

Mercy Has a Human Heart

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Mercy Has a Human Heart

by [the_deep_magic](#)

Summary

It only hurts if he tries to fight it.

Notes

Spoilers: a few very vague references to S2, nothing really spoilery

Warnings: sort-of-maybe-voyeurism, barebacking

Title from William Blake's "The Divine Image," because yeah, that's just what kind of fic this is.

They're past the need for windows now.

It wouldn't matter anyway – Stiles' dorm is more than half a day's drive south, and Derek can't leave his pack for that long. That, says Stiles, is what Derek gets for turning three of the most emotionally damaged teenagers in Beacon Hills (and Boyd), and even after two years and change, they're still unpredictable at best.

And though technically Scott isn't Derek's fault or even his pack, he *is* his responsibility, and Scott's penchant for getting himself stuck in the middle of some truly preposterous things, even while at community college (or perhaps especially while at community college) is damn near supernatural in its own right. Without Stiles there to run Damage Control: McCall Division, it's pretty much become Derek's full-time job. The kid's got his heart in the right place; it's the rest of his body parts, and how they all remain attached, that Derek has to worry about.

Stiles drives up whenever he can, though both Scott and Derek feel guilty about that. Derek would tell him not to come so often if it weren't for Scott and Stiles' dad (and if he thought, even for a second, that Stiles would listen). Because Stiles needs to get his own life going at college; he deserves it, no matter how much he complains about how agonizingly boring it is without a series of increasingly violent mythological creatures trying to take his head off.

"Hand to god, Derek, I would rather have a harpy's claws sunk in my chest – again – than hear one more frat bro say 'Beer me' and laugh like it's cutting edge humor. I might even be able to handle the grammatical incoherency if the joke weren't already five, maybe ten years old. That is what I'm surrounded by, and I weep for the future of this country. So, who's trying to kill you this week?"

But it's Spring Break now, and Stiles' dad thinks he's driven down to Tijuana with friends for the week when really he's ensconced in the woods about a 15-minute drive from the Stilinski homestead. Derek's suggestion that he *actually* go to Tijuana was met with an eye roll he could hear over the phone. (*"We are going to have a serious talk about your martyr complex. After I suck your brains out through your dick, but still."*)

They've already fucked once, Stiles barely making it through the front door before Derek was on him. Stiles did insist on dragging them both to the filthy but slightly-softer-than-the-charred-wood rug by the stairs before Derek could properly grind him into the floorboards. With Stiles whimpering and moaning into his mouth, Derek could barely get his own pants open and had to slice clean through Stiles' jeans. It was a true testament to their desperation that Stiles wasn't immediately bitching about Derek's claws getting that close to his junk.

Derek should be far too old to find a dry hump against a dirty floor so fucking hot, but Stiles' scent, especially after being absent for so long, was a tangible assault on Derek's senses, and as badly as he wanted to bury himself in Stiles' body and just fucking *stay* there, he was too far gone by the time Stiles walked through the door to prepare him for anything more. He'd heard the Jeep a mile away, caught a hint of the scent moments later, and Stiles was lucky Derek hadn't bolted through the woods, forced the car off the highway, and taken Stiles right there in the back seat.

Which Derek would never do. He really wouldn't, and not just because he'd never hear the end of it if he put so much as a scratch on Stiles' precious Jeep.

Once Derek had made Stiles shoot all over his stomach, then fucked against the hot, sweat-slicked crease of Stiles' hip until he was coming to the familiar sound of Stiles' post-orgasmic babbling (*"Fuck yeah, mark me, come all over me. God, Derek, c'mon, do it"*), Derek was still too frantic, too close to losing control. Stiles was holding him by the back of the neck, kissing him lazily, and Derek was barely holding back the urge to *bite*.

He had to get away from Stiles. Not for long, just enough to cool off a little, get the wolf under control in a way that he just couldn't when his world was narrowed down to the smell of sex and their mingled cum on Stiles' body. With one last lick into Stiles' mouth, Derek shoved himself up and tucked himself away.

He was surprised at the pang in his chest when *Stiles* didn't look surprised. Derek made some pathetic excuse about going to warn the pack to leave them alone for the night (which was utter bullshit – they could smell Stiles a mile off, too, and knew exactly what that meant), but Stiles just stretched, looking far more at home on Derek's floor than anyone had a right to, and yawned. "I'll just get settled in, shall I? Please god, tell me the shower's still working. I brought towels. I know not to depend on you for the finer things in life, but I'd really rather not have to hose off out back."

"No, shower's fine," Derek said, unable to tear his eyes away from where Stiles was rubbing a hand through the mess on his stomach. "I won't be gone long." He had a feeling that he was supposed to say something inanely polite like *make yourself at home*, but Stiles hardly needed the invitation.

"No, yeah, go," Stiles said, waving him off. "I'm good." And maybe he'd forgotten that Derek could still hear him even after he'd left the house. But probably not.

"S'okay," Derek heard Stiles mutter to himself through another yawn. "Not like I need cuddling. Or a 'how are you, Stiles?' Or eye contact. Totally fine here. I'll just enjoy the afterglow with... this rug. We're good buddies now, me and the rug. I should probably buy him a drink. He's feeling a little used right now, but I'll help him through it."

Before Derek could let himself start thinking about that, he let himself shift and silently tore off into the woods.

It hasn't been this bad in years, not since Stiles was in high school. Derek refused to lay a hand on him until he turned 18. Surprisingly (or not), that was the easy part; the hard part was keeping Stiles' hands off *him*. Stiles knew the line, though; he never pushed past Derek's carefully-honed control, just got him right up against the fine edge of it and tried to badger him into changing his mind. It was the one argument Derek wouldn't let him win.

"Seriously," Stiles said, blinking accusingly, and it wasn't a question. "You've broken the law in every other possible way – murder, kidnapping, breaking and entering, assault, battery – so much battery, I can personally attest to the battery – not to mention literally thousands of dollars of property damage. Oh, and stalking. Can't believe I left out the stalking. And this is where you're drawing the line?"

“You’re sixteen,” Derek growled, as though it might be interpreted as menacing. It wasn’t. “You have no idea what you want. And I’m not interested in a child.”

Stiles folded his arms over his chest and blinked again. Aggressively. How was that even possible? “See, this is why we leave the bullshitting to me, because you can’t lie to save your furry little ass.”

Derek loses track of time sprinting through the woods, racing in circles but never more than a mile or so from the house. Never far enough to lose Stiles’ scent.

By the time he returns to the porch, entire body heaving with breath as he shifts back, he realizes hours have passed. Fuck, he really *didn’t* intend to be gone this long, but he knows Stiles is still here, Derek’s own scent lingering on him despite the shower. Even though his heart is slamming in his chest, Derek feels lighter; he’s appeased the wolf enough to be able to control it. For now.

Stiles’ clothes, including his cum-drenched shirt, are crumpled on the floor in the bathroom. He must have brought his own soap – apparently not trusting Derek to have that, either – because the scent is clean but unfamiliar. But it’s inextricably mixed with Stiles’ skin, so Derek can hardly find it offensive.

Derek doesn’t have a clock – doesn’t need one – but he knows it has to be past 2 a.m. now, and Stiles had a long drive up this afternoon, so Derek isn’t surprised that that Stiles is passed out in his bed, resting on his stomach with one arm curled under the pillow. He *is* surprised that Stiles is naked, and the wolf uncurls in Derek’s chest, perking up at the sight of Stiles asleep and vulnerable in the heart of its den.

It’s been a warm spring and the sheets are pushed down to Stiles’ waist, the moonlight making his pale skin glow. The moon is waxing – Stiles will be here for the full moon, a thought that loosens some of the constant tension in Derek’s shoulders. Somehow, it’s easier when Stiles is here; his whole pack can feel it, their alpha more relaxed, wrestling almost playfully with his betas as they run.

But the full moon’s not for three days and has nothing to do with the ache that’s growing in Derek’s whole body, the wolf beginning to pace impatiently. Then, improbably, it stills, watching intently as Derek approaches the bed. He sits as lightly as he can, trying not to wake Stiles. When he is awake, he’s never still enough for Derek to just look.

Stiles doesn’t like having his body scrutinized any better than Derek likes being caught doing the scrutinizing, so Derek is rarely afforded the chance to see the light freckles spattered across Stiles’ shoulders, which have broadened considerably over the past few years. Or the smooth taper of his hips into his narrow waist. He must still be playing lacrosse – for a coach that actually lets him play – because even with Stiles relaxed so completely, Derek can see the soft definition in the lean muscles of his back and shoulders, as well as his arm where it’s wrapped under the pillow.

Not that Derek hasn’t had his hands over every part of this body at some point in the past year, but he’s never just gotten to *look* like this. Hell, half the time, their clothes never really make it off. Stiles’ clothes, anyway. Stiles has concocted an elaborate theory that

werewolves are allergic to fabric from the waist up, and Derek feels no particular need to disabuse him of this notion.

There's only so long Derek can look before he has to touch, and if he has to touch, he might as well taste. Stiles appears to be out cold, giving Derek the opportunity to savor, so he presses his open lips to the back of Stiles' neck and leaves them there, tongue dragging slowly across a small patch of skin. The shock of it across his tongue is both comforting and deeply inflaming, pulls him right back to the first time he got to taste.

Derek had barely even pulled back before Stiles was complaining.

"Dude, no," Stiles groaned, tongue running over his reddened, kiss-swollen lips, and jabbed a finger at Derek's bare chest. "You are not backing out now. Not after stringing me along for all this time. I've waited for this for almost two fucking years, man. No pressure or anything, but if you don't go through with this, I will literally explode from sexual frustration. Literally. And I know how much you hate cleaning, so imagine scrubbing little Stiles-bits out of the walls. I mean, you could always just leave it, not that anyone would notice with the state of this place, but I think my dad would probably have some awkward ques—mmmph."

Derek wasn't sure whether he was more excited to kiss Stiles or to finally have a reliable method of shutting him up. But even werewolves have to come up for air some time, and this time it was actually Derek who spoke first, voice embarrassingly breathy. "You waited?"

"Nineteen months, twenty-three days—I could probably give you the hour, but I'd have to check my sparkly Lisa Frank unicorn diary." He rolled his eyes so hard they looked dangerously close to popping out of his head. "Yes, I waited, you unbelievably thick canine. I mean, it was hell: men, women, flinging themselves at me constantly. I've been fending them off left and right. What the fuck did you think I was doing?"

It shouldn't have come as any surprise to Derek – he'd have been able to smell anyone else on Stiles if... But at the time, Derek had been studiously attempting not to smell Stiles, to keep his distance, in a rare stab at self-preservation. Even though everything in his head told him to be gentle, all the wolf wanted was to stake its claim. The why aren't you fucking me right the hell now look Stiles was giving him was emphatically not helping.

Derek felt his eyes flash red, inhaled to see if he could scent any fear from Stiles. No, nothing but adrenaline and need and god, why wasn't he fucking Stiles already? "Well, I was going to ask how you wanted it," Derek breathed low and hot against Stiles' mouth. "But I think I'll be the one to decide that now."

And in one smooth motion, he hoisted Stiles off his lap and flipped him over on his hands and knees. Stiles moaned loud enough to wake the dead and dropped down on his elbows, lifting his ass higher so Derek could tear his jeans down over his hips. "Like this. Oh god, just like this. For the record, I would have said this."

When Stiles was wet and open and ready, Derek bent to cover his body, tasting the lust-drenched sweat on the back of Stiles' neck as he slowly pushed in.

That's how they usually fuck, Stiles on all fours, or Stiles with his face pressed against the wall, or – very occasionally – Stiles tucked in the curl of Derek's body as they lay on their sides. Not that they don't spend plenty of time grappling with hands and mouths (because holy fuck, Stiles' *mouth* – Derek doesn't mind the constant chatter so much now that he knows it's essentially strength conditioning for Stiles' tongue) or grinding up against each other, but when Derek is thrusting into him, it's always with Stiles turned away so that Derek can scrape his teeth against the back of Stiles' neck, rut into him hard and deep, jerk him easily at whatever pace Derek wants (or Stiles can convince Derek he wants). It still feels like the wolf claiming him, every time, and Stiles has never complained or given off a whiff of uncertainty or hesitation.

It doesn't occur to Derek until just now – watching Stiles' eyes dart under closed lids as he dreams; long, delicate eyelashes resting against his cheeks – the he never gets to see Stiles' face in those moments, not really. He never thought he needed to – after all, Stiles is nothing if not extraordinarily communicative, and Derek can pick up on every change in heartbeat, every fresh spurt of arousal.

Derek freezes when he realizes his hand is halfway to Stiles' face, fingers ready to trace the prominence of Stiles' cheekbone, follow the line up his temple to the shell of his ear. Not as though Derek's tongue hasn't traced that path before... But no, that might wake Stiles. And though the wolf is starting to paw impatiently at his insides, Derek doesn't want that. Not yet. He wants a little longer to keep looking.

Stiles isn't snoring, but his breathing is deep and heavy, ribs slowly expanding and contracting in the moonlight. The smooth expanse of his skin isn't nearly as scarred as it should be, considering. There's a thin, almost undetectable smooth line on the back of his neck, courtesy of the kanima. A jagged tear, long healed, over the round of his left shoulder – a chimera that time, strong as hell, but at least not venomous. The worst, Derek knows, are on his chest: yes, there was an actual harpy, and yes, it got its claws in Stiles' chest before he could mace the everloving hell out of it. Because yes, Stiles brought mace to a harpy fight. (*"It's got eyes. And if it's got eyes, I'm gonna mace it. Cryptozoology Combat 101."*) He really is smarter and crazier than the rest of them put together.

At that thought, something that is very much not the wolf (yet is much, much more unnerving) wells up in Derek's chest, and he lowers his head to continue tasting (*kissing*) his way down Stiles' spine, one hot, soft press of his mouth for each vertebra.

Derek feels the exact second Stiles shivers awake, when Derek's lips reach a very sensitive spot on the small of Stiles' back. Derek freezes, somewhat mortified by his position, bent low over Stiles' naked, sleeping body. But while Stiles doesn't quite fall back to sleep, nor does he move or – more notably – speak. His breathing slows again and he's dozing, and they're both going to continue to pretend that he's still out of it. Derek feels like he's just been given permission to do something, but he doesn't quite know what.

There's a scar he doesn't recognize over Stiles' hip – not deep, but freshly healed – and Derek isn't sure if he's angrier at whoever put it there or the fact that it wasn't him. Though he's been painfully careful not to give Stiles anything that won't fully heal: bruises, yes; bites, *god* yes; but never broken skin. Teeth and fingernails, but never fangs or claws. It's

hard to hold back sometimes, knowing Stiles will be that far away, his body unmarked once Derek's scent on him fades, but...

He trusts Stiles, in a way that has nothing to do with wolves or packs and makes Derek feel like the one who's bruised and vulnerable. Even when it's late at night and Stiles is whispering into the phone, "*Yours, I'm all yours.*" And then, less softly, "*Yes, I swear to god I'll tell you if I see any werewolves, werelizards, or weretortoises on campus, you big baby.*"

Derek touches the unfamiliar scar lightly, with just one fingertip, and it feels a hundred times more intimate than their fast, hard rut by the stairs. If he weren't someone so brutally empty on the inside, fueled by nothing but anger and fear and instinct – if he weren't, well, *Derek* – what would he do? Would he reach out to see if Stiles' hair, which he's been growing out, is really as soft as it looks? Would he mold his hands to the shape of Stiles' waist, not to claim but just to hold? Would he trace the tips of his fingers over Stiles' brow? How do normal, non-broken people touch each other?

His wolf is silent, Stiles is silent, and Derek doesn't know what to *do*. What does that make him?

He is saved by the sound of Stiles' voice, rusty from sleep and half-muffled by the pillow. "I don't really mind you running off afterwards, 'cause I know you'll come back." His eyes are still closed, but Derek can see the corner of his mouth start to curl up in a smile. "Still kind of a dick move, though."

What can Derek say to that? Even he knows it's true. "I can't—" he tries, weakly. Stiles makes him feel *weak*, and that's something he can't afford any more than he can live without. "It's too much," he finishes lamely.

That nascent smile curves into fullness as Stiles stretches and rolls over onto his back. "Yeah, I get that I'm one hell of a sex machine, but you're just gonna have to deal with it. Ain't nobody can change me, baby."

His tone is confident, cocky – not to mention the fact that anyone, even Stiles, who dared to call Derek "baby" would find themselves immediately facing down fangs – but Stiles still hasn't opened his eyes, and it keeps him painfully vulnerable. If he wanted to, Derek could move so quickly that Stiles wouldn't even hear him, could pin Stiles roughly to the bed and put claws to his throat. Or flee out the nearest exit. And Stiles can't smell Derek's uncertainty or the vicious, raging fear that comes with it. He's totally at Derek's mercy – not that he isn't always, physically, but this is *willing*, this is *surrender*, and if Stiles knows the immense, terrifying power he has over Derek, his slightly lopsided, goofy smile doesn't show it.

Stiles reaches a hand out – soft skin, bitten nails, maddeningly nimble fingers, *human* – all invitation, no expectation. Derek does the only thing he can: he presses the side of his face to Stiles' palm as though he could hide in it. Stiles' thumb blindly seeks out the sweep of Derek's cheekbone, rubbing gently. "Kiss me?" Stiles asks softly, and yes, *yes*.

Derek is meshing their mouths together before Stiles can even take another breath, tongue chasing away the faintly sour taste of sleep to find the sweetness underneath. Stiles is

making soft, breathy sounds as he digs his fingers into Derek's hair, and somewhere far away, the wolf keens with longing, sharp and painful.

Breathless, Stiles grins against Derek's mouth and runs a hand down the front of his shirt. "You need to be much, much more naked," he says, but Derek already feels stripped to the bone – taking his clothes off is nothing.

Well, not nothing – it earns him the sweet, primal press of skin against skin, and it's as though the moonlight's sunk right into Stiles' body, grabbing Derek deep in the gut and *pulling*. He could no more resist this than he could the power of the full moon, and that's the one thing, the one hold over him that isn't frightening. Never has been, not for him. It's in his blood, tempting and familiar and irresistible. It only hurts if he tries to fight it.

He wants to spend more time touching, kissing, licking every inch of pale skin, but more than that, he *needs* to lose himself in the body beneath him. Mere moments of skin sliding against skin and he's panting for it, his control already starting to slip. Stiles isn't ready yet, not for what Derek needs, and he doesn't even remember where he put the—

"Looking for something?" Stiles asks, his shit-eating grin a little disconcerting when his eyes are still closed, but he's pulled his other hand out from under the pillow, holding up a tube, and *Jesus*, his fingers are still wet.

A growl tears its way out of Derek's throat and he pulls back to shove Stiles' thighs apart, rougher than he means to, but by now he's intimately familiar with Stiles' particular range of sounds – both verbal and not – and that grunt was a definite *yes*. Sure enough, when Derek pushes a hand between Stiles' legs, he's already slick and two of Derek's thick fingers slide in easily. This time he gets a slightly choked, "*Fuck*, so good."

Three fingers takes a little effort, but Stiles is arching back and pushing himself down past the thickness of Derek's knuckles, doing most of the work himself, and Derek just gets to watch. Stiles' jaw works around a groan as he fights to relax, and Derek can only imagine what's going on in that brain of his, whether every channel is broadcasting filthy fantasies (and holy fuck, does Stiles have one hell of an imagination, even though Derek is pretty sure he's actually holding back on some of the more elaborate ones) or whether the physical sensation is enough to blast it all into white noise.

Either way, Stiles' face and body hide nothing, fevered flush spreading down his neck to his chest, expression registering the moment pain yields to stretch, then to fullness, then to actual pleasure as Derek twists his fingers inside him. Derek's used to the sounds Stiles is making, the thick scent of arousal deepening into need, but he's never *seen*, not really. He'll get a glimpse of a half-turned face as Stiles cranes back to kiss him, or the wicked look Stiles flashes up at him when Derek's cock is sliding into the lush heat of Stiles' mouth – but all those put together are nothing compared to this, this deliberate display of abandon. It's almost aggressive in its openness, and it drives the air from Derek's lungs.

Stiles' hands are fisting in the sheets as he keeps fucking himself on Derek's fingers, and all of Derek's senses tell him Stiles is ready. It's at this point that Stiles would usually start begging, no hesitation or shame, and Derek can never hold out against it for very long, even if he wanted to. But now Stiles is biting hard enough on his lower lip that Derek can smell

the faintest tang of blood. It makes the wolf roar in his chest, but if Stiles is managing to keep his mouth shut, Derek can damn well keep his wolf under control.

Besides, he's not ready to give this up yet, the sight of Stiles writhing so vulnerably on his fingers. But Derek does crawl up Stiles' body – it puts his wrist at an awkward angle but he's unwilling to leave Stiles empty – to sooth Stiles' mouth open with his own. There's only the tiniest amount of blood, but Derek's tongue is uncommonly gentle, and it pulls a shuddering whimper out of Stiles.

"You ready?" Derek asks, well aware of the answer, but Stiles' *please* is something he needs to hear.

Derek drags his open mouth down the flushed, oversensitive skin at the center of Stiles' chest, Stiles gasping and bucking when Derek's chin bumps the head of his neglected cock. It's an even deeper, richer red than the rest of him, the head nearly purple by now and leaking all over his pale belly, just from Derek's fingers in him, Derek's mouth on his skin. Derek doesn't mean to tease, but he takes the head of Stiles' cock in his mouth without thinking, just because he needs the taste of him, and Stiles swears loudly and creatively, his body twisting in that familiar way where he can't decide whether to squirm away from Derek or push closer. It's kind of a thing for them, but it always ends the same way.

"Derek," Stiles grates out, a note of warning woven into the desperation. He's built up some fairly impressive stamina over a year's time, but tonight he's been wound nearly to the breaking point and, hell, Derek's about ready to go off just watching him – a pleasure he's never allowed himself before.

Stiles groans loudly as Derek removes his fingers, but he keeps his eyes tightly shut even as Derek pushes into him. Despite the time Derek's already taken to open him up, it's been a while, and the tight friction of Stiles' body has Derek moving slowly, gasping for breath. He rubs over whatever parts of Stiles he can get his hands on, now utterly spoiled for choice: up Stiles' sides, back down his arms and over the tender flesh of his belly, the crease of his hips, and his thighs as one lifts to wrap around Derek's waist.

Derek drops down to his hands, wanting to feel all that skin against him at once, and it puts him in the perfect position to catch the moan that falls from Stiles' lips as Derek moves inside him, feeding the sound right back to him, a perfect echo of Stiles' need. Derek licks heavily into Stiles' mouth, trying to get himself under control but, as usual, Stiles has other plans.

With all the leverage he's got, he undulates his hips, fucking himself as best he can on Derek's cock and making a pleased, smug sound as he does. It immediately has Derek's eyes flashing red and he growls – Jesus, Stiles knows just how to work him, because the musk of arousal is suddenly all Derek can process, everything else shutting down as the wolf commands that he *take*.

And he does, in long, rolling thrusts entirely for his own pleasure, but Stiles is gasping contentedly, short fingernails digging into Derek's shoulders just so he can hang on for the ride. And though Stiles' eyes are closed, Derek can see every sensation register nakedly in Stiles' expression. It forces Derek to slow down, to *watch*, feeling strangely voyeuristic

since Stiles can't see him. But that's the point – Stiles is giving him unrestricted permission to look. It's almost too much, and Derek has to fight the urge to bury his face in Stiles' neck. Stiles is showing him everything and all Derek wants to do is *hide*.

But then Stiles slides his hands blindly up Derek's neck to tangle in his hair and murmurs, "It's okay. C'mon, more."

Derek lifts Stiles' hips as he starts thrusting again and the hand in his hair spasms into a fist. Stiles lets out a sweet, broken little sound at the apex of every thrust, and Derek wants more of it, wants the way Stiles' whole body goes tense when he's getting close. Derek reaches down to fist Stiles' cock, slick with sweat and precum, and he gets all of that and more – he can see Stiles' eyelids fluttering madly; the way the flush spreading down his chest deepens into something more like a glow; the obscene, wet shine of Stiles' open mouth.

When Stiles finally comes, his eyes fly open and lock right on to Derek's, making his hips falter even as he keeps stroking Stiles through a hard, shuddering orgasm. Stiles doesn't look away for a second, doesn't blink, even after his body starts to go lax with the last few trembles, and Derek feels speared to the core, unable to move even though his body is screaming for release.

With what looks like considerable effort, Stiles curls up to kiss Derek's slack mouth, now purposefully keeping his eyes wide open, and whispers, "Come on, let me see you."

Stiles tugs them back down until Derek can plant one hand on the bed and the other on the headboard. He tries to keep his eyes open, he really does, but it's too much, watching Stiles watch him. After everything Stiles has shown him, he can't let go the way he needs to, so he takes a cue from Stiles and shuts his eyes.

As soon as he does, it feels like he can move again, resuming his former pace and losing himself in it. Which must be exactly what Stiles wants, because Derek hears a breathless laugh that turns into something more like a moan, along with a soft, "Yeah, Derek, just like that."

Derek knows he's blushing to the roots of his hair – and worse, knows Stiles can *see* it, along with whatever else is reflected on his face. But he can still smell Stiles – his release, his pleasure, his closeness – and hear his soft sounds of encouragement, and as Derek comes, he feels like he's stumbling headlong into something raw and new and terrifying, but it's good – the bone-deep, mind-wiping kind of good – and Stiles is there to catch him, quite literally, as he falls.

Leg still braced around Derek's hip, Stiles rolls them both to the side, mumbling something about "...*actually made of fucking granite, what the hell...*" But his tone is a fond one and he keeps a tight hold of Derek, stroking his hair the way Derek only lets him do after sex. Derek, who is never removing his face from where it's buried against Stiles' neck, because, utterly improbably, his wolf has done the equivalent of stretching lazily and rolling over to have its belly rubbed. And that's not... That can't *happen*.

But Stiles isn't his beta. He's not even a wolf, so while he can (and does) piss Derek off to no end, he can also push him without challenging his authority over the pack. It's Derek's

control over *himself*, not the wolf, that Stiles tests with his mouthing off and inappropriately-timed jokes and open displays of affection. Stiles actually anchors his wolf, and that realization sends Derek reeling. He's relied on anger so long that he's been terrified to give it up, only to recognize that he gave it up a long time ago.

Derek watched Stiles lace up his sneakers silently, not even bothering to mention to Stiles that he'd put his shirt back on inside out. It was profoundly disturbing, this silence. Derek didn't think he'd ever hear a blank space that Stiles didn't know how to fill.

But for once he seemed to be trying to choose his words carefully, as though they'd change anything.

"You can call me any time," Stiles said, looking meaningfully up at Derek. "I mean, I know you won't, but you can. I'd like that. Hey, if you're feeling really ambitious, you could find a computer and Skype me. That way, you can glower at me long-distance. I'm really going to miss that glower. I don't suppose you'd let me take a picture so I could make a life-size Derek cardboard cutout. I'll find a dark, shadowy corner of the room to put it in, and it'll be just like old times. Sure, it'll be a little hard to explain to my roommate, but—"

So much for choosing his words carefully. Derek cut him off with a hard, bruising kiss. "You can't take me with you. Don't try."

"Oh my god, do you practice this shit in the mirror? Do you sit alone at night and work on sounding tragic? Derek, I'm going off to college, not to war. They do let me out occasionally. I think there's a law."

After a moment of pained silence, Stiles' face softened, and he set a hand firmly on Derek's chest – right over his heart. "You get this, don't you? What we are? Don't make me spout poetry at you, because you know I will. One rhyming couplet and you'll be on the floor, squirming in agony."

The words were right there on Derek's lips, so very close to becoming reality... and he couldn't say them.

Yet again, Stiles saved him – this time with an achingly soft kiss that sparked through Derek like heat lightning. "Be careful," he murmured against Derek's lips, as though those words were his to say. "I want you in one piece every time I come home."

"Hey," Stiles murmurs into the sweaty mess of Derek's hair. "All right?"

Not for a long time, Derek thinks, but he grunts out what he hopes is an affirmative.

"Good." He can feel Stiles' grin against his scalp. "Because I take back what I said earlier. If you try and run off on me this time, I'll tear your throat out. With my teeth."

Then he laughs at his own dumb joke – an easy, warm chuckle that Derek couldn't replicate if he tried. He finds himself constantly amazed by this boy, this *man* who understands grief and loss in a way none of the others do, and yet can still laugh like it's as easy as breathing. It's not fair to Stiles that Derek needs him like this. Stiles should be out living his life, not

spending his spare time in this burnt-out husk of a house that Derek barely manages to keep habitable.

His familiar train of thought is interrupted by a hard pinch to his side, and it's enough to snap his senses to full alertness. But when he jerks up, Stiles is just gazing evenly at him, eyes a warm amber in the low light. "I can actually hear you guilt-tripping, you know. It's my own personal superpower. If I had a choice, I'd probably have gone with flight or laser vision or the ability to, like, make Jackson inexplicably itchy in bad places at will. But instead I got 'Derek thinks he can't have nice things' radar. And let me tell you, it is *supremely* annoying. I've decided to dedicate this entire week to sexing you out of it. Because I am a very nice thing."

Derek rolls his eyes, mainly so he won't reveal just how close to home Stiles managed to hit, but he doesn't move to pull away. Not this time. Without a word, he settles back down against Stiles' side, draping a heavy arm across Stiles' stomach. Stiles makes a satisfied little noise, like Derek just confessed to everything, but Derek decides to let it go.

He can let Stiles have that one. Just this once.

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