lydia that Scott was engaged to Allison Argent, the niece of the recently deceased Kate. *Small world*, Lydia thought around bouts of nausea as she had tried Scott's phone again and again. Lydia had time to throw up, take a cold shower, and gather her thoughts. She wore her perfume like a shield, threw on a clear lacquer over her conservatively filed nails.

She tailored the perfect outfit. A statement. *I am not a resident here*.

"Is it official? Did they sign anything?"

When he rolled his eyes, Lydia saw how the rims were red. Raw.

"Yeah." Scott wiped his mouth. "Notarized. It's official." He smiled, sick and clammy. He was looking more skeletal by the minute. "You always know the right questions. I thought," Scott hiccuped, "I thought I'd made that up. In my head, you know? Like I kept thinking I built you up into something you're not. But I didn't. You really are just how I remembered."

It was never about cruelty.

Lydia had known Stiles Stilinski since grade school. She knew him the way most people knew him. If someone said his name, Lydia would need a moment to recall his face. Beacon Hills was small enough that everyone *knew* each other, even if it was only by face and name. Stiles was the annoying little kid who had a crush on her in kindergarten, then he was the kid without a mother, and then he was simply *Stiles*.

He's like a gnat, Lydia remembered saying in eighth grade. *Always around. Annoying.*

People laughed with her because, back then, people *always* laughed with her. The annoying little gnat who had Scott McCall as a best friend.

The best thing that Stiles Stilinski ever did for the city of Beacon Hills and his classmates was disappear, and then, as they all presumed until a few weeks ago, die.

Even the most underwhelming child could accomplish great things if they were attached to a tragedy. It was why Lydia found Scott the moment the news broke in their gym. It was why she squeezed his arm, her eyes on the FBI Agents and her teachers.

It was well known that Stiles was a lock-key kid.

The fact that he'd gone missing on his birthday, Lydia only remembering thanks to Facebook, cemented the fact that Stiles's father hadn't been home. The Sheriff stood in their gymnasium, off to the side with his arms crossed, not looking at anyone in particular. She took Scott's arm into her grip and whispered to him.

Tragedies could make or break a school.

Lydia didn't want to be trapped in Beacon Hills, and if the faculty and high school collapsed under an arduous investigation, then she'd have a harder time getting out.

With the FBI frustrated and the egos of her peers satiated with vigils and fundraisers, Lydia went to work on gardens, community outreach programs, scholarships, all in Stiles's name. Stiles gave them so much. *It's what he would have wanted*, Lydia told their superintendent with Scott by her side. The moment they left his office, Scott yanked his hand away from hers. *You have no idea*, Scott held the door open for her, his knuckles white, *what Stiles would have wanted*.

Murals were painted in his memory. Trellises of plants adorned the school in his honor.

Then Stiles came back from the dead.

"Are you going to see him?" Lydia pierced through years of fermenting judgement. Resentment. Scott slouched. "It might be good for him to see a friendly face."

Scott's elbows hit the table hard, hard enough that some of his coffee fell from his cup. When he sucked in his breath, it was wet, like he had no hope of closing his mouth if he wanted to keep breathing.

"It doesn't feel friendly." His fingers dug into his face. "Not anymore."



....

“I gotta,” Finstock sucked in air, “I gotta stop.” His legs felt like jelly as he stumbled and grabbed a tree to keep himself from falling over. “Oh God I’m so fucking old.” Thick fog slithered over his busted-up sneakers. He sucked in air like a fish stranded on land. He smeared his palm against his face even though it did nothing to relieve his exhaustion. “This is revenge, isn’t it? For all the drills.”

“C’mon, Coach,” Stiles wasn’t even out of breath, the brat. “I need you to get me through Trigonometry. Can’t have you dying on me yet.”

Stiles smiled at him, and even though the sun still hadn’t risen in the early morning, Finstock saw that there wasn’t a single trace of strain or uncertainty.

The first week, Finstock almost quit he was so nervous.

He threw up twice the first morning, and had nearly called out of the entire deal. His conscious stopped him. So what if he was nervous? So what if he woke up at the crack of dawn so he could be *debriefed* by Dr. Susan Vendegast? It was nothing... nothing compared to what Stiles had to put up with for years.

Years, all in their backyard.

Under the ground, but never far away from home.

“You’re a machine.” Finstock pushed himself up from the tree. “Let’s walk for ten minutes. Then we’ll pick up the pace.”

Stiles nodded and dug through his backpack, pulling out his study guide. He pushed it into Finstock’s clammy hands.

“Quiz me.”

Susie cut to the chase quickly. *Stiles is lucky that his mental deterioration is as limited as it is, but it’s still substantial in terms of Post Traumatic Stress. He might disassociate, he might have sudden mood swings, the possibilities of his behavior are largely unpredictable.* She listed this out with a calm expression, not smiling, not frowning. Meditative, as though Finstock wasn’t terrified with every word that dropped from her lips. *Physical contact is tricky. If he initiates, then it’s fine. He knows that he is free to ask for contact, no matter how awkward it might seem.*

Finstock had slapped his own face to get the color back in his cheeks moments before the Sheriff opened the door.

The first thing he noticed was how *clean* everything was. There wasn’t a book or blanket out of place. It wasn’t a rushed job either, it was clearly long-term. The Sheriff might have lost his son and wife, but if his house was clean then maybe he could make it one more day. Stiles sat in the kitchen, his boney, thin body out of place. It was like a horror movie ad had been crossed with an IKEA catalogue.

He turned and his lips twitched into a crooked, shadowy attempt of a polite smile. *Hey, Coach.*

“You know, it’s okay to take your time with this kind of thing.” They stopped by a river. A tree, mid-rot, had fallen down. Stiles crossed it without hesitation. Finstock followed, less confident. Stiles held out his hand and he eagerly took it, marveling at how strong his grip was despite his thin fingers. “You’re still... recovering. Getting a GED on top of that, it’s a lot.”

Morning sunlight dripped through the trees. It was mid-summer, and in a few hours it would be too hot to even *think* about running. Finstock felt humidity seep into the air. It would rain later.

“I know.” Stiles’s cheekbones were still sharp, but the rest of him was softening. Slowly but surely. “I lost a lot of time.” Stiles pressed forward, climbing a hill. He still had Finstock’s

hand captured in his grasp. “I don’t want to lose more.”

Finstock didn’t offer his hand for a handshake at the start of their first tutoring session.

He lugged out his books and materials on their kitchen table and went to work. Stiles was wide awake despite the hour, his eyes sharp as Finstock went over their syllabus. He had backtracked to his lesson plan a few months before Stiles was taken, and then built it from there. Funnily enough, Stiles never spaced out during lessons. It was when they’d take short breaks, often drinking water on the back porch, that Stiles would slip into a trance.

Finstock almost didn’t notice the first time. Stiles’s breathing slowed, to a shallow lull, and his eyes stared forward, unblinking and unfocused. It wasn’t until he started swaying, gently, that Finstock realized that this was a dissociative episode that Dr. Vendegast had warned him about.

Hey, Finstock snapped his fingers, *Stiles, come on, kiddo*. He reached without thinking, his fingers barely touching Stiles’s arm before Stiles jerked his arm to the side. He inhaled like he’d been held underwater, animalistic in his desperation and fear, and Finstock was babbling before his brain could catch up with his words. *Jesus Christ, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m an idiot, I didn’t mean to hurt you—*

It’s all right. Finstock wasn’t sure if Stiles was talking himself or not. *I’m fine. I’m here. I’m fine.*

“Stiles, we’re going to have to turn back soon. My legs are dying.”

“Yeah, mine too.”

Finstock snorted as they broke through the tree line.

“You’re a dirty liar.”

Finstock drew in a breath to laugh, because his exhaustion was making him a little delirious, but then he saw where Stiles had led them. His jaw snapped shut. Stiles finally let his hand slip free.

He followed Stiles through the Beacon Hills cemetery. Sunlight warmed their backs as they climbed the winding road. Finstock saw the flowers before he saw the gravestone. Mounds upon mounds of bouquets, some fresh, some decaying, clogged the path and spilled over onto other graves, all amassing on Stiles’s tombstone.

Stiles kicked the flowers away so that his mother’s grave was free of the debris, and sat down with his back against the stone. Finstock joined him, his knees aching as fog swirled over their legs. Well-wishes, remembrances, deflated balloons, and dissolving teddybears littered the path all the way back to the entrance. The smell of flowers wasn’t light and airy. They had turned over-ripe, the smell nauseating.

“They’re going to leave soon.”

By now, he knew who *they* were. The *they* that Finstock had only seen in the papers, blurry shots, and would see remnants some mornings. A half-empty coffee cup in the sink, ornate tea leaves, a heavy gold ring. Pieces of them left behind, a promise that they'd return.

As soon as the case was thrown out, the journalists left.

Stiles knew, before he went missing, how fast the world moved. How tragedies competed for air time. One kid going missing was nothing compared to the heartbreaking loss that was just a few days down the road, and so on, and so on. The world kept turning. Some kid coming back from presumed death, that was yesterday's news.

Even the families of the victims wanted them home. They didn't have the expenses to keep staying away from their jobs.

"Keeping in contact shouldn't be hard." Finstock nudged Stiles's shoulder. Stiles leaned on him. Physical contact was always either zero or total touch. Stiles draped himself across Finstock's back, his cheek resting on Finstock's sweaty shoulder. "You've got their number."

If Finstock closed his eyes, he could feel Stiles's heartbeat against his back, a steady, strong cadence. Stiles's breath blew down Finstock's spine.

"I know." Whenever Stiles touched him it felt heavy. As if every grip, every squeeze was predetermined centuries ago. He pulled Finstock close, his long arms a cage of flesh and bone. "I'll miss seeing them."

"You'll see them again." Finstock brought his hand up, to run his thumb along the muscle that ran down Stiles's elbow to his wrist. He felt Stiles's lungs lurge, his body going rigid. "It's all right."

Crying was common. Susie had spelled it out simply. Swift changes in emotion were to be expected. Stiles expressed himself as though no one were watching. Years of isolation with the others had stripped away societal boundaries. He had to relearn the meaning of shame and privacy.

Finstock was used to crying in the socially acceptable way, either in complete privacy or apologizing around struggled breathing as he wrestled with control over his emotions.

Stiles's breath evened out into what Finstock now recognized as a dissociative episode.

"I got you." Tears soaked through Finstock's shirt. Stiles's weight increased the farther he ventured from the present. "I got you."

By the time the sun cast the entire hillside in light, they were gone.



....

The first “real” food Stiles had was chicken broth and crackers. He wanted pizza, but his dad insisted that they had to start slow. Broth and crackers looked bland, but once Stiles slid the spoon into his mouth... it wasn’t just about taste, but about the feel of warm liquid slipping down his throat. It was countless memories of being sick, his mother humming under her breath as he laid under blankets on the couch.

Soup and crackers was the best meal Stiles could remember eating.

Of course, the more he ate, the more his stomach remembered and refined its taste. Tastes that mostly remained the same. There were some new differences.

Chocolate, mayonnaise, and the butterscotch candies his grandmother used to get would turn his stomach inside out for days.

Pizza, luckily, still registered on the list of things his stomach still wanted.

“If you’re ever in the DC area, I’d be happy to show you my favorite pizza place.”

Special Agent Jun Kamata wiped his hands on his napkin despite being the one of the cleanest eaters Stiles had ever seen. Stiles still had to repeat the mantra of *slow down, how loud am I being, it won’t be taken away* over and over until sometimes he lost the taste of what he was eating.

Losing the simple routine of ,em>Wake up, go to the bathroom, do exercises, eat, speak, dance, eat, go the bathroom, speak, sleep hurt. Waking up alone, going to the bathroom alone, showering alone...

Relearning societal boundaries is a hard but necessary process, Susie insisted when Stiles would have a rough day.

Societal boundaries are bullshit, Stiles argued. Because it only took a few weeks for him to forget them entirely. Susie shrugged, her smile waning into something sadder.

Maybe. But the majority rules.

Special Agent Shannon Strickland cleared his throat, jerking Stiles back to the present.

“Sorry,” Stiles said, because that was what people were supposed to do if they spaced out for God knows how long during a conversation, “pizza place, yeah. If I’m ever there, I’ll uh,” Stiles rubbed his thumb over the back of his hand, at the last pieces of raw skin that remained on his body. “I’ll hit you up.”

He had both of their numbers on a new phone. The phone was another reminder he had to remember new rules. *Keep it with me*. He had *things* now, things that he couldn’t leave lying around.

It was enough to give him a headache.

He swallowed the last bite of pizza, spreading his fingers over his stomach before he got up and collected the dishes. *Wash up after yourself, including your body*. He broke down the pizza box and put it in the recycling, before he went back to the sink and dried the plates. He mouthed along the directions as he did each step, because sometimes he’d forget. He’d left the sink on a few times, he’d gone about his day with soap suds still clinging to his skin.

Don’t forget, Stiles repeated under his breath as he triple-checked the kitchen to make sure everything was as he left it.

“Are you gonna say goodbye to the others before you go?” Jun’s smile told Stiles what he needed to know. His father was changing into his uniform upstairs. Stiles listened to the house creak and groan. Shannon straightened in his chair. “Thanks for,” Stiles let out a long breath, his eyes resting on the scar tissue that stretched up his arms before he met their eyes, “everything. I know it wasn’t easy.”

He walked them to the door because it was polite and it was a way to make *sure* they left. *Sometimes the societal bullshit can work in our favor*, Stiles, Susie had reminded him with a grin.

“There’s still more work to do.” Shannon’s smile was soft despite the harsh lines on his face. “We’ll be in touch.”

Stiles shook both of their hands before closing the door, going over all the locks three times as his dad came downstairs.

“They’re gone already?” His father was a mixture of relieved and embarrassed. “Well, all right then. At least they paid for dinner.” Stiles snorted, a loud sound that wasn’t polite but made his dad’s smile reach his eyes. “Not sick of pizza yet?”

“Please,” Stiles rubbed his stomach. “I’ll never be sick of pizza.”

His dad lingered between the living room and foyer, the way he always did when he had to leave. He’d spent every minute of sick time and vacation days. He was getting his retirement in order, but there would still be a few weeks when Stiles would have to be alone for a few hours at a time.

“I’ll lock up after you,” Stiles said, or else his father wouldn’t leave. “I’ll either sleep or work on meditation stuff until you get home.”

Guilt only got them so far. Guilt wouldn’t *make* Stiles better. So he hugged his dad goodbye and locked up after him, turning to face his empty house with tense shoulders.

“Get Finstock’s study guides,” Stiles sang under his breath, gathering textbooks in his arms, “double-check the back door,” he hummed as his fingers triple-checked every lock on the first floor. “Go upstairs,” he did, “check the windows,” he did. Stiles wasn’t sure what songs he sang his routine to, he had no idea what melodies *remained* in his memory, or if they were just random strings of notes rushing to fill the silence. “Check the bedroom locks.”

His door had five locks. His window had three. He had a knife within reach. He told his father that it made him feel safe.

He told Susie that as well, but she waited, an expectant look on her face as Stiles drew his shoulders up to his ears. *If it ever happens again...* he shuddered at the thought. *I won’t let myself be taken alive.*

Susie understood.

He opened the curtains and let moonlight spill across his bed. *Change into pajamas* was the next reminder even though he was more comfortable naked. If he slept naked he often forgot to put on clothes until his father had to remind him. Pajamas made it easier to remember, and if he forgot to change, at least he was wearing a form of clothing. He pulled on loose boxers and a t-shirt with the title of a show he didn’t recognize emblazoned across the chest.

He sat on his bed, took a deep breath, and closed his eyes.

On his fourth breath, he was... somewhere else.

Cool air washed over his bare skin. Stars twinkled above him. The moon was at his back. Grass was under his toes, though he knew it was too soft to be real, too uniform to be any realistic yard or field. His breath fogged out in front of him but he didn't feel cold. The three Alphas laid out before him, Satomi curled up on her side, Deucalion gently touching her back with his hand, and Peter resting his chin on Satomi's head. *Mine*, Stiles thought at the sight of them. He didn't speak it aloud, because the word itself was just a shadow of what he really meant, of what they were and would always be to him. *Mine*.

"Finally, Songbird." Deucalion sat up. Their bodies were bright under the moon. "You took your time."

Stiles smiled and it didn't hurt his face. He fell into their embraces and it didn't sting his skin. Deucalion's palm was heaven against Stiles's cheek, Satomi's lips against his cheek were a warm greeting, and Peter's arms around his waist were anchoring. Skin against skin. Breaths overlapping. It was different from when he saw them in group therapy, when they were clothed, knowing they could only be truthful to a point before they'd have to pull back.

The reward for progression was free time. Susie would go inside and leave them to their own devices for a half an hour. Those were the cherished windows in time when Stiles could steal hugs, squeezes, and kisses. But it still had to be within reason. It had to be easily disengaged or socially acceptable. A hug around the middle, a pat on the back, a kiss on the cheek.

Not long drags of palms down bare skin, not faces buried in Stiles's neck, not caresses that spilled across his skin like water. Mouths breathing into him, breath warming him, fingers gliding across his skin until he felt whole again.

They were going back to their homes soon.

Separation will naturally cause some return to old habits, Susie assured them all, *but I believe you are ready to face it*.

One of the many things they didn't tell Susie was that they saw each other every night.

Stiles would bring them to a place where they could speak and touch freely. It was a muted place, where the sky was too luminous and the darkness too soft. When he touched them, he knew it was a muddled version of what the reality would be.

The more Stiles ate, the more he slowly repaired his decaying body, the more things returned to him. His libido was a shocking force. He'd forgotten what it felt like, the electric, physical *thrill* of deep attraction, a throbbing need that Stiles hadn't felt in years. He didn't know how he dealt with it before, the distracting hum of *wantneednow* every time he looked at Peter. Every time their hands brushed, or when Peter's fingers would linger over his mark when they'd have to say goodbye.

Kisses were overwhelming.

The hospital had been when Stiles was barely alive, stitched together by adrenalin and his Alphas' will.

Now, every kiss burned and made his heart race.

It was safer like this. When sensations were lessened.

Still, as Stiles slid into Peter's lap, his breath hitched in his lungs.

"We'll get better." He reached back, his hand fumbling, until Satomi and Deucalion were at his back. Peter trembled, his lips stealing quick kisses up Stiles's neck, his fingers steady on Stiles's hips as Stiles let his head fall back against Deucalion's shoulder. "Together. No matter how far apart we are. We're *together*."

Satomi's held Stiles in her arms as Peter's hands gripped Stiles's legs, squeezing the muscles, monitoring Stiles's recovery with a scrutinizing eye. Deucalion ran his fingers through Stiles's hair, gripping and pulling, testing to make sure it was healthy. Satomi kept her hands above Stiles's heart, savoring each thud against her palms.

Please, Stiles only had to think once for Peter to kiss him, his tongue dipping into his mouth without hesitation. The Alphas moved around him, helping him remain steady as he bit Peter's lower lip, pulling until Peter shuddered against him, his erection hot and slick against Stiles's thigh.

"Stiles." Peter's breath fanned against his throat. "*Stiles*."

His name sounded different, half a name and half a title, a prayer. A summoning.

"I want to have sex with you," Stiles whispered. "Even if it's just here, it will mean something. Until we can work up to the real thing." He kissed the corner of Peter's mouth. Peter whimpered. "Is that okay?"

Peter nodded, his eyes bright as he kissed Stiles, stealing the breath from his mouth. His teeth were sharp, his tongue a strong, slick muscle that fed Stiles affection. Long licks that swept over his teeth were enough to make Stiles dizzy until Deucalion flicked Peter's arm and growled, "take it easy, Peter."

The kisses down his chest were reverent. Peter's fingers were gentle, thorough. His lips followed every touch, every dip and knick against his skin. His thumb rolled over Stiles's nipples, his eyes shining at how that made Stiles arch his back, his legs tightening around Peter's hips.

"Stiles," Peter whispered breathlessly, his tongue laving over Stiles's chest, "I love you." He flicked his tongue over Stiles's nipple, running his thumb over the other. "I love you—"

Loveyouloveyouloveyou echoed in Stiles's mind as he came. Peter groaned, his hips jerking forward. He ran his fingers through Stiles's ejaculate, mouthing further down Stiles's chest. Stiles jumped at the first brush of fingers against his thigh. Peter froze. Stiles forced out a harsh exhale.

“Keep going. I’m fine. Just new to this.”

Satomi kissed Stiles’s cheek, petting the skin above his heart.

“You’re doing so well, Stiles.”

Deucalion was a steady presence at his back, his lips moving against Stiles’s temple.

“Breathe deep, and if you want to stop, Peter will stop.”

It felt good, being filled, having them all there because Stiles couldn’t imagine doing this by himself. He needed them, he needed to reassurance, the shared breath, touch, and affection or else he’d fall to pieces. He needed Peter’s fingers inside him just as much as he needed Satomi and Deucalion holding him up, helping him breathe and move.

Peter’s arms shook when he pressed into him. He kissed Stiles, swallowing his gasps and moans. Stiles hadn’t realized he’d been begging, a repeating stream of *please, Peter, please*, until Satomi whispered, *Shh*, against Stiles’s shoulder. Peter’s hips jerked forward and Stiles arched his back, his fingers digging into Peter’s back. *We have you*, Deucalion promised as Stiles sank his teeth into Peter’s shoulder.

Mine, Stiles thought with blood in his mouth, with his Alphas around him, they answered his call. **Mine.**



....

The final night with the other former captives was more serene than Noah had pictured. He thought there would be tears, protests, and possible violence, not a calm final group session out in the backyard. Noah snuck a glance out of the back window.

He couldn't get over how *normal* the four of them appeared. Deucalion, Satomi, and Peter were quick to recover from the physical endurance that they'd faced in comparison to Stiles, but now that Stiles was catching up...

It was like looking through a window into another place and time. In some other world where *none* of them had ever gone missing. Noah began to see who the others had been. Deucalion held himself with grand self importance, even if it was just over something simple like refilling a cup of tea. Satomi was a matron, not afraid to chide Deucalion if he got too rude or fix Stiles's shirt if the collar got too rumpled. Peter was comfortable enough to make snarky remarks.

Those moments were rare, but increasing in frequency.

Finstock whistled from the living room.

“A full twenty points higher than last week.” Noah wandered back into the living room to see Finstock in full grading mode. A red pen dangled from Finstock’s teeth, bobbing as he squinted at the paper before sighing and shoving his reading glasses on his face. “Still smart as a whip.”

He clicked his tongue and floundered when the pen tumbled out of his mouth. Noah caught it, grimacing at the slick feel of saliva on it.

“Good progress?”

Finstock took the pen.

“Great progress. The lack of focus is, um,” Finstock winced, “more intense but he’s getting there.” He rubbed a sticker onto the corner of the study guide. “Looks like they’re wrapping up.”

It was early, but sessions didn’t always run on a perfect schedule, sometimes running over or under by fifteen minutes. Hiroaki, Talia, and Isaac hadn’t arrived yet, and Finstock waved at Stiles through the window, giving him a thumbs-up while he put the practice test on the kitchen. Susie let herself back into the house.

“I’m going to let them have their twenty minutes.” Finstock helped Susie into her jacket and she ran her fingers over the sleeves, fixing the cuffs as she sighed. “Noah, there might be a dip in Stiles’s mood and mannerisms for the first few weeks after they leave. But I think they’re at a point where they’re ready for separation.”

“Yeah, but it’s not real separation.” Noah and Susie turned to look at Finstock. He crossed his arms, his ears red. “I mean, we’ve got technology. They can talk whenever they want.”

Susie smiled.

“Exactly. It will certainly encourage them to learn and harness how technological communication has changed.”

Her visits would decrease, as she’d be traveling between California, Washington, and England. She shook Noah’s hand and Finstock walked her to her car.

Noah started a pot of tea for Satomi and Deucalion, and coffee for Peter. He kept his back to the windows as he prepared a light meal.

As much as Noah wanted to believe what he saw out of the window, that his son was happy, whole, and so similar to how Noah remembered him... he couldn’t shake the reality.

“*They’re mine,*” still kept Noah up at night. The sound of three bodies hitting the ground as they all fainted *together*. Noah kept the paramedics and his officers on the move so either it slipped from their minds or they thought better than to bring up the odd phenomenon.

Once Stiles left the hospital, the strange details didn't vanish.

He'd murmur in his sleep some nights, though whenever Noah listened in he could make out... conversations. Very clear and direct answers, sometimes even jokes would come out of Stiles mouth, always between pauses, as though someone was speaking. When Stiles would have a dissociative episode, as Susie labeled them, he'd move with an assurance that Noah had never seen before. Despite his eyes being unfocused, Stiles would glide across the yard, up the stairs, or through his living room with alien elegance.

Noah still didn't know why there was a bite mark on his wrist.

He'd watch his son's fingers caress the scar tissue, sometimes a quick swipe with a smile, others longer, deeper touches as his breathing evened out and his mind went elsewhere.

Where do you go, Noah never asks. Are they somehow... with you?

The porch door opened and four different sets of footsteps padded across his kitchen. He heard them pull up chairs to the counter. Waiting for him to turn around. The thin hairs on the back of Noah's neck stood up when he realized this was the first time that Strickland, Kamata, Susie, and their families were nowhere near them. They were alone with him.

They could speak freely.

If Noah kept his back turned, he could go on pretending that he didn't see anything, that all the little things he noticed were just... strange coincidences. If he didn't turn around he'd be allowing himself to slide back into his old habits. Old habits that left Stiles alone on his birthday.

Noah turned, his heart thundering in his chest as he met his son's frightened but determined gaze.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait, it's been busy at work and in life. Plus, I wanted to make sure the update delivered and wasn't rushed, so I hope this was worth the wait.

I can feel this story wrapping up, so yeah. It's bittersweet, but I'm happy we made it this far. Let me know what you think, even if you weren't a fan, I know I pushed it in places in terms of physical intimacy and how it was sexual and not sexual at the same time. Sorry not sorry!

Art is by the INCREDIBLE [callmechikki](#)!

I'll still be active on tumblr for the time being, but there are other ways to find me. [Here](#) you can see a little breakdown of other places to find me and the other things I do in

relation to these fics (journals/behind the scenes, playlists, head canons). [So click on over](#) to get the full rundown!

Chapter 16: Freedom

Chapter Summary

“Does it bother you?” Stiles asked once he turned the car off in the Hale’s driveway. The Jeep had climbed the long dirt path that was framed by trees, some areas almost completely overrun. It was somewhere between dusk and night, the sky hesitating before deciding on which way it wanted to turn. Stiles grimaced, his hands falling from the wheel. “That I’m not the same person I used to be?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Days of Freedom:

Stiles: 764

Peter: 764

Deucalion: 764

Satomi: 764

When Stiles was born, Noah thought *Jesus, he’s so tiny*. He knew that babies were small, fragile, but when he held Stiles in his hands for the first time... he thought surely he was *too* small, *too* fragile. Claudia must have seen it on his face, the bafflement that this little bundle of pink toes and a scrunched up face was going to be a real person one day.

“*He’s ours,*” Claudia had whispered, exhausted yet glowing as she took Stiles back into her arms. “*He’s going to be great, Noah. You’ll see.*”

Stiles hadn’t stayed tiny for long. He grew, he ran before he walked, and he talked *so much* that Noah had a hard time keeping up. Claudia... she never seemed to struggle with it, jumping from one story to another, while pausing to field questions... Noah didn’t have the patience. He thought that together, they provided a good balance for Stiles.

Then she died.

It will be fine, Noah thought as Claudia’s casket lowered into the ground, Stiles’s little body shuddering with sobs that made people’s mouths twist in discomfort. *It’s fine, I can do this. It’s fine.*

Fine turned into a slimy word that gummed up his teeth and tongue. *Fine* was an excuse. *Fine* was barely keeping his head above water.

Noah Stilinski jerked awake.

Nothing in particular had woken him. He didn't dream anymore. Retirement should have brought calm into him, but every morning he was yanked out of sleep, out of breath and his heart pounding as his eyes struggled to adjust to the dark. He turned on his bed, wincing as various *pops* went down his spine when he fumbled for his glasses.

He pressed the heels of his palms to his eyes, chasing away the murky shadows that tempted him back to sleep. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and wondered when age had finally caught up to him.

Probably when you stopped drinking. Waking up with whiskey chased any hints of arthritis away. Sobriety brought brightness to his life. Pain too.

The stairs creaked as he gripped the banister. He smelled coffee and on the last step he could hear the pot gurgling on its automated timer. Bread and butter were set out. His favorite mug was cleaned and by the coffee maker.

The porch door was open.

Hot coffee warmed the ceramic. Noah pressed his palms against it, letting the warmth loosen his skin. He shuffled to the porch.

Stiles had a penlight in his mouth, re-reading his study guides. His practice sheets were sprawled across the worn wood, held down by books and highlighters. Post-its whispered in the breeze. He watched his son's eyebrows lower, his breath fogging out in the air as he whispered definitions and equations.

The mixture of timezones, restlessness, and the aftermath of... everything, had Stiles up at all hours. Some days he'd sleep a few hours, others half a day. The early morning or late evening was the only time Stiles could be outside without protective sunglasses.

"Want breakfast?" Stiles hummed without lifting his gaze from his books. "Eggs good?"

Noah hadn't bothered to learn cooking much before Stiles had been taken, and it wasn't until he returned that he started looking up recipes and watching videos on his iPad. They learned together, measuring out ingredients and laughing when a dish blew up in their face and sighing when it finally came together.

The smell of buttered toast lured Stiles inside. Morning light came through tinted windows.

"Finstock had a good feeling about the test," Noah offered when Stiles slumped onto a stool.

"I know." Stiles took out pill-box, where his vitamins were separated by days. Over time, he was able to take less. It was down to a manageable seven tablets. "Just in case. It was, uh, I was distracted a lot."

Noah remembered how pale Stiles had been when he came out of the testing center. He was pallid, his palms sticky, and he'd made it about a half hour in the car before he wheezed, *pull*

over: Moments later, Stiles was on his knees on the side of the road, retching what remained of his breakfast and dry heaved until his legs gave out.

I'm okay, Stiles had insisted when tears slid down his cheeks, gravel sticking to his shoulders. It was another three minutes before he got his breath back, an additional two before they were back in the car, windows rolled down. Later that night, Noah had ordered pizza and Stiles had gone with him to the store to pick up peanut butter M&Ms.

“Just be careful about eye-strain, or you’ll have to wear glasses like your old man.”

Stiles snorted and his smile eased the bags under his eyes. They were on their second helping of breakfast when gravel crackled in the driveway. Stiles perked up, and knuckles rapped on the door three times before it opened. Finstock burst in, dressed in blown out jeans and a T-Shirt that simply said SHIT on it in big black letters.

He was out of breath, an envelope clutched in his hand.

“Stiles,” Stiles stood up quickly, the stool clattering to the floor as Finstock grinned, “Stiles, you *did it*, I told you, didn’t I tell ‘im, Noah, I fucking *told you—*”

Finstock was slammed against the door when Stiles leapt into his arms. Noah grinned and poured Finstock a cup of coffee as the tutor laughed, raspy and deep as he grunted out a, “*Christ, you’re all muscle, learn to take a day off, kid.*”

....



Days of Freedom:

Stiles: 915

Peter: 915

Deucalion: 915

Satomi: 915

“Three black bags for clothes, blue bag for medical supplies, two green bags for gifts, and two soft purple bags for snacks... Dad, I can’t find the purple—”

“I got ‘em right here.”

Stiles’s eyes jerked up to the front passenger’s seat where his dad sat with the bags on his lap. Noah smiled at Stiles’s dramatic sigh of relief.

“Okay. I’m just going to go over it one more time—”

“Stiles,” Noah moved the bags to the floor, buckling in his seatbelt. “You’ve checked three times. If we forgot something, we’ll get it on the road. Susie says you need to practice improvised inconveniences.”

His son shuddered out a breath before he slipped into the driver’s seat.

“Right.” He started the car, his lungs only hitching once. “Okay.”

Getting a GED wasn’t the only goal Stiles had. Throughout Noah’s retirement he’d kept busy with his son, getting driving lessons, cooking all sorts of things from scratch, and practicing what Susie liked to call *Public Daily Routines*. Whether that meant stopping at a coffee shop or getting groceries, Stiles needed practice.

Grocery shopping was harder than the long study sessions for his GED. Lists were a blessing and a curse. They’d keep Stiles on task, but if one item was out of stock it could mean hours of searching and retracing steps. The first time Stiles had tried shopping without Noah with him, he’d called Noah from the bathroom, breathing heavily and begging to be picked up.

Baby steps, Susie reminded them both.

Stiles drove, at first just down the driveway, then to the library, then to the grocery store, and they’d practiced and practiced until he was ready for his first *trip*. Stiles had mapped out every rest stop, every gas station, and every possible place to eat that had healthy options that Noah would be forced to endure.

Stiles would drive the first half, the majority of which he wouldn’t need sunglasses, and Noah would drive the second half.

It was a fourteen hour drive to Bainbridge Island. The smell of salty sea air was a rush that Noah had forgotten. The ferry was nice, and Stiles stayed outside the entire time, his knuckles white on the railing but his smile wide. Bits of water sprayed up as the boat rocked. Noah nudged Stiles.

“You excited?”

Stiles nodded and took a deep breath, leaning against Noah as he shivered.

“Yeah. Nervous too.” His grip tightened on the railing and he rocked back, his elbows locking. For a brief moment, Noah had the horrible worry that Stiles was going to throw himself overboard before his body relaxed. “It’s been so long since I’ve seen her, you know, not just in here,” he tapped his temple with a stiff smile. “I bet my face has changed. I hope it doesn’t freak her out.”

Satomi didn’t freak out.

The car was still rocking to a stop when Stiles lept from the car, the door hanging open as he ran up the cobblestone pathway. Noah shook his head, unbuckling his seatbelt and taking his

time getting out of the car as a breathless “— *look at your hair, oh my God you look so good, are these your grandchildren?*” filled the air.

Stiles forgot his hesitation. Satomi’s hands framed his face, relearning the swell of his cheeks. He had his fingers in her hair, speaking excitedly in Japanese. Noah felt time slow, his son’s tense shoulders and expressions falling away piece by piece the more Satomi touched him.

Yomiko and her children came out of the house first, Hiroaki and Azumi close behind. Time returned to its normal flow, Stiles pulling away to catch the grandchildren leaping into his arms, to kiss Hiroaki’s cheek.

Hiroaki’s hugs were still the same, enveloping despite his lean stature and wiry stature.

“Good to see you, Noah.”

Windchimes hung from their house and they had an herb garden that flourished on the east side of their house. They had neighbors who were warm and stopped by just to say hello. When they’d driven off the ferry, there wasn’t a looming sense of emptiness or dread that shrouded Beacon Hills.

How did you escape it, Noah wanted to ask. Hiroaki still looked at Satomi with unrestrained love that was returned tenfold whenever she glanced his way. *How did you dodge resentment?*

Instead, Noah cleared his throat.

“Good to see you too, Hiroaki.”

....



Days of Freedom:

Stiles: 1,007

Peter: 1,007

Deucalion: 1,007

Satomi: 1,007

It wasn't until they visited Deucalion Blackwood that Noah really realize that... to some, his son was more than just a survivor.

Dozens of small hands reached for him, endless touches that Stiles took with open arms and a small smile. The strangest thing was how... quiet the children were. When they'd pulled into the estate that had been redesigned to be an orphanage, the laughter and shrieking had been

loud. Noah's ears rang with it, and that was when he realized how long it had been since he heard anything like it in Beacon Hills.

"How was your flight, Mr. Stilinski?"

Isaac Lahey only seemed to grow taller as time went on. He grabbed their suitcases without a word and led Noah away to the staff living quarters. All the buildings were brick with wooden floors that creaked in certain places. While the buildings themselves were large, the rooms were small with worn furniture and rugs giving every space a homey atmosphere. Noah had hesitated at first, twisting to turn back to Stiles, but Isaac gently looped his arm through Noah's and started walking with a, "he'll be fine, Mr. Stilinski."

Noah passed small studies, dining rooms, and one large kitchen until they got to a spiral stairwell.

"The flight wasn't too bad." The second floor was for staff personal quarters. Isaac slowed his pace when Noah took his time on the steps, feeling the strain of age and sitting on a plane for ten hours. Isaac helped him up the last four steps and thankfully the spare room was just a few paces down, in the back right corner of the building. "Still working for Deucalion, huh?"

Isaac made a high-pitched sound as he opened the door, letting Noah in first.

"Erm," his voice cracked and just like that, he was the same youthful face that looked just as lost as Noah had felt when they'd first met. "I wouldn't say—I don't work for Mr. Blackwood. If he ever needs my help, not that he would but if he *did* I would be there, but I work for the Blackwood Youth Program." He cleared his throat, setting the suitcases down. "Is this room to your liking? Deucalion had it built for whenever Stiles would be visiting."

It was... intimately constructed, *nothing* in the room looked new, yet none of it felt overused. *A home away from home*, Noah thought as he sat on a quilted single bed.

"This is really nice." Noah smiled. "Thank you, Isaac."

"Please," Isaac shook his head, his hair falling out of place, "don't mention it. Really, it's the least we could do."

Isaac helped him unpack and put their clothes on hangers before they ventured back outside at a much slower pace.

By the time Noah was back outside, the sun was starting to set and Stiles was playing tag as Deucalion sat on the sidelines. It was strange to see, strange enough for Noah to stop suddenly. Isaac bumped into him, a flustered *I'm sorry, I'm sorry* being instantly waved off by Noah's hand.

"He looks good." Isaac joined Noah on a nearby bench. "Different from when I last saw him."

Noah smiled, weary but better.

“Well, he’s been working hard.” Stiles slid on his knees in the grass, piled under a group of children. Deucalion’s face lit up at the noise of Stiles’s laughter echoing across the field. “Deucalion looks good as well.”

“Thanks. Or,” Isaac ducked his head, “I’m sure Mr. Blackwood would be flattered. It wasn’t easy, it’s still not... it will never *be* easy but... he’s been doing well.” Isaac fiddled with a frayed thread on his blazer. He leaned forward, his eyes on the children as he whispered. “Is he... is he really the True Alpha?” Noah turned to look at Isaac, at how his cheeks bloomed red and he ducked his head. “I just, I don’t know what they’re supposed to look like or... *be like*, you know? Mr. Blackwood said that’s what Stiles is, and I’ve read old legends, like fairytales but it’s never been *real* before.” Isaac wrung his hands. “Sorry, that’s probably rude.”

Noah shrugged and turned back to look at Deucalion getting up, using a cane to playfully whack ankles of giggling teenagers, making them scamper away so he could help Stiles to his feet.

He could only go off what the Alphas and Stiles had told him that night, over two years ago before they all went home. Stiles wasn’t comfortable using a label, but Satomi had no issue bestowing a title on him. *I’m still human*, Stiles had reassured his father when the Alphas faces had transformed as physical proof, *but I can feel them now. All the time. We can be with each other even if we’re miles apart.*

“I couldn’t tell you.”

Noah watched Deucalion shoulder Stiles’s weight effortlessly, despite Stiles’s extra height and weight. Stiles hugged Deucalion like they were friendly neighbors who saw each other every evening... because, in a way, he did.

.....



Days of Freedom:

Stiles: 1,142

Peter: 1,142

Deucalion: 1,142

Satomi: 1,142

“Does it bother you?” Stiles asked once he turned the car off in the Hale’s driveway. The Jeep had climbed the long dirt path that was framed by trees, some areas almost completely overrun. It was somewhere between dusk and night, the sky hesitating before deciding on which way it wanted to turn. Stiles grimaced, his hands falling from the wheel. “That I’m not the same person I used to be?”

“Stiles,” Noah swallowed past the instinctive platitudes that had clogged his throat before Stiles was taken, the useless clichés that were great on a Hallmark card but weren’t a replacement for actual parenting. “Stiles, you’re my son. You’re alive. After everything... no one would be the same after that.”

Stiles rolled his lower lip between his teeth, his eyes flickering from Noah, to the lit porch just a few feet away.

“Beacon Hills doesn’t feel like home. When I was there, before, it felt like I wasn’t a part of it. And then when I was gone, suddenly I was everywhere. And now...” Stiles grinned, the night air bringing color rushing back to his skin. “I think Beacon Hills is a happier place when I’m not in it.”

All the plants died in the community garden that Lydia Martin had set up in Stiles’s honor. No matter how many attempts were made, how carefully the soil had been tilled, the only thing that could grow was grass.

The mural on the school had been graffitied over. The eyes of Stiles’s smiling face had bled black, though the security cameras didn’t show any vandals coming armed with spray cans. The entire piece was painted over the next day.

“Fuck Beacon Hills.” Stiles snorted out a startled laugh and Noah’s lips twitched into a smile. “I mean it. Fuck it. Fuck every square mile of it.”

Stiles laughed, a little too loud and a little too tight, but Noah didn’t care. He couldn’t stop smiling if he tried.

Travelling across the country didn’t feel like the vacation that Noah had insisted it would feel like to Melissa. The moment he passed the *Welcome to Beacon Hills* sign, he saw Stiles’s breaths deepen. When they rolled down the windows, the air was fresh and new. Rest stops held a new mystery, from a small patch of poppies to a kid that shyly accepted the extra bag of M&Ms that came out of the vending machine.

Backroads that would have bored Noah to tears were suddenly exciting, Stiles rolling down the windows to smell cow manure and wave at sheep.

It’s like when I’d go on the long walks with Peter, Deuc, and Satomi, only it’s really happening, Stiles laughed when they pulled over to pet a cow, its tongue licking Stiles’s hand and face. *It’s really happening.*

“Are you okay?” Noah couldn’t beat Stiles to the heaviest bag in time and watched his son shoulder it without effort. “About being different from who you were before?”

Stiles’s DVD collection went back into the worn cardboard boxes after the first three months. When he was a teenager, he’d loved fiction, more specifically horror. The first place Stiles was able to go to on his own was the library, but when he’d return it was always with a backpack full of nonfiction. When he laughed, the breath seemed to catch in his throat, the noise loud and it would fill a whole room. Raw mirth and amusement that never failed to

astonish Noah, that always left him smiling and dizzy because he could *see* his son smile and laugh in a way he never had before.

Scott McCall had been another change.

Noah had been crawling out of his own skin when Stiles had sat on the front steps of his house with his former best friend. He'd made pancakes, eggs, toast, french toast, three pots of coffee, and had eaten way too much too fast. He could barely hear them through the door, their voices a calming hum, and after a few hours, gravel crunched in the driveway and Stiles opened the door, alone.

He ate some cold eggs with red-rimmed eyes. *He did what he had to*, Stiles reported with a dry rasp.

"Yeah." Stiles took a deep breath, his grip tight on his bags as he faced the Hale's front porch. "Yeah, I am."

Muffled voices pressed against the Hale's red door with gold grim and bronze knob. Stiles knocked three times. The screech of chairs against the floors made Noah's breath freeze in his lungs. There were a few pairs of footsteps clambering towards the door, but it was a deep, assured voice that Noah could just make out on the other side chiding, *"Please don't howl in front of our guests."*

The door swung open.

Peter Hale swayed on his feet, his left hand holding the frame as a briefly pinched, nervous expression melted into a handsome smile.

Noah thought of how unfair it was, that the rest of the Alphas healed so quickly. Physically. Peter looked like he stepped out of a high-end catalogue, neatly groomed and not one blemish on his skin, the crows feet at his eyes could easily be interpreted as a laugh-filled life and not brought on by over a decade of captivity.

Stiles would have to wear sunglasses for the rest of his life. The psoriasis patches on his skin lessened, but the ones on his neck and between his fingers would most likely be permanent. The hair was distinctly thinner by his left temple.

"Stiles," Peter looked at Stiles like he was a sanctuary during a storm, "it's good to see you."

.....



Cool summer wind blew through linen curtains. The cicadas still slept, and for a few more hours before the sun rose, their property would remain still, save for a tickle of wind that carried humid air and the scent of herbs into their bedroom. Peter was awake, had been for... he wasn't sure how long. He still struggled with time. If he wasn't wearing a watch, if he wasn't doing some sort of activity, time slipped away.

He wasn't sure how long his eyes had been open. He wasn't sure how long he'd simply sat up, his back against the headboard and the sheets pooled around his waist as he breathed, in and out, matching the rhythm from—

Fingers bumped his hip, clumsy at first, then certain. Steady.

“Why are you awake?”

Stiles always snapped awake, from sleep to alert within seconds. Peter blinked and rubbed his eyes.

“I’m not sure.” Peter pressed his palms to his cheeks, willing warmth back into his face. “It’s a big day.”

They were going to have a lot of visitors. He’d need to start cooking the moment the sun came up, and he’d have to double-triple-quadruple check the house, make sure that it was *presentable*, whatever that meant. It meant the buzzing anxiety that anticipation brought, with the release that it wouldn’t be much different than last year, or the year to come. Routines, to Peter before... before Stiles and the Alphas... would have been a death sentence.

Funny, how with time, opinions change.

“Mm.”

Stiles stretched. Moonlight spilled down his neck, his chest. The sight drew Peter’s eyes immediately, pulling him out of the haze and into the present... and what a beautiful present it was. Stiles’s eyes were half-open as he dragged his fingers down his chest, his ribs, his palm pressing just below his belly button. Peter swallowed. Stiles smirked.

Peter let his growl rumble against Stiles’s skin. He tasted the laughter that bubbled into the air and skimmed his teeth against delicate skin. His body was only sluggish for a moment before blood came rushing back under his skin. He licked up Stiles’s neck, rolling his hips against Stiles’s swelling cock. Stiles shuddered, half-ticklish, half-sensitive, as Peter left lingering bites down his neck and shoulder.

“What do you,” Stiles writhed, “*ah*, need, Peter?”

You. Only you. Always. For the rest of my life. Peter swallowed the words in favor of running his lips along the scar tissue on Stiles’s right wrist. Stiles keened, shuddering, and Peter *felt him*, he *felt* the bubbly bliss that spread down Stiles’s spine, because it also spread down Peter’s spine.

“I want you to come on my face.” Peter confessed, eyes closed as he kissed down Stiles’s chest, stopping to mouth at Stiles’s nipples. “And I want to come inside you.”

He might be bigger and stronger than Stiles, but even as he pinned him to the bed, even as his cock hung hot and heavy between his legs... he waited. He would *always* wait for his Alpha. *I want to be a part of you*, Peter thought, his throat tight. Stiles’s breath caught and Peter kept still, hovering and hard in the dark.

I want to give every piece of myself to you.

“Okay,” Stiles nodded, his voice cracking around what wasn’t said but was definitely heard. “Let’s do it.”

Peter shuddered and his hands dropped under Stiles’s hips. Stiles’s hand immediately came to rest on the back of Peter’s head. He guided his cock into Peter’s mouth with assurance, purpose, and Peter melted, grateful, always *grateful*, at how Stiles held him, his thumbs resting gently on Peter’s temples.

It wasn't always like this.

It took years. It wasn't *just* years lost to captivity, but also to recovery. It was phone calls, establishing a more open routine, and sharing dreams... it was Stiles working up to traveling, to getting in a *car*, and it was countless trials and errors until...

Until they reached a new freedom, until Peter could touch and be touched without flinching. Until they could caress each other for more than a few seconds before finishing immediately, shuddering against each other and flushed with hyper-sensitive pleasure.

It was being relearned by the world. Relearned by his Pack. By other Packs. He was a Hale Alpha, but when he joined Talia for Regional Pack meetings, he was separate, respected, but never touched unless he initiated. He was a Hale Alpha, but he was also an Alpha of another Pack.

He pulled back, his tongue pressing along the head of Stiles's cock, moaning when Stiles's fingers tightened in his hair.

"*Please,*" he only had to ask, once, before his wish was granted.

Relearning the old pleasures he used to take was odd. The sensation of smirking, of out-maneuvering an opponent with words, it was foreign until it wasn't. It was strange until... until it stopped feeling as though he slipped into someone else's skin. He savored it, being on Stiles's arm during a meeting, sharpening every smile from Stiles with a harder smirk.

Peter scissored his fingers into Stiles, who moaned, still sore from the night before. He wanted more. Stiles ground his hips down, his eyes shining bright in the moonlight. Peter shuddered, his back arched in a bow, his forehead pressed against the inside of Stiles's knee.

He always wanted more.

"You can have," Stiles whispered as Peter's dick caught on the rim, razor-sharp pleasure sparking behind his eyes. His breath lodged in his throat as he pushed inside. It was a sensation Peter had experienced more times than he could count, but it still robbed him of coherency. Stiles hummed, dragging Peter's hand to his mouth so he could kiss his palm. "Everything."

Peter let out half a howl as he chased his pleasure, as he thrust his hips in time with Stiles's breath, drunk off pheromones. Stiles's arousal was a slow spiral until all Peter cared about was helping him reach that point. It always starts as fucking, and it always became something more. Frenzied melted into endless, and harsh breaths softened into sighs.

With a clever twist and a shove, Peter was on his back, the wind nearly knocked out of him at the sight of Stiles above him. Pale skin dotted with moles, constellations against an alien sky. Brown eyes were blown black, nipples pebbled in the night air, and lush bow-lips curled in an adoring smile—

When they first started, Peter had to blindfold himself against the sight of Stiles.

They had to work their way up to this moment, and still fingers itched to fumble for the nightstand or to grab a pillow. Instead, Peter let his claws prick Stiles's hips, felt his body shifting and flexing beneath him, and Stiles never shied away from Peter Hale the man, or Peter Hale the wolf. It wasn't just Peter who wanted everything Stiles had to give. Stiles wanted *all of him*, and Peter aimed to give it. Every. Single. Time.

A whimper was the only warning Stiles gave before he came, wetness splashing up Peter's chest.

Peter shuddered and came undone.

The next time he opened his eyes, it was lighter outside and the mess had been cleaned from his stomach. Stiles sat on the bed, naked, but the sunlight had taken the glow from his skin and the eternity from his eyes.

Peter smiled, his fingers tracing the bite and scratch marks that spotted down Stiles's body.

"Feeling better?" He felt more at home in his skin after sex, after Stiles was all over him. Peter sat up and let his answer come in a kiss, a smile pressed against Stiles's mouth. After three kisses, Stiles pushed him away. "Come on, we gotta brush our teeth."

Every room had several laminated lists in it. Before leaving the bedroom, they had a few checklists. Did they make the bed? Did they put dirty clothes in the hamper? Was it time to do laundry? Were they wearing clothes?

For the bathroom it *Rinse, Shampoo, Conditioner*. Did they wash their hands? Did they brush their teeth? Did they moisturize?

Living on their own meant making sure they weren't forgetting how to take care of themselves.

"Couldn't we just order pizzas and soda?" Stiles whined as he pulled out an extra table and chairs, breaking out the nice placemats from Talia. "Then we wouldn't have to do all this work."

Peter scoffed, wiping sweat from his forehead as he prepared steaks.

"Because an Alpha provides food for their Pack."

Long arms wrapped around Peter's middle.

"Delivery is providing."

Sometimes Peter would think that he was dreaming, that he'd jerk awake and he'd be back between slabs of glass. When his heart would get too full, when Stiles touched him so freely, he thought... he thought that surely he couldn't have *this*. A dream come to life, where he was cooking, where he had a home in rural New York, where he had a husband, a True Alpha, and a Pack that were already considered living legends. *Any minute now*, Peter thought, staring at diced garlic and onions.

Stiles pinched Peter's side. Peter flinched and turned around, fixing Stiles with a long stare.

Stiles smirked.

"You're still awake, aren't you?"

Noah, Deucalion, Isaac, and the Itos would be there soon. Soon, their house would be full of their family. Soon they'd be filling plates with food and glasses with wine, and the quiet would break way into noise, affectionate bubbling *noise* that would wrap around them like blankets. Stiles would dote on Satomi's grandkids and Peter would beat Deucalion at chess. Satomi would tell stories by the fire, and eventually, when the food in their bellies grew heavy, they'd all lay on the living room rug and simply bask in each other's silence.

That was *coming*.

Peter relished the *now*. He chased Stiles, growling while his mate giggled, twisted, and sighed beneath him. Every yelp, every gasp, every breathy *Peter* all said the same thing.

You're free.

You're free.

You're free.

Chapter End Notes

Finally.

After, no joke, three different attempts, I finally got the final chapter to a place I was happy with. Conclusions are hard... and I wanted to wrap it up in a satisfying way without waving away too many problems. So, while I know that this the end, I hope it shows that it was a slow step to each first visit, and then the final piece where it's sometime in the future, no counter needed since they're not waiting for the other shoe to drop anymore.

Guys, thanks for coming on this journey with me. It was an idea that came from the first season of the OA and my fascination of what it would be like to know fellow captors for years and never being able to touch them. And then, of course, I wanted to bring my own tropes that I love into it, mainly pertaining to human excellence and will power.

Thanks so much for reading, commenting, leaving kudos... all of it. I hope you like the conclusion, and even if you did it, still let me know.

Art is by the INCREDIBLE [callmechikki!](#)

We're shaped by the lives we live :)

[EDIT: Wrap-up Post is here!](#)

I'll still be active on tumblr for the time being, but there are other ways to find me. **[Here](#)** you can see a little breakdown of other places to find me and the other things I do in relation to these fics (journals/behind the scenes, playlists, head canons). **[So click on over](#)** to get the full rundown!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!