I must become lionhearted

by Regann

Summary

Stiles usually felt like the odd man out among the werewolves of Beacon Hills, but a surprise inheritance from a distant cousin leaves him with a chance to even the odds, just in time to help with the looming threat of the Alpha Pack.

Notes

This fic is a loose fusion with the NBC show, Grimm, in that it uses its some of its mythology, although no knowledge of that series is needed to understand. Title is inspired by a song lyric from Florence + the Machine's "Rabbit Heart." So much love goes to Pookaseraph who has humored me patiently since I decided to revert my fandom interests back to 2012.
Stiles came awake with a shout, limbs flailing as he flung himself upright. He was panting for breath like he’d been doing suicides at lacrosse practice, and he ran a shaky hand over his hair, trying to find a way to calm his racing heart.

It was the fourth day -- night -- that he’d woke up screaming from nightmares he really couldn’t remember. By the time his terror had faded enough for solid thought, all the details had already slipped away, leaving him with nothing but vague impressions of monsters, violence and terror. Given his life over the last few months, the nightmares weren’t surprising but these felt different. Stiles couldn’t explain exactly how, but they did.

Whatever was causing them, it was a bang-up way to start his summer vacation, he decided sourly. He’d survived werewolves, kanimas and evil, elderly psychos and everything was finally starting to calm down in Beacon Hills. So, of course, there were freaking nightmares to make sure Stiles still didn’t get a good night’s sleep.

Stiles threw himself back down on the bed but sleep refused to return, despite the fact that it was way too early to be up on a day of summer vacation. With a sigh, Stiles eventually gave in and headed downstairs where he could hear his dad moving around in the kitchen, thus proving exactly how too-early it was if his dad hadn’t left for his day shift yet.

“Morning, kiddo,” the Sheriff said, surprise in his voice when he turned to see Stiles. “Up all night?”

“Something like that,” he grumbled as he reached around his dad to grab a bowl for cereal.

“You and Scott got any plans? Productive ones, I mean?” the Sheriff added.

Stiles shrugged. “Might go practice some lacrosse, I don’t know. It’s barely summer. I’m really ready for a string of non-productive days.”

The Sheriff looked at him over the rim of his coffee cup, a patently paternal look of judgement. Stiles sighed. “Don’t forget the new rules,” his dad warned.

Stiles’s shoulders hunched a little. “Yeah, yeah, I remember.” He waved his free hand while the other poured Captain Crunch into his bowl. “No more gallivanting around or kidnapping people or getting protective orders sworn against me. I got it.”

His dad frowned. “I feel like I’ve been very lenient considering some of the stunts you pulled this spring,” he said. “Watch that attitude, son.”

Since his dad didn’t know half of the stuff he’d been up to, Stiles decided to nod agreeably and focus on shoveling cereal into his mouth to forestall any more ‘attitude.’ His dad’s stern expression melted a little and he patted Stiles on the shoulder on his way out the door. “At least don’t spend the entire day playing video games, okay?”

Stiles didn’t bother with a reply, mostly because he didn’t know what he was going to do for the day. It was too early to even think about texting Scott and, like always, Scott remained the extent of his immediate social circle. And the strange expansion he’d had thanks to werewolf shenanigans was hardly worth note -- even if he’d had a masochistic desire to hang out with any of them, they weren’t exactly available. No one had seen Boyd and Erica since the night of Gerard’s attack and the rest of the pack seemed to be laying low, which currently included Jackson, or so Isaac had told
Scott. And Allison had been shipped off to France for the summer, while Lydia was currently visiting relatives in New York.

So...Stiles had Scott, like always.

Still jittery from the dream he couldn’t remember, Stiles decided to try and organize all of the supernatural-related research he currently had stuffed in a box under his bed and half the day passed in a daze, as he tried to make sense of half of what he’d printed off the internet over the last few months. A lot of it was from when Scott had first been bitten, so it had either been proven incorrect or was now something he knew well enough that he didn’t need a piece of paper to remind him. After a few hours, Stiles was pretty disgusted with most of it and decided it could be trashed, although he needed a better disposal system than dumping it into his own trashcan. He was contemplating a midnight bonfire in the Preserve as he stuffed it all back under his bed.

His dad called around lunch time and asked if Stiles wanted to pick something up and come have lunch with him at the station; Stiles assumed his dad was feeling guilty about his sharp words from that morning, no matter how truthful they were. He gladly agreed, exchanging his ratty sweatpants for jeans before he headed out to one of his and his dad’s favorite diners to pick up their usual order.

That, Stiles would reflect later, was when things started to get weird.

He was standing at the register while he waited for the server manning the lunch counter to bag up his to-go cartons when he glanced around the diner. The diner looked like always -- shiny red booths and laminate tables, full of people at the lunch time rush. He recognized a lot of the faces he saw and those he skipped over from long familiarity. There was a woman, though, he’d never seen before, young and dressed in a suit and sharp heels that, for some reason, made him think “lawyer.” He watched her slide out of her seat and move to leave, his curiosity born primarily out of boredom. That was, until she glanced back toward him, and her face morphed right before his very eyes.

For a second instead of the attractive woman he had seen sitting at the booth, there was some kind of -- monster -- looking back at him, sunken eyes and decaying flesh and gaping, cavernous mouth with pointed teeth. It -- she? -- seemed to snarl when it noticed Stiles’s attention and Stiles jumped, startled. His flailing arm knocked into a napkin dispenser and he hurried to stop it from toppling to the floor. Once he had saved it, he looked back, only to see that the woman was gone, taking whatever he had seen with her.

Stiles was still trying to make sense of it when he heard his name being called. “Stiles? You okay?”

He turned quickly back toward the cash register where his food was waiting and Cindy, the server, was waiting to take his payment. “Yeah, yeah, of course,” he said, fumbling for his wallet. “That woman that just left, do you know her?”

“She works at a law firm near the Courthouse, has for about a year now,” Cindy asked. “Why?”

Stiles shrugged, not even sure how to answer.

“Don’t you think she’s a little older for you?” Cindy teased. “Don’t think Daddy would approve of you having a sugar mama.”

His lip curled in feigned disgust. “Real cute.”
Cindy laughed as she counted out his change. “I thought you were in the middle of your bad boy phase, anyway.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Stiles said, fake dignity impugned. He silently wanted to murder whichever deputy had blabbed to Cindy about his Jackson-related legal trouble.

Cindy raised an unimpressed eyebrow at his sad evasion. He didn’t know why he even tried; she’d known him since before his mom had died, which meant too well to fall for his crap. She leaned against the counter before she answered, voice pitched low like she was going to impart a secret. “Don’t think I haven’t seen you around town a time or two with Mr. Tall, Dark and Broody, him with the hot rod and the leather jacket.”

Stiles -- well, squawked in indignation. “I never!” he said, even as he felt color creeping up his neck. It was bad enough that he’d been seen with Derek Hale, period, let alone that Cindy drew the complete wrong conclusion.

She just rolled her eyes. “Calm down, Stiles, I’m not about to rat you out,” she said.

“There’s nothing to rat out, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, grabbing his food. “Later!”

Cindy’s laugh followed him out of the diner and, honestly, Stiles couldn’t decide what bothered him more, the strange double-vision of the woman with the monster’s face or the implication that he was -- dating? -- their resident jackass alpha werewolf.

Stiles decided to fall back on the old standby: ignore both problems until they went away.

His mood sank further when he reached the station and saw the serious set of his father’s features. “What?” he asked as he flung himself down in the empty chair at his dad’s desk. “I’m innocent, I swear.”

The Sheriff rolled his eyes, even as he reached for the food. “For once,” he said. Then he sighed. “I’ve got some sad news, I’m afraid.”

Stiles tried to stop himself from running through every nightmare scenario between his “Oh?” and when his father started speaking. He had to busy himself with opening his container of burger and fries to keep his hands steady.

“Remember your Aunt Marta? On your mom’s side?” his dad asked.

Stiles paused shaking his ketchup packet. “Mom’s cousin, right? They grew up together,” he said. “It’s not like I’ve seen her since the funeral.”

The Sheriff nodded. “I got a call today from a friend of hers,” he explained. “She...had the same thing that got your mom.”

Stiles noted the past tense and knew that a person only got rid of what had killed his mom one way -- and that was by dying. “Shit.”

“Yeah,” his dad agreed. He rubbed at the bridge of his nose. “There’s not going to be a funeral or anything. She was cremated today. But she left some family things that he’s sent on to us. Well, you. Since you’re all that’s left.”

“Last Gajos standing,” Stiles deadpanned. “Go me.”
The Sheriff grimaced but he didn’t bother to chastise Stiles for his earlier expletive or gallows humor. Stiles appreciated the leeway because, frankly, his life was at a point where he earned the use of those things, even if his dad didn’t know the half of it. “Sorry, kid,” was what the Sheriff settled on after the silence stretched out between them. “It’s a lousy distinction.”

Stiles didn’t argue because it was true.

Lunch was a strained affair after that and Stiles was glad to go home once he finished eating, especially since he got a text from Scott saying that he was done at the vet for the day and wanted to come over. They spent the rest of the afternoon and early evening playing video games so that, by the time the Sheriff got home for dinner, Stiles felt more like himself, like a normal teenage boy, and less like someone who hung with werewolves and was haunted by death. He even managed to throw together a salad that his dad ate most of, which was a win all around. By the time Stiles crawled into bed to watch Netflix until he passed out, he’d put most of the weirdness of the day behind him.

He woke up screaming from another nightmare about four hours later, his terror so loud and palpable that it woke his dad up with him. He still couldn’t remember what he dreamed of that scared so badly but the fear followed him to wakefulness, even with his dad at his side, soothing away the building panic attack before it could get too far. His dad assumed it was a nightmare about his mom, brought on by the news of Marta’s death, and Stiles almost wished it had been, so then he’d have been able to make sense of it. Instead, he was left with aimless dread and a million questions he had no idea how to answer about what was going on in his subconscious.

The next day, a huge package arrived on their porch, postmarked for one Mieczyslaw Stilinski from Marta Gajos. Inside was a massive trunk, almost what Stiles wanted to call a chest, with heavy iron fittings and an intimidating-looking lock. A padded letter arrived the same day and it contained an intricate-looking key that fit said lock.

And that was when things started to get even weirder.

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“We can go through it when I get home tonight,” his dad said once they had deposited the chest in Stiles’s room, both a little out of breath from the endeavor. It had been like carrying bricks.

“Naw, it’s fine,” Stiles said, his fingers twisting in the chain that held the key, now looped around his neck like a necklace. “I think I want to do it alone, you know? No offense, Dad.”

His dad gave his shoulder a squeeze. “None taken. But you call me if you need me, okay? Even if it’s just….stuff. Okay?”

“Okay,” Stiles agreed. “Now get out of here before you’re late. You’re the boss, you’re supposed to be a good example.”

The Sheriff snorted but gave him another quick shoulder-squeeze before he was out of the door. Stiles waited until he heard the front door slam before he sank to the floor in front of the chest, studying it in the sudden quiet. It looked ancient and impenetrable without the key around Stiles’s neck. He had no idea why Marta would choose to send whatever she had in that particular chest unless it was part of what she’d wanted him to have, a family heirloom in and of itself.

Stiles knew that his level of anticipation was over the top for what was probably a box of photos and knick knacks but his gut said something more than that was waiting for him. He took the chain from around his neck and fitted the key into the lock. It turned with a click and the lock fell open.
Stiles lifted the lid and peered inside. His first look was disappointing.

The contents of the chest was hidden under a velvety-looking cloth thrown over everything but, on top of the cloth, was waiting a letter, the plain white envelope addressed to him and his god-forsaken real name. He opened it and unfolded the paper within until lines of spidery black writing were revealed. He started reading.

*My dear Mieczyslaw,* the letter began, *I apologize that I can’t do this in person but it’s safer if I don’t. Let me tell you why: because fairy tales aren’t just stories. Monsters are real and they are hiding where you least expect them. And I have to warn you because Claudia didn’t get the chance.*

Stiles almost dropped the letter after those few lines. Six months ago, he would’ve blamed Marta’s words on the dementia that eventually killed her but Stiles knew she was right -- monsters were real. He had seen his fair share already. Marta sounded like she had, too, and his Mom, as well. His heart was hammering away in his chest at the implications.

He read on.

*More than warn you, I have to prepare you for what’s to come. You come from a distinguished line, one called to protect the innocents from the monsters they can’t see. You can see them -- you’ll soon be able to see what others can’t and you’ll inherit the gifts of our family that were mine until now. I know it sounds like the fantasies of a dying woman but when it comes to you, you’ll know. And you’ll need everything that we’ve sent to you.*

“Holy shit,” Stiles muttered aloud. It sounded like...it sounded like the Gajoses had been a family of hunters, like the Argents. Protecting innocents? See what others couldn’t? It sounded like it might’ve even been their version of the Argent Code -- hopefully one they followed better than the Argents had.

He continued to read.

*I know it must be frightening as you come into your power but, above all, trust yourself. Your instincts will guide you. I’m sorry that this burden will come to you without proper preparation but you’re all that’s left of us. I know you’ll make all of us, including your mother, proud.*

The letter ended with Marta’s simple signature and Stiles let it fall to the floor, still in shock. Out of all the strange coincidences in the world, could it be that he’d stumbled upon the supernatural by accident when it would’ve been exposed to him all along?

And what, he wondered, had Marta meant about coming into some kind of power? It sounded vaguely magical but it wasn’t like the Argents had any particular skills outside of the normal human realm, unless one counted the higher-than-normal incidence of psychopathy in Allison’s particular branch. But she made it sound like...something. Stiles didn’t know what but something.

Suddenly, he remembered the strange double-vision he had had of the pretty lawyer from the diner. He would see what others wouldn’t, Marta wrote, and no one had seemed to notice the woman’s ghoulishe face.

It was all too fantastic to really wrap his head around, even with his recent background in the supernatural. Stiles put the question of powers behind him and decided to delve into the tools that Marta had sent along.

He pulled away the cloth to reveal a ton of books that looked as ancient as the chest. He pulled volume after volume, caressing the spines, flipping through the pages. It looked like Marta had
sent him the hard copy of the Gajos version of the Argent bestiary, except several of the books were, thankfully, in English. Some weren’t, and they seemed to run the gamut of European languages: German, French, Latin and definitely several were in Polish. Stiles finally just set them all aside to see what else waited in the chest.

Beneath the books were weapons, medieval-looking and probably too dangerous for Stiles’s clumsy, untrained hands to handle. There were knives and maces and... maybe a crossbow? There were also a crate inside the chest, packed with cotton, that held glass bottles, some holding liquid and others herbs and powders, like something Deaton would pull out in a pinch.

Stiles closed the chest with a bang. He was suddenly pretty overwhelmed by everything the chest meant. The biggest thing that was swallowing up his thoughts was the fact that his mom would’ve known -- about the supernatural, about werewolves. If she had been there, he might’ve already known himself, even before Scott was bitten. He missed her with a renewed fierceness when he thought about what it might’ve meant to have her support during everything that had happened in recent months. He always missed her, of course, but this was a sharp new sting to that old ache.

Stiles also realized that he couldn’t let his dad know what was really in the chest. For one, his dad would immediately assume that it was part of Marta’s dementia and he’d probably just take it all away from him. Stiles definitely didn’t want that, especially not until he understood everything Marta had implied in her letter. He hated that it was another necessary lie that he’d have to feed his father.

He looked through the collection of books, pulling them all out of the chest, until he found one that had “Werewolves” stamped into the spine and then he laid the velvet cloth down to hide the weapons. He hid the English books beneath the foreign language ones, since his dad didn’t speak a lick of anything outside of conversational Spanish, so that he could hopefully pass off Marta’s gift as a bunch of musty old books that wouldn’t interest the Sheriff in the slightest. Stiles tucked Marta’s letter into the werewolf book and hid that volume under his bed for later reading.

The day was barely half-over and Stiles didn’t know what to do with himself. He was buzzing with everything he had learned and his concentration was shot from the jumble of excitement-anxiety-fear it had swirled up inside of him. It wasn’t like he was going to be able to distract himself with video games or porn; Marta’s revelations had been too huge for that.

Stiles needed to share.

SCOTT. COME OVER ASAP. he texted, using all-caps to impress upon his lackadaisical friend that he meant business. IMPORTANT SHIT TO SHOW YOU.

Because Scott was still the best, even when his Allison-induced stupidity made Stiles want to think otherwise, it took less than fifteen minutes for Stiles to get a ‘omw’ text in reply. Stiles hurried downstairs where he hovered by the door, the anticipation killing him. He couldn’t wait to be able to tell someone about everything, to share the influx of ideas and theories now floating around in his brain. He knew Scott probably wouldn’t care about a lot of it but he’d listen anyway. Thus was the beauty of their friendship.

Stiles had migrated to waiting in the living room when he finally heard Scott’s feet outside the door and then the front door was opening and he could hear Scott’s voice. “Stiles, man,” he was saying as he stepped inside. “What has got you all wound up this early?”

“You won’t believe me until I show you!” he said as he met Scott in the doorway and that was when several things seem to happen at once. Scott turned to Stiles and Stiles watched in horrible fascination as Scott’s face did that thing that the lawyer’s had where there was a double-vision
effect. Scott’s face flashed into something that vaguely looked like his wolfed-out face but was actually a little more wolfy, a little more of a complete change from something human to something animal. It only lasted a few seconds and it went away as soon as Stiles blinked, the face in front of him back to the familiar slopes and curves of Scott’s human one.

But that was not the most surprising thing because in those seconds when their eyes had met, Scott flinched, a full-body reaction that saw him slam himself away from Stiles like he thought his friend might hurt him. Stiles noticed that Scott’s hands had turned to claws and then he was actually wolfed out, golden eyes and all. When Stiles took a concerned step forward, Scott actually growled.

“Scott! What the hell is wrong with you?” Stiles said

Scott was breathing hard, like he still had asthma, but the gold was fading from his eyes and his claws were slowly retracting. “Stiles,” he said once the fangs were gone. “I’m sorry I -- it’s just -- your face.”

Stiles touched fingers to his nose. “What’s wrong with my face?”

Scott shook his head. “It’s just -- when I looked at you, for a minute, it was like -- I just knew you were going to hurt me.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Stiles said, even as he was replaying the words of Marta’s letter. “I would never!”

“I know!” Scott replied. “And it’s passed now and I know you’d never but it...I was startled and it just happened. Like, what the hell, you know?”

“Yeah, I know,” Stiles sighed. “Funnily enough, that is kind of why I called you.”

“Yeah?” Scott asked. “What’s up?”

“Like I said, I need to show you,” he said. “Follow me.”

Given the speed at which Stiles could talk, it didn’t take long for him to explain everything while Scott looked through the contents of the chest. Once he was finished speaking, Stiles stopped pacing and looked down at his friend. “Well?” he demanded.

“It’s kind of badass,” Scott said immediately because he was the best friend ever. “I mean, that minute earlier sucked but it’s cool that you’ve got this history.”

“You’re not afraid of me or weirded out?” Stiles asked. “Because, you know, the hunters of our acquaintance have been pretty iffy and, well, my face scared the shit out of you before?”

“I know I can trust you, Stiles,” Scott said. “So no, not afraid or weirded out.” He paused. “Although...”

“Although...?” Stiles prompted.

“Maybe we should talk to Deaton?” he suggested. “Like you said, the Argents don’t have the face thing and your aunt mentioned powers. He might know more.”

Stiles thought about the terrible moment when it looked like Scott was actually afraid of him and how his friend still couldn’t quite articulate what it was about Stiles’s face that had set him off. He thought again about the double-vision thing.
“Okay,” he agreed. “To Deaton’s, we go.”

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Deaton was actually busy with customers since it was the middle of the day, so Scott and Stiles camped out in one of the back rooms until he had a break in appointments. He offered a smile in apology as he entered -- that is, until his gaze landed on Stiles’s face.

The vet stilled, like a man scared of being attacked by a wild animal, and Stiles watched as something green and verdant -- the impression of vines and earth and sun -- seemed to shimmer in his eyes before they settled to their usual dark color. “Well,” he began, closing the door behind him. “I was going to ask what you brought you boys here but I think I know.”

“Yeah, that,” Stiles said with a grimace. “Scott had a reaction, too. We thought you might know something about why.”

“I think I can help with that,” he said. “I’m going to assume that you’ve had a recent death in the family?”

Stiles nodded. “My mom’s cousin, Marta. She was the last of my mom’s family.”

“Other than you,” Deaton said.

“Yeah, except for me.” He leaned back against the cabinets that lined one side of the room. “She sent me a trunk of stuff -- books and knives and potions, I think. She wrote a letter but it wasn’t very specific. There was something about powers? If I hadn’t started seeing weird stuff, I would’ve just thought that my mom’s family were hunters like the Argents.”

“Most hunter families are like the Argents, just humans who have gathered information and skill,” Deaton said. “But others...are a bit more.”

“So you do know what’s up with Stiles,” Scott said, a statement. “He’s a much rarer breed, but yes,” Deaton admitted. His gaze steadied on Stiles, studying. “I knew you had a spark of something in you. Maybe not magic but something. Now I see that I was right.”

“But I just got it, whatever it is,” Stiles said.

Deaton shook his head. “You didn’t get full powers until your cousin died but some of what you inherited you were born with. Your curiosity, your ability and compulsion to solve puzzles, riddles. Your interest in law enforcement, too. You probably have very good instincts, a ‘gut’ feeling about people.”

“Like how I just knew Matt was evil,” Stiles said, nodding.

“You were joking when you said that,” Scott said.

Stiles rolled his eyes. “I totally wasn’t, it was just that no one would listen to me and, oops, look who turned out to be right?”

“The point is,” Deaton continued, cutting off the argument. “The spark I saw in you was part of that. Now you’ve just gotten all of the power instead part of it. Think of it like the werewolf alpha power that’s passed from wolf to wolf.”

“So now I’m, like, alpha hunter?” Stiles asked with a snort.
“The German word for what you are is Grimm,” Deaton told him. “Given your family’s national heritage, Gniew might be the more apt term.”

“Is that Polish?” Stiles asked. “Because the only Polish I know is profanity and how to say good night.”

Deaton gave him a look that said he was unimpressed with Stiles’s witticisms. Scott was shaking his head, which meant the same thing.

“Okay, okay,” he said, holding his hands up for mercy. “So, Doc, can you exposition me? Give me the 4-1-1 about what I can expect?”

“You’ve probably dealt with most of it already,” Deaton said. “You’ve seen true faces, I assume, and you know that the supernatural will recognize you in return. Have you had visions? Or strange dreams?”

“Nightmares every night this week,” he admitted. “Last night was the worst.”

“That was probably the power transfer. I’ve heard it can be rough.” Deaton looked as if he wanted to say more but they all heard the bell on the front door chime. The vet turned to Scott. “I know you’re not working, but if you could get them settled, I’ll finish up with Stiles.”

Scott nodded and went off to do as the vet asked. Deaton turned to Stiles. “I can tell you this: you might not realize it yet but the power you have now will need fine-tuning. You’re going to have to think about training.”

“Okay,” Stiles said with a nod. “I can do...training. I guess.”

“You also need to be careful, in a way you haven’t before,” he said. “Before now, unless someone connected you with Scott or Derek or werewolves in general, you could be passed over by a supernatural being. But just as you can see them, they can see you now.”

“Why did I scare Scott?” he wanted to know. “He couldn’t explain.”

“Some have described it as seeing an infinite darkness looking back at them from your eyes but I think it’s different for different beings. Just know that they can and you won’t necessarily make friends when they do.”

“Great, another target on my back,” Stiles mused. “It wasn’t enough to be the one squishy human around.”

Deaton offered him a small smile. “There’s more I’d like to tell you, but I don’t have time now. If you want to come back after I close up?”

Stiles sighed because it wasn’t like he really had a choice. “See you then,” he said. “Thanks, Dr. Deaton.”

The vet offered him a nod before he left Stiles alone with his thoughts, which had yet to stop racing since he had opened Marta’s letter earlier that day. After werewolves, magical hunter blood wasn’t that hard to accept, except where it applied to him, Stiles Stilinski. Nothing about him really spoke much to being destined to be a great slayer of evil supernatural beings, which was probably why Deaton said he’d need to train. The thought didn’t delight. He had a feeling that no amount of destiny was really going to make it easier for him.

He and Scott left Deaton’s and Stiles remembered to shoot off a quick text to his dad that he was
going to hang with Scott for the rest of the day. It was a good cover for when he went back to Deaton’s after 5 and, with the chest locked and key around Stiles’s neck, his secret was safe for the moment. He did spend the day with Scott, although they decided not to focus on supernatural weirdness. Instead, Scott told Stiles about his determination to study all summer in preparation for junior year and Stiles definitely wanted to help, so they ended up at the local bookstore, going through stacks of used paperbacks, looking for titles from the reading list Stiles pulled up on his phone.

They left with two bulging plastic shopping bags of cheap books with plans to share them as needed between them. Scott was telling Stiles all about the SAT vocabulary prep page he had bookmarked on his computer as they headed to Stiles’s Jeep, parked half-way across the strip mall parking lot, when Stiles felt something like a pins-and-needles awareness creep up his spine. He stopped walking and turned sharply, searching around for the source of the feeling.

He was surprised when his eyes landed on Jackson and Isaac standing near Jackson’s car, parked near the hardware store. The pair was an incongruous sight, despite their shared douchey propensity for unnecessary scarves, but Stiles knew from Scott that Jackson was getting his Werewolf 101 education from Derek. What really surprised Stiles -- although it would have to stop surprising him soon, he supposed -- was the way the two young werewolves were staring back at him.

Stiles narrowed his eyes and Jackson’s face slipped first, flashing him a second of his true, wolfy face and the lapse seemed to ripple to Isaac a second later. It was still fascinating to see and Stiles held his gaze on him, even as he watched Jackson’s eyes widen when he noticed that Stiles was still watching. Something made Stiles take a few steps toward them and he watched as they both flinched at the action: Jackson reared back until his shoulders hit his car and Isaac’s shoulders hunched a little before he looked back to challenge Stiles’s interest with fanged teeth bared.

That drew a low grow from Scott, still at Stiles’s side, reminding Stiles that they were having a weird stand-off in a busy mall parking lot, still far enough away from each other that the werewolves would need to shout before Stiles could hear them. He laid a hand on Scott’s shoulder and jostled him out of his staring contest with Isaac. “Come on,” he said, grabbing his friend by the neck and directing him toward his Jeep like he was a misbehaving puppy. “That was weird, let’s just go.”

“Sure,” Scott said, letting himself be steered. “I guess it was more of your new stuff, huh?”

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed. “It’s gonna take some getting used to.”

Scott set the bag of books down in the back as he climbed in. “But you have to admit, after years of his crap, it was kind of cool that you could intimidate Jackson with a look.”

Stiles slid the keys into the ignition but didn’t start the Jeep, thinking back. “I’ll concede that,” he said. “Is this what you felt like when your werewolf powers kicked in?”

Scott shrugged. “I was more excited that I could play lacrosse and Allison liked me but yeah, a little.”

“Well you’ve always been a kinder, gentler soul than I, Scotty,” Stiles pointed out, a philosophical lilt to his words. “Me, I’ve got a mean streak a mile wide.”

“I don’t know about that,” Scott said.

Stiles started the car. “I do, buddy,” he said. “I do.”
Stiles had always been aware that he was a little more ruthless than his heart-of-gold friend and had just chalked it up to the fundamental differences in their personalities but he wondered if that difference had something to do with the “infinite darkness” that now lived in his eyes. Stiles wasn’t an evil person or even a bad one but he had seen during the last six months where Scott had struggled to deal with the death portion of their supernatural adventures, Stiles had less so.

Scott wanted to save everyone and believed it could be done while Stiles...sometimes he had found himself a little more down with Derek’s modus operandi of teeth-and-claws now, questions later. He wouldn’t have let the guy kill Lydia or anyone he really cared about but if death had been the only way to stop Jackson? Stiles couldn’t imagine that he would’ve cried all that much over the dude’s dead body. And he definitely hoped that Gerard Argent was rotting wherever he was.

It was more reflection to add to the pile of thoughts already cluttering up Stiles’s mind and he resigned himself to a few more sleepless nights, even without the specter of nightmares. Just like with werewolves, these new revelations were rewriting everything Stiles knew, except it wasn’t just reality under assault, it was the reality of his own self. And even if he was just a spastic teenager with a love-hate relationship with danger, Stiles had never really questioned himself before in the midst of it all. But now he had to, making him all the more eager for whatever he could learn from Deaton. More than most, Stiles knew he needed to understand before he could accept.

He knew one thing, though: his hopes for a boring summer were already thoroughly dashed.

**

Derek could sense the betas’ agitation before they had even gotten halfway up the stairs to the loft. He paused where he had been sweeping up the dust and debris scattered across the floor, trying to bring a vague semblance of habitability to the space. He didn’t need much and the loft had fit the bill: more secure and easily defensible than any of his other choices and far enough away from other residential areas that he felt like he had some level of solitude within his own walls.

Peter, sitting on the iron stairs, looked up as Jackson and Isaac’s footsteps grew closer and he glanced at Derek, as if he, too, could sense distress coming from the teenagers. A moment later, the door slid open and the two boys were there, both carrying the goods from the hardware store he’d sent them after.

With only a few weeks of actual training between them, Derek was less able to read Jackson’s expression but he recognized the stricken one on Isaac’s face. “What?” he demanded, letting the handle of the industrial broom drop from his hold. “What happened?”

The boys exchanged a look and Derek steeled himself for news about the Alpha Pack. They had been quiet since the warning painted on the door of the Hale House but Derek had been trying to prepare for whatever they would bring. He still didn’t know where Boyd and Erica were and he didn’t plan to lose any more of his pack if he could help it.

Out of everything Derek might’ve expected to hear, what Isaac said wasn’t it. “We saw Scott and Stiles at the store.”

Derek let his confusion cover the fact that he was startled to hear Stiles’s name for the first time in weeks. Isaac had spoke of Scott since they saw each other when they helped at the vet but Derek had been careful to keep his distance both from them. Especially Stiles, who he technically had no reason to see. He was just Scott’s annoying human friend, no matter what he had done for Derek since they had met. “So?” he prompted when Jackson and Isaac shared a look between them, like neither wanted to continue.
It was Jackson who let out a disgusted noise and broke off his staring contest with Isaac. “There’s something wrong with Stilinski,” he spit out. “I don’t know what but…”

“He’s not right,” Isaac continued. “He’s not...Stiles.”

Derek tried to pretend like he didn’t feel something leaden in his stomach at his betas’ words, didn’t feel something wrong crawling up his spine.

“Huh,” Peter said from his roost on the stairs, reminding everyone of his presence. “That could mean any number of terrible and terrifying things.”

“Tell me,” Derek ordered. “Everything.”

As Derek listened, he tried to ignore the wolf crying in the back of his head, the annoying voice that told him that if he didn’t want to lose any more of his pack, that he meant he couldn’t lose Stiles.

**

“This is a terrible idea,” Stiles said under his breath for what was probably the twentieth time since he had climbed in his Jeep that morning. “This is the terriblest idea.”

The night before he had met with Deaton for a few hours and got the gist of what Deaton thought he needed to do in order to get a handle on his newfound abilities. The powers Marta had mentioned hadn’t just included the true-face thing he had already experienced or, apparently, visions to help guide him. No, there was always physical abilities as well.

“You’re saying that I’m a superhero now?” Stiles had asked dubiously when Deaton had mentioned enhanced strength, speed, improved reflexes and quicker healing.

“But you aren’t quite as ‘squishy’ as you were before.”

The point he had been trying to make was that none of it would do Stiles much good if he didn’t get training to put it to good use. And who did Deaton suggest would be the ideal candidate to train up a fledgling Grimm?

Chris freaking Argent, of course.

Which was why Stiles had gotten up that morning, ignored the warning bells in his head, and driven over to the apartment building that the Argents had moved to after Gerard had disappeared. Stiles was glad he wouldn’t have to return to the house where he’d been dragged and beaten a month before.

Still, it didn’t mean he wanted to go to Chris Argent for help.

Finally the elevator reached the Argents’ floor and Stiles knocked on the door with all the happiness of a man facing an execution. Deaton hadn’t exactly told him how to get Argent to agree to train him, other than by telling him the truth but Stiles wasn’t sure how much traction that would get him. It wasn’t like Scott -- and, by extension, he -- didn’t have a complicated relationship with the Argent family.

It was after his second knock that the door opened and there stood Mr. Argent, surprise evident on his face. “Stiles,” he said in that deep, rumbling way he had. “I thought you’d be aware that Allison is gone for the summer.”
“I am,” he said. “I’m here to talk to you.”

Argent raised an eyebrow but made no move to let him in.

“Deaton told me to come to you,” Stiles said. “I need help and it’s not really a conversation I want to have in the hall, you know?”

Argent backed up and let Stiles enter the apartment. It was nice, he noticed, and didn’t seem to have room or privacy where Argent could string up teenagers and torture them. That alone made it an improvement over their old house.

“After recent events, I thought it would be best for me and my daughter if I got out of the business, so to speak,” Argent said. “I’m not sure why Alan sent you to me for help.”

Stiles took a deep breath and hoped he wasn’t going to regret this. “My mom’s cousin died recently,” he said.

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

Stiles shook his head. “I didn’t really know her but she sent me stuff because I’m basically the last one still alive on that side of my family.” Stiles’s fingers worried at the hem of his T-shirt. “Do you know what a Grimm is?”

Argent’s eyes widened in surprise. “Are you saying that you…?”

“Have you ever heard of Marta Gajos?” Stiles asked.

The surprise on Argent’s face became shock. “Marta Gajos was your mother’s cousin?”

Stiles nodded.

Argent finally sat down and Stiles copied him, collapsing into a nearby chair. “I worked with her once, years ago,” he finally said. “Grimms... we Argents primarily concern ourselves with werewolves, but Grimms, like your cousin... there are things you can’t even begin to imagine and that’s what they often deal with. But even before that incidence, I knew of her by reputation.”

“Yeah, so she died and now I’m this Grimm thing,” Stiles said. “Deaton said I need to train if I want to be able to do what she could with these ‘powers’ or whatever. And if I’m some kind of magical hunter, we figured that you’d be the best person to teach me what to do with it.”

“I hardly think you’re suddenly going to become a werewolf hunter, Stiles,” Argent said dryly. “I don’t think your loyalties are that divided.”

“No, you’re right but my family’s motto seems to be more about protecting innocents than murdering werewolves,” Stiles replied. “And I know enough about how you guys go after wolves, thanks. What I’m talking about is learning how to fight, to use the chest full of crazy weapons Marta sent me. Even if I wanted Scott to teach me that, he couldn’t. He doesn’t fight like a human and that’s what I am, no matter whatever kind of supernatural power-up I have.”

Argent gave him a long, searching look. It was interesting how relieved Stiles was to be faced with someone who wasn’t suddenly flinching if they looked too long into his eyes. Stiles held Argent’s gaze. “You’re serious?”

“Absolutely,” he said. “If you’re out of the business, it looks like I’m all the hunter Beacon Hills has left.”
“Hopefully it won’t need me or you,” Argent said.

“Because we’re that lucky,” Stiles said.

Argent almost smiled.

“Look, I’m not like your family or probably even Marta. I’m not going to go looking for trouble. But if it comes here, I want to be able to help. In case it wasn’t obvious, I’m kind of the brains around here.”

“Well, you do choose to associate with teenage werewolves,” Agent said. “Hardly surprising that you have the most sense among them.”

“Anyway,” Stiles said. “What do you say?”

“I’ve always admired your bravery even when I thought it doubled as stupidity,” Argent said after a minute.

“Thanks?”

“What I mean is...yes, I’ll help you.” Argent pointed a finger at him. “But you have to take this seriously. Don’t waste my time.”

“I wouldn’t waste mine,” Stiles said.

“I’ll call you in a few days once I’ve got an idea of how I want to do this.”

“None of the kidnapping, surprise attack stunts you pulled on Allison,” Stiles warned. “I won’t like it and my dad will take it seriously.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” he said.

Stiles stood, wiping his sweaty palms down the thighs of his jeans. “So, yeah, that was it. Thanks.”

Stiles called Scott, who was at Deaton’s for work, once he was on the road home to let him know the good news, if it could be called that. Stiles still wasn’t sure if he was ready to put himself in the hands of any Argent for anything but at least Chris Argent had proven to be the least crazy of the Argent adults he had met. The fact that he wanted to leave hunting behind entirely only made him more sane in Stiles’s opinion. He wondered if Allison shared her father’s opinion or if that was part of the reason she was off to Europe for the summer.

After his meeting with Argent, Stiles stopped by the grocery store to pick up a few things and did the ‘true face’ thing twice more on random people he passed. One looked like a hamster or something and it scurried away post-haste when it saw Stiles and another, a woman, looked feathered and didn’t even seem to notice Stiles at all. Stiles was beginning to realize how much more there was to the supernatural world of Beacon Hills than werewolves and their associated issues but at least these other beings seemed to keep to themselves.

Stiles’s world was growing weirder every day.

Once he was home and certain that his dad was snoring peacefully in his room in preparation for covering the night shift, Stiles used the key he still wore around his neck to unlock Marta’s chest. He didn’t know why but he wanted to touch everything again, run his fingers over the old blades of the knives, down the age-worn spines of the books, across the cool glass of the unknown liquids housed within. He knew he couldn’t but it was like he wanted to absorb the knowledge through the
tips of his fingers.

He had dinner with his dad before the Sheriff left for his shift, then Stiles settled on his bed with his computer and Marta’s werewolf book. He started at the beginning of the book, skipping over the random paragraphs in languages he didn’t read. It looked less like a book, he realized, and more like a compendium of information left by past Grimms on the subject of werewolves. There was no real rhyme or reason to the way the information was organized.

The drawings were badass, though.

Stiles pushed the book aside to run downstairs for a soda. When he came back up the stairs, he couldn’t help but notice that the bedroom light was off, where it hadn’t been before. Sure, the bulb could’ve decided to die while he’d been downstairs but it seemed unlikely. His steps slowed and he wished he had grabbed the aluminum baseball bat his dad kept near the front door. Part of him wanted to run from whatever might be waiting in his room but another part said he could face it. That second part was probably what Chris Argent considered stupidity.

Stiles had barely reached the door to push it open when a hand -- clawed, definitely werewolfy -- had a hold of him, dragging him into the room and throwing him up against in the wall. In the dark, Stiles struggled to see his attacker but that didn’t stop him from lashing out, arms and legs, trying to free himself from whoever’s hold. Through some stroke of magically-inherited luck, Stiles’s elbow slammed into the werewolf’s snout and Stiles was free. He heard a grunt of pain even as he scrambled for the light switch, which he managed to turn on right before he was grabbed again, pinned against the now-closed door by a heavy arm laid across his collarbone.

Once his eyes adjusted to the light, Stiles found himself nose-to-nose with the true face of a werewolf, far more actual wolf than the three he’d seen already. Dark fur and red eyes and, somehow, a sadness deeper than Stiles knew he usually wore on his beautiful, human features.

“Derek,” he whispered as everything came into sharp focus -- Derek’s usual face, his bloodied nose, the fact that he could feel the sting in his elbow that had caused the injury that was already healing before his eyes. The fact that he had managed to hit, to hurt Derek at all.

“...Stiles.”

The werewolf had always been a man of few words.

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Derek had been disturbed by his betas’ report about Stiles, but not so much that he hadn’t decided to wait until he could catch Stiles home alone without his father in the house. He watched until the Sheriff left and let himself in through the window of Stiles’s room when the boy ran downstairs. He flicked off the lights to give himself an advantage, since he didn’t know what exactly he would be facing.

As Peter had said, a report of Stiles “not being Stiles” could mean a number of things, none of which were good, especially since he had smelled the fear that both his betas had felt faced with whatever Stiles currently was. Something about Stiles -- skinny, defenseless Stiles -- had scared Isaac and Jackson. It was worrisome, to say the least.

But for all the things Derek had feared, what he actually saw once he came face-to-face with Stiles had never even entered his mind.

Derek’s breaths were quick and his nose still throbbed from where Stiles -- Stiles -- had managed
to jab him with his elbow, a fact that had surprised him enough that he had dropped his hold. But now Derek had Stiles pinned against the wall, subdued, and he could look into Stiles’s eyes and he understood exactly why his betas had come to the loft confused and scared.

It started with the black hole that now existed in Stiles’s eyes.

Behind the color -- the same amber brown they had always been -- there was a depth, a darkness that reflected back at Derek everything that Derek knew of himself and the world. It was intense, penetrating; it held a wisdom beyond all their ages, held magic that sent shivers up Derek’s spine. It chilled him even though he knew he’d never be able to find the words to explain why. It was like looking into the yawning infinity of space.

It was looking into the eyes of a Grimm.

“Derek,” he heard Stiles say and he could only answer with “Stiles,” not knowing exactly what else to say faced with the tectonic shifting of his reality. Stiles was a Grimm, the thing that was basically a supernatural creature’s version of a boogeyman, the thing they grew up to fear even more than hunters like the Argents. Because Grimms were magic on top of ruthless and they could see down into your truest soul.

Which meant Stiles could see down into Derek’s.

Before he realized it, Derek had jerked away from Stiles, releasing him from his hold.

“Thanks,” Stiles said as he took a deep breath, like Derek’s grip had deprived him of air. “What was with the rough handling anyway?”

Derek had to concentrate to answer, his instincts still running high and agitated -- still trying to reconcile Stiles with Grimm. “Isaac and Jackson said that there was something wrong with you.”

“So you came to check on me?” He sounded delighted.

“To kill you, if need be,” he clarified.

Stiles frowned. “Just when I think our friendship has evolved past idle threats.”

“It wasn’t idle,” Derek said. “They made it sound like you were possessed. Sometimes that’s the only way to deal with situations like those.”

“Possession? Like demonic possession? That’s a thing I have to worry about, too? Great,” Stiles said. He glanced up sharply, catching Derek’s eyes. Derek had to work hard not to react, still unused to the darkness he saw in their depths. “You know I’m not possessed, right?”

“I realize that,” Derek agreed. “You’re Grimm.”

“Well, you’re pretty dire yourself, sourwolf, but I try not to judge. Much.” The humor faded. “So you know I am.”

Derek let out a mirthless mockery of a laugh. “Yeah, Stiles, I do. I grew up on stories about your kind.”

“What kind of stories?”

“You’re our version of the Big Bad Wolf.”

Stiles winced. “Yikes, that’s some bad press, right there.” Derek hadn’t even realized that he was
avoiding Stiles’s gaze again until he noticed how hard Stiles was trying to catch his. Derek let their eyes meet and, finally, he could see Stiles there instead of just Grimm, could see the different kind of intensity that was Stiles’s alone. Derek was never quite sure what that tangle of earnestness and frankness meant when Stiles looked at him like that. He’d tried more than once to catch the scent that went with it but he could never discern anything outside of Stiles’s unique scent overlaid with the usual jumble of lust-restlessness-medication that followed him everywhere. “Derek, man, you have to know that nothing’s changed, right? It’s not like I’m suddenly your enemy.”

“Then why do you smell like Chris Argent?” Derek asked.

“Because Deaton said I needed someone to teach me how to defend myself and Argent is the only person I know who would have any idea on how to use half of the weapons that Marta sent me.” Stiles shook his head. “Look, I can tell this is freaking you out but this is happening to me. I am way beyond freaked out whenever I let myself think about it too hard.” He let out a sigh as he sank down to sit on the edge of his bed. “I mean, shit, I actually landed an effective jab on you. That’s enough to blow my mind.”

“I was surprised, not hurt,” he said. “You’re hardly a threat.”

“Exactly!” Stiles agreed, complete with flailing arms. “Just because my cousin died and all I got was this lousy double-vision thing and a trunk full of books and weapons doesn’t change that. Right?”

Derek could hear the entreaty in Stiles’s voice. “Right, he finally said and watched as the tension bled from Stiles’s shoulders. “Nothing’s changed.”

“Good,” Stiles said. “Great, even.”

Derek headed for the window.

“Hey, you’re leaving? Just like that?”

“I just came to make sure we didn’t have another situation like the kanima on our hands,” he said. “I have, we don’t, so, yes, now I’m leaving. Goodbye, Stiles.”

Derek didn’t wait for the kid’s reply even though he could hear it as he was walking toward the street. “Oh, so all I have to do to get you to check in is gain weird magical hunting powers. Fan-freaking-tastic.”

Derek wasn’t sure what the words meant, so he ignored them. He was still busy dealing with the fact that Stiles had become a Grimm. That Stiles was now something else, something different than what Derek had come to know him as. Derek didn’t appreciate change or unknown mixing around with the things he had already sorted and dealt with. Stiles had already had a bad habit of escaping the boxes where Derek’s mind put him -- nuisance, sidekick, enemy, ally, something-else-to-be-ignored -- but now he had run amok of it all. Derek didn’t know what to think.

When he reached the loft, the only person still there was Peter and his uncle was waiting for a report with baited breath.

“So,” he began by way of greeting when Derek walked in. “I don’t see any blood so I’m assuming you didn’t have to murder your favorite little human?”

Derek ignored the jab about Stiles being his favorite. “He’s not possessed. He’s a Grimm.”

Even Peter couldn’t keep up his feigned boredom at that. “Our little Stiles is a Grimm?
That’s...way more interesting than anything I had thought of.”

“He mentioned a Marta,” Derek told him. “Sound familiar?”

“There was a Marta Gajos some years ago that was said to be a Grimm,” Peter admitted. “Could very well be her.”

“That’s why Jackson and Isaac were afraid of him,” Derek said.

Peter was watching him with his pale, assessing eyes. “Are you saying you weren’t when you saw him?”

Derek closed his eyes, remembering. “It wasn’t fear, exactly, but it wasn’t pleasant.”

“I look forward to my next meeting with him,” Peter said. “I’ve never faced a Grimm before.”

Derek snorted. “No telling what he’ll see if he looks at your true face.”

Peter waved a hand, accepting Derek’s words. “It would’ve made an interesting case study had he accepted the bite when I offered.”

Derek felt himself go cold. “You did what?”

Peter rolled his eyes like he was over Derek’s growling questions. “It was a lifetime ago now, quite literally. But he helped me find you when Kate Argent had you and I offered. He declined.” Somehow Stiles had probably rambled about a million useless words in Derek’s hearing since then but that had never come up. When he glanced back at Peter, he was watching Derek with a quirked eyebrow. “I wonder what he’d say if you were the alpha with the teeth on his wrist? Not that it would matter. Grimms are immune to the bite.”

“Why are you still here?” Derek wanted to know. “As you’ve said more than once, you have a much nicer apartment waiting for you.”

“We were so close when you were younger, Derek,” Peter said. “Don’t you miss it?”

“Since you murdered Laura, tried to kill me and came back from the dead? Not really.”

“Now, now,” Peter chided. “No need to be so rude.”

Derek rolled his eyes and resisted the urge to slit Peter’s throat -- again. He settled for growling, deep and low. His uncle stood up, hands raised in mock surrender. “Fine,” Peter said. “I’ll leave you to your brooding. But at least Stiles has turned out to be of some use.”

Derek hated himself even as he asked, “What do you mean?”

Peter’s smile was smug and chilly. “Well if anything is going to distract the Alpha Pack from us, it’s going to be the presence of a new and wholly unprepared Grimm. At least he’ll have bought us some time while they track him down and gut him.”

Derek was rooted to the spot by Peter’s words, which allowed his uncle to lean in close as he passed. “It’s a pity,” he whispered in Derek’s ear. “I think I’ll miss him.”

The heavy sound of the loft door closing echoed around him but it still wasn’t as heavy as the sound of his beating heart at the thought of losing Stiles to the Alpha Pack.
Chapter 2

A few hours after Derek left, another werewolf crawled into Stiles’s room through his window but this one had been explicitly invited.

Scott stilled as soon as he was over the sill, eyeing the way Stiles was pacing around. “You okay, Stiles?”

“No,” Stiles said emphatically, not bothering to stop his pacing. “I think I’ve finally reached a place where I need to freak out.”

Scott settled on the bed to listen to Stiles’s account of his visit from Beacon Hills’ resident alpha werewolf, the recitation of which just seemed to add to Stiles’s roiling emotions. Because while Stiles had briefly thought it was awesome to be able to cow Jackson with a look, seeing the reaction that Derek had had to him stole all the fun out of it. It had been terrible -- god, he was using that word so much these days, terrible, terror, terrifying -- to see that kind of naked fear in Derek’s eyes when he looked at him. Derek had looked at him in a lot of ways but never like that and Stiles -- he hated it. He hated that Derek had spent most of their brief conversation trying not to look him in the eye.

“He couldn’t stand to look at me,” he whined to Scott. “And, bizarrely, it was not okay.”

“He’ll get over it,” Scott said. “It only took a minute for me to get used to it. Now I barely notice when I look at you.”

Stiles frowned. “Yeah but we have our epic bromance for the ages to fall back on,” he said. “Me and Derek, we don’t really have much other than…”

“…your weird thing for each other,” Scott finished with a snort.

Stiles gawked. “There is no…I mean, I don’t have…I mean, what?”

Scott gave him a look that inferred that Stiles was an idiot, which was just wrong coming from his best friend. If there was anyone in their friendship who deserved to receive that look, it was Scott from Stiles, not the other way around. “Okay, look, I don’t want to talk about this, like, ever but -- dude, you basically smell like lust and pining every time he’s around. I wasn’t going to mention it because it doesn’t seem to bother him. But, yeah, you guys have a weird thing.”

Stiles was glad that no one else was around to witness his absolute mortification in the face of Scott’s casual summation of something he tried really hard to hide from himself. Because, yes, Derek was hot like burning and sometimes he had a sadness about him that made the tender parts of Stiles’s heart contract until it was painful but it wasn’t a thing. That was reserved for the likes of Lydia Martin, even if Stiles had kind of backed off of that since they were something like actual friends these days.

This was exactly why Stiles didn’t ever want to think about this. Ever.

While he was busy involuntarily turning a bright shade of red and hoping that he could, actually, please, die from this level of embarrassment, Scott had stood, coming over to lay a supportive hand on Stiles’s shoulder. “It’s fine, okay? Nothing is going to change. Derek will get over it.”
motioned toward the window. “I’m going to split so I beat my mom home. Talk more tomorrow?”

“Yeah, sure,” Stiles said with a sigh and a waving arm. “If you haven’t broken my brain. Jesus, Scott.”

Scott grinned over his shoulder, one leg already out of the window. “Werewolves, kanimas and magical hunter blood you handle and this breaks you? Man up, dude.”

Scott was gone before Stiles had a chance to actually throw something at him like he desperately wanted to.

Stiles tried to concentrate on something productive -- so many new books about werewolves and other supernatural things -- but he couldn’t make himself stare at the words and comprehend them, so he eventually settled down to watch old-ass anime shows on Hulu until he passed out. It wasn’t the best sleep he’d ever had but at least there were no screaming-awake nightmares, so Stiles called it a win, even if he had slept lightly enough to wake up at the sound of his dad’s car pulling up in the drive at the end of his shift.

Despite the fact that it was too early for anyone sane to be awake, Stiles noticed that he had a text message, one that had come from -- Allison Argent’s phone?

3pm at the Preserve entrance. Bring whatever she sent you. - CA

“Wow,” Stiles said aloud. “Who even knew the dinosaur could type?”

It was a little tricky sneaking various weapons down into his Jeep with his dad around, but the Sheriff was pretty much beat after working all night and Stiles left him snoring in his recliner when he finally tiptoed out with his own personal arsenal stuffed in a duffel bag over his shoulder. He’d packed a lot of what had come out of Marta’s chest -- several knives, something that looked like a baseball studded with sharp iron points and a funky crossbow. He figured Chris Argent would appreciate the latter.

Argent’s SUV was already parked when Stiles pulled up. By the time he got out, Argent was waiting for him by the back of the Jeep.

“Stiles,” he said. “Are you ready?”

He shrugged, a gesture made awkward by the duffel on his shoulder. “As I’ll ever be.”

Argent started walking into the wilderness. “Follow me.”

Stiles didn’t argue as he followed, letting Argent set the pace and the direction. As much time as the Argents had spent skulking in the woods, he figured Chris knew a good spot where they could practice without being seen. It didn’t take too long before they settled in a small clearing that didn’t look any different to Stiles than any other he’d come across in the Preserve but he was hardly an outdoorsman for all the time he spent out there these days.

Argent motioned for the duffel. “Let’s see what you have.”

For all that Stiles liked to talk shit about the Argents, Chris definitely knew his stuff when it came to weapons and he wasn’t a bad teacher. He went through each of the weapons that Stiles had brought, explained what it was, how it was used and any history he knew about it.
Naturally, he started with the crossbow. “I believe Grimms call this a doppelarmbrust,” he said, holding up the archaic-looking weapon. “Double crossbow. The darts you’ve brought are typically packed with a poison of some kind. For werewolves, it would typically contain wolfsbane.”

“Typically,” Stiles parroted. “But since I don’t plan on killing werewolves, what else could be used?”

Chris sent the doppelarmbrust back into the duffel as he answered. “Maybe some kind of hemlock extract? That is more Deaton’s expertise than mine.”

Out of everything, Stiles was most drawn to the studded baseball bat, which Chris explained was called a kanabo. Mostly because he was used to swinging wildly at things and it would probably be the easiest to explain away if someone caught him with it. Surprisingly, Argent agreed. “It’s difficult to be inconspicuous when you’re carrying medieval weaponry,” he admitted. “If it wasn’t for your Grimm blood, I’d suggest that you’d upgrade to the 21st century if you planned to hunt, but there is a ritual aspect with Grimms, or so I’ve heard. We don’t know much but there is magic involved with what you are. Magic needs the right tools.”

Of course, Argent chose to start Stiles’s training with the funky crossbow. “This is hopeless,” Stiles declared after his last two darts went awry of the target for what felt like the hundredth time. Stiles squinted at it and practiced aiming the crossbow while Argent collected the darts. “So much for super magical hunting abilities.”

“While I hate to suggest that any teenager use their brains less, I think you’re overthinking this, Stiles,” Chris said as he handed the darts back. Stiles steadied the crossbow and carefully loaded it for another go-round. At least he’d learned one thing. “First, stop being in a hurry. You have to learn accuracy before you can add speed. Second, you are supposed to be naturally gifted at this. Perhaps try relaxing and trusting that?”

“Easy for you to say,” Stiles muttered under his breath but he gamely lifted the crossbow and pointed it at the target. He focused on steadying his hand, on trying to line up the target and less on the fact that it took him forever to do it. “They were all scared of me,” he heard himself saying out loud.

“They?” Chris asked, like conversation was something they did and not a weird aberration in their working relationship.

“The werewolves,” Stiles clarified. “They all freaked when they saw me for the first time. After.”

“Even Scott?”

“He freaked the least,” he admitted. “But the others…it was weird.”

“They respect you.”

“Not hardly.”

“Then at least the power you now have,” Chris continued. “You need to learn to harness that because one day you won’t have a choice but to use it.”

Stiles could feel his hands getting clammy. “Yeah, yeah.” He was still eyeing the simple paper
target Chris had tacked up on a nearby tree.

“Imagine yourself hitting the target and then let your intuition follow through,” he advised. The crossbow slipped a little in Stiles’s grip but he held it steady. “Take the shot.”

Stiles squeezed the trigger mechanism twice in quick but steady succession, making sure to keep his arm strong against the strange kickback from the loosening of the darts. When he dropped his arm, he looked across at the target and let out a whoop of excitement and gave in to the sudden desire for a fist pump. “Hell yeah!”

The darts weren’t really anywhere near the bullseye but they had hit the paper itself, not the ground or the bark of another tree. It was way closer than he’d gotten when they’d started an hour ago.

Chris actually flashed a smile. “You’re letting your nerves get the best of you,” he said as he pulled the darts from the paper. “It’s a common problem. I saw it with Allison a lot when I first started teaching her archery.”

“I’m never going to be as badass as you guys but I’d like to be good enough to hit the broadside of a bad guy before he gets to me,” Stiles said. “That’s the goal anyway.”

“Enough practice and that’s achievable,” he said. “As long as you’re willing to make the choice when you have to. It’s harder when it’s a living thing on the other end and not a paper target.”

“I don’t know,” Stiles sniped, unable to stop himself. “Your family doesn’t seem to have any problem with it.”

“I know we’ve had our differences of opinion but I have never wanted to do anything more than protect humans,” Chris said. “I know my family’s record of late but that doesn’t include me.”

“But you think I’m going to have to hurt someone, possibly a werewolf,” Stiles guessed.

“Born werewolves, like Hale? They’ve been taught to fear you their whole lives. You said you saw that fear yourself.”

Stiles tried not to think about it. “Yeah.”

“Werewolves are predators,” Chris reminded him. “They’re not going to stand an enemy in their midst for long. Especially not a new alpha who can’t even keep a pack together. He won’t be able to help himself.”

“Derek’s not going to hurt me,” Stiles said and even though he believed it -- and he did, they had too much life-saving between them to think otherwise -- Stiles was glad there were no werewolves around to listen to the stutter of his heart.

“I hope that’s true,” Chris said. “I don’t want anyone else hurt over all this. But I’m a realist and I think you prefer to be one as well.”

“I’m being real,” Stiles insisted.

“You’re talking about someone who murdered his own uncle in front of you.”

“His evil uncle who had killed his sister,” Stiles added because context was important. “And
unfortunately, Peter got better.”

Chris snorted. “I had heard of that.”

Stiles held out his hand for the darts. “Look I appreciate the bonding and all but I don’t think we’re going to agree about werewolves, now or ever. So?”

Chris held his gaze until it was almost uncomfortable but Stiles refused to look away. He wanted Chris to see the belief in his eyes, his certainty. There were a lot of things Stiles thought might kill him but Derek Hale was no longer one of them. Finally, Chris placed the darts in his open palm. He motioned toward the target. “Again.”

Stiles nodded, loaded the crossbow and tried again.

**

While Stiles was no werewolf, he always figured he was in decent shape. He played lacrosse, he spent more than enough time running for his life -- he was active. Still, after several days of training with Chris Argent, Stiles was beginning to wonder if he’d been wrong because he was sore. The muscles in his arms and back were particularly unhappy, stretched and tested in ways that lacrosse apparently hadn’t readied them for.

Every afternoon they had met so far, Chris had kept him out in the woods for hours and Stiles had done his best to be a good student. They had worked mostly with the crossbow at first, but eventually, Chris had added some knife work into the mix and Stiles had been impressed because, damn, Argent knew how to wield a knife. He should’ve known, of course, since he had seen Allison’s skills but it was far more impressive to behold when he wasn’t in imminent danger of death.

And in just those few days, Stiles had seen such marked improvement that he could no longer doubt the sing of the supernatural in his blood. He was still a giant klutz who couldn’t control his limbs in normal circumstances but whenever he concentrated and let the instinct come over him like Chris suggested, he could do it -- he could hit the target with the doppelarmbrust more often than not, he could hold a knife and not worry about nicking himself with its business end. He had managed to take down Chris a few times in their mock tussles and the hunter had grudgingly expressed his respect for Stiles’s growing skill.

“You might even survive your high school years,” Chris had joked dryly as they had parted that afternoon. “Imagine my surprise.”

Stiles took the sarcasm in stride; it was his language, after all. He just grinned and threw his duffel of weapons into the Jeep before climbing in. He gunned the engine as he sped away from the woods.

His dad was home when he dragged himself inside and he raised an eyebrow at Stiles’s dirty, sweat-soaked appearance. “You’re really taking this lacrosse training stuff, seriously, huh?”

He wiped at his cheek, nodding along with the lie he’d given his dad to explain his disappearances into the woods. “Well, maybe if I work hard enough I can join Scott on the field instead of the bench next year.”

“Good for you,” his dad said with an affectionate squeeze to his shoulder. “But you stink, kid. I
suggest a shower.”

“On it!” he said as he tripped up the stairs, all supernatural grace having fled. “I’m meeting Scott for burgers later. You good on your own?”

“Sure,” the Sheriff said with a gleam of mischief in his eye.

“No red meat!” Stiles yelled back as he reached the top of the stairs. “Vegetables! Salads! You hear me?”

The sound of his dad’s laughter followed him into the bathroom and Stiles felt something in his chest loosen at the uncomplicated sound. They had been struggling for so long, it felt like.

The summer sun had just started to disappear in splashes of red and orange by the time Stiles was leaving to meet Scott for dinner at his favorite diner. They didn’t do much “out” since they were poor teenagers who talked about things like werewolves a lot of the time but sometimes both he and Scott liked to pretend that they weren’t complete weirdos and do things like hang out together in public. That was their plan for the night -- food and then maybe the arcade. Nice, normal buddy activities that they hadn’t had a chance to enjoy lately.

Scott was waiting on his front porch and he all but leapt into the Jeep before they were off again. Cindy was working an evening shift for once and Stiles gave her a quick wave before he and Scott slid into one of booths near the back of the diner. She returned his wave and indicated that she’d be over in a minute. He gave her a thumbs up in reply.

They ordered burgers, curly fries and milkshakes, then had a conversation that didn’t revolve around anything more terrifying than what junior year of high school might hold for them.

“I’ve finished two books already,” Scott said proudly. “I’ve only got one more left off the summer reading list and then I’m going to start on we’ll be doing next year.”

“Five high, man,” Stiles said, holding up his hand. Scott’s palm met his. “That’s great. You’ll be ready to kick ass and take names next year. Academically, I mean. You were already doing that in other ways.”

Scott’s grin faded a little and he looked thoughtful. “It helps, actually. To keep my mind off things. People. You know.”

The specter of Allison hung heavy in the air and Stiles reached over to pat Scott on the arm in sympathy. “I hear you. You’re doing great. Love yourself first, Scotty, and nothing says that like self-improvement.”

“I just want to keep my grades up for lacrosse,” he said.

“You know Coach is going to make us all do cross-country in the Fall,” Stiles reminded him. “Because, of course, we don’t get enough Finstock between lacrosse and Econ.”

The conversation drifted to some of the happenings during Scott’s last shift at Deaton’s and Stiles was kind of a sucker for stories about fluffy animals even if he wasn’t really into owning a pet himself. People came and went around them but Stiles didn’t pay much attention. He was having fun with his friend and the ache in his muscles had further dulled to almost nothingness; the night was young, the food was great and all his supernatural problems seemed far away for the moment.
Which, of course, was why his supernatural problems decided to walk in the door. Not that Stiles noticed immediately -- it was Cindy who noticed first as she stopped by to drop the check at their table. “Tall, Dark and Broody just walked in with a friend,” she told him under her breath. Both Scott and Stiles tensed as they craned to see who had come in. As expected it was Derek, accompanied by Isaac.

Stiles let his head hit the table in exasperation. “And we were having such a nice night.”

Cindy snorted and patted him on the back of the head before she drifted away.

The next thing he knew, the two werewolves were looming beside their table. Stiles noticed that Derek looked like his usual scowly self but Isaac looked uncomfortable, refusing to let his eyes drift too near Stiles’s face. It still made Stiles feel bad-weird to think about his new effect on the werewolves of his acquaintance.

“Well?” Stiles prompted when no one else seemed inclined to speak. He crossed his arms and settled back to glare at Derek. “You need something?”

Derek looked like he wanted to flee instead of answer. “There’s something you two need to know,” he finally said, looking at Scott. Stiles tried not to feel ignored even though that was what had happened.

Scott let out a huff. “At least sit down.”

Isaac and Derek exchanged a look before Derek nodded and Isaac slid into the booth next to Scott, leaving Derek to crowd in next to Stiles. His wilder imagination might’ve read something into the feel of Derek’s thigh pressed next to his under the table if he knew it wasn’t just a matter of logistics.

“What do we need to know?” Scott asked.

Derek looked around like there were enemies ready to jump out of every shadow. Stiles might’ve once considered it just paranoid. “Not here,” he said in a low voice. “We need privacy.”

“Then why come in here?” Scott wanted to know.

“We saw Stiles’s Jeep,” Isaac explained.

“You could’ve just texted one of us instead of stopping,” Stiles pointed out. “Phones, communication technologies, it’s a thing.”

“Meet us at the loft as soon as you’re done here,” Derek said. He glanced toward Stiles and sneered a little. “I’ll text you the address.”

Stiles aggressively sucked on the straw of his milkshake. “You do that, big guy.”

Derek rolled his eyes before standing and stalking out.

“What’s this about?” Scott asked Isaac as the younger werewolf stood to follow his alpha.

“It is important, I promise,” Isaac said, not exactly an answer but Scott nodded anyway. “See you
in a few.”

“So,” Cindy asked a minute later when she came over to check on them. “Was that a jealousy thing or the shortest double date in the history of ever?”

Scott choked at the implication and Stiles opened his mouth to explain exactly how wrong her insinuations were when he heard his phone trill in his jeans pocket. He pulled it out to see that it was a text message with an address.

“It’s a sign that I was a horrible person in a former life,” Stiles sighed. “Come on, Scotty, I think we’re being summoned.”

The two friends quickly settled their check and piled into the Jeep, Stiles double-checking the address before he pulled out of the parking lot. Derek’s new digs were in a mixed-use area, part commercial and part residential, which Stiles hoped meant it was some improvement over a burned-out house and an abandoned railway station. When they pulled up, Stiles wasn’t sure if it was but the actual loft itself looked...livable if not cozy. He wasn’t surprised to find it sparsely furnished or a little dusty-looking. Derek liked his ambiance, it seemed.

The werewolf in question was leaning up against a table, arms crossed, as if the five-minute wait he had endured for their arrival was unacceptable. Isaac was on the couch, elbows resting on his knees.

“Okay,” Stiles began as he came inside, followed by Scott who closed the door behind them. “Things we need to know?”

It still took Derek a minute to answer, despite the fact that he had volunteered to share. “You both need to be careful,” he said. “There’s...we’re pretty sure there’s another pack in town.”

“Of werewolves?” Scott asked.

Derek nodded. “But not just werewolves. Alphas.”

Stiles felt panic push at the sides of his brain. “A pack made entirely of alphas?” he asked. Derek nodded again. “Wow, new nightmare fodder.”

“What do they want?” Scott wanted to know.

“We don’t know,” Derek said. “They’ve been around for at least a month but they haven’t done anything that we know of.”

Stiles watched Derek’s expression, listened to what he didn’t say. “You think they have something to do with Erica and Boyd, don’t you?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “But probably.”

“If you’ve known for a month, why say something now?” It was a good question; Stiles was glad Scott brought it up.

It was Isaac who answered, despite a warning glance from Derek that seemed designed to keep his beta from doing so. “Stiles,” Isaac said, with a nod in his direction.
“Me?” Stiles asked. “What?”

Isaac shrugged. “That creepy power thing you have now makes them want to rip your throat out.”

“Great,” Stiles said, like fear hadn’t taken a dangerous hold on his lungs.

“You just need to watch out,” Derek said, cutting off the spiral of Stiles’s panic. It wasn’t simply his words though: when Stiles hadn’t be paying attention, Derek had stepped close and his fingers were wrapped around one of Stiles’s wrists. It was surprisingly grounding, even if it made Stiles’s heart race for a completely different reason. “You understand?”

“Yeah, of course,” Stiles mumbled, licking his suddenly dry lips. “Gotcha.”

“Is Stiles really in danger?” Scott asked, voice heavy with concern.

Derek’s fingers were still around Stiles’s wrist. “I don’t know for certain but it wouldn’t surprise me.” Derek was actually looking at him, green eyes intent on Stiles’s face. “You need to be careful.”

“We’ll look after him,” Scott promised.

“Hey, wait, now, I can take care of myself,” he protested, even though Scott’s concern was sweet. So was Derek’s, in its own twisted, confusing way, he decided.

“Since when?” Derek asked with a snort.

“Since forever,” Stiles told him. “But especially now that I’m practically a Slayer.”

“Then how do you explain this?” Derek’s hand moved from his wrist to press a thumb against a rather spectacular bruise that peeked out from the corner of his shirt. Derek’s hand was spread against his collarbone, fingertips against the exposed skin of his neck. Stiles shivered.

“Training,” he answered.

Derek leaned in a little, scenting. “With Argent.”

He shrugged. “Somebody’s gotta do it.”

The pressure from Derek’s hand increased ever-so-slightly. “There are other options. If you just ask.”

Stiles swallowed and felt Derek’s fingers where he did. “I’ll think about it.”

A loud cough from Isaac broke the moment and Derek jerked away from Stiles like he’d been burned. Stiles felt like he was going to vibrate out of his skin.

He heard a strange low growl from behind him, a growl he knew belonged to Scott. Derek stepped back farther from Stiles. “We have to get going,” Scott announced and Stiles felt his friend’s hand tug on his elbow. “You’ll let us know if you find out something? We can help each other.”

Derek nodded his agreement. “If either of you see something, let me know.”
“We will,” Scott called back over his shoulder, practically yanking Stiles toward the door. “Say goodbye, Stiles.”

“Goodbye, Stiles!” Stiles managed to joke before his werewolf best friend was dragging him down the stairs. “Dude, chill.”

“So much weirdness between you two,” Scott was grumbling. “I couldn’t smell it another minute.”

“What did you smell, Scott?” Stiles asked, interested. “Not just me, but Derek, too?”

Scott rolled his eyes.

“Scott? Buddy? Come on! What did you sniff out?”

They bickered all the way home and Stiles was grateful for his friend’s efforts to distract him from the fact that he suddenly had a bullseye on his back.

**

Derek listened in until Scott and Stiles reached Stiles’s Jeep and drove away. Only once the sound of its engine faded from his ears did Derek let the tension seep from his body.

“Wow,” Isaac said aloud, ending the silence between them. The word was accompanied by a short bark of laughter. He shook his head. “You better be glad Peter wasn’t here for that.”

Derek glared at Isaac but his beta was no longer cowed by his human expressions, no matter how thunderous.

Instead, Isaac rolled his eyes. “I don’t know why you don’t just screw him and get it over with. His scent is practically begging for it.”

It wasn’t that Derek was unaware of the way Stiles looked at him, the way his scent did, as Isaac pointed out, reveal just how interested he’d be in some of the things Derek had fantasized about doing to him. What Isaac didn’t grasp was how much more complicated it was than whether or not they both wanted it. And Stiles’s age was just the first of many reasons it would be a bad idea.

“We’re not talking about this,” Derek stated, just enough steel that Isaac felt the order behind it. Isaac held up his hands in surrender. “You need to be careful, as well,” Derek said instead. “If they do have Boyd and Erica, they may be going after my betas. You and Jackson could be targeted next.”

“You’re actually worried, then?” Isaac asked. “This isn’t just about your paranoia about Stiles.”

“I don’t have paranoia about Stiles,” Derek said. “But we know about the risk and he didn’t. Considering they’ve been biding their time with us, he’s probably the most vulnerable.”

“And they’ll really care about whatever is going on with him?” Isaac said, doubt in his voice.

“How did you feel when he looked at you in that parking lot?” Derek asked.

Isaac frowned as he remembered. “Scared,” he finally answered.
Derek nodded. "The more darkness you have inside? The worst that feeling is when you’re faced with a Grimm. The alpha pack is made of werewolves who murdered their packs. How do you think they’ll feel faced with someone who reminds them of that? Someone who they’ve spent their entire lives being taught will murder them in their beds? Just because we know that Stiles is harmless, others don’t. And the alphas, if they did, don’t seem to have a problem with killing anyone who might cause them trouble."

Isaac sounded much more concerned when he next asked, “Do you think that Boyd and Erica are still alive?”

“I don’t know,” Derek admitted. “I hope so. Part of me hopes that they got away and found another pack like they said. But…” He shook his head. “They’re alive until I learn different.”

“Death waiting around every corner, like always,” Isaac tried to joke but it felt flat since it was the truth. “Does it ever get better?”

Derek remembered what it was like when his mother was alive, when their pack was strong and steady. He hadn’t thought he could ever miss his mother more than he did right after the fire but he had when he’d become the alpha and realized how inadequately prepared he was to be a leader. “It can,” he answered softly.

Long after Isaac had went to sleep, Derek was awake, trying to make sense of the new tangle of mystery around them. Peter seemed to think the alpha pack was waiting for something but Derek couldn’t decide what it could be. If they had Erica and Boyd, why hadn’t they made a move against Isaac or Jackson? Peter also assumed that the pack’s goal was to add Derek to their ranks but Derek knew it didn’t matter how long they waited -- he would never follow in their footsteps. He had proven to be far from a capable alpha but he’d never kill his betas just to save his own life.

Stiles -- that was a new complication. Derek didn’t trust Peter but as soon as he had said it, he’d known that his uncle was right about Stiles being a vulnerable target. Grimms were dangerous and feared for a reason, and they possessed their own special spark of power that acted much like the alpha power, passed down at death from one relative to another. To a group of power-hungry shifters, Stiles would be an undeniable temptation.

Derek was tired of losing people and he wasn’t about to let Stiles be next, no more than he wanted it to be Scott or Isaac or even Jackson. But he wouldn’t lie to himself and pretend that Stiles wasn’t something different to him than a beta or whatever Scott was to him. He couldn’t even call Stiles a friend because that wasn’t what it was. More than anything, potential crackled between them and, even if Derek wasn’t ready to do anything about it, he wasn’t ready to lose it either. He didn’t think he’d ever be ready to lose Stiles and that was a very frightening thing to admit, even to himself.

By the time Derek fell into a restless sleep, dawn was already brightening the sky.

**

For the next week, Stiles kept up his training with Chris Argent and, amazingly, he continued to improve. Before, the need to get good had been about vague, potential threats in the future, but now with the knowledge that the Alpha Pack was hanging around the edges of their lives, the need was imperative.

As much as Stiles had come to grudgingly accept that Chris Argent wasn’t as terrible as his sister
or father, Stiles didn’t feel right about telling him about the Alpha Pack, even though Chris looked suspicious when he noticed how much more focused Stiles was in their sessions. He didn’t press but Stiles often felt the assessing weight of his gaze on him in quiet moments, as if he thought the fraught silence could tease it out of Stiles. He resisted, holding stubbornly to a loyalty to Derek that said the alpha wouldn’t want any Argent to know anything about his business.

After his second week of Argent training, Stiles had to admit that he was actually starting to believe in the power of his supernatural hunter blood. His reflexes were sharpening and he was getting better and better with his arsenal of medieval badassery. He’d never be Allison or Chris with a crossbow but he could definitely hit the broadside of a bad guy under pressure and that feeling was comforting. For the last six months, Stiles had felt like he was wading into the supernatural gladiatorial games that had become his life with little more than his quick wits to protect his vulnerable human flesh; now, he could strap the doppelarmbrust on his back, grab a knife and the kanabo and feel like he’d hurt something else instead of himself trying to use them.

What he didn’t do in those two weeks of increased training was contact Derek and Derek didn’t contact him. He still wasn’t sure if he trusted Derek’s vague offer to train with him and he thought him, werewolves and weapons might be a bad mix, even if it were werewolves he typically tolerated. Stiles wasn’t sure he was ready to have weaponry at his disposal and be in the same room as Jackson quite yet.

What Stiles did do was honor his promise to be careful and he started carrying around one of his Grimm knives with him. It wasn’t anything spectacular, although the questions he’d have to answer if his dad found it was going to be epic, he knew. He kept the sheathed blade tucked in the waistband of his jeans and he had practiced drawing it quickly both with Chris and by himself. He knew a knife wasn’t much against a werewolf, alpha or otherwise, but he hoped the element of surprise would be in his favor if he ever needed it.

Turned out, he needed it when he least expected it.

Since he had inherited his Grimm-ness, Stiles had gotten used to seeing the occasional true face of people he thought were ordinary humans. Their true faces all resembled animals -- not wolves, though -- and, when their eyes met Stiles’s, they usually hurried away, clearly in no mood for trouble. Since Stiles was willing to let any creature live and let live, he didn’t bother with them, content to let them keep on keeping on as long as nothing was amiss. He should’ve expected a time would come when he wouldn’t have that chance.

He had been picking up a pizza for dinner because he’d fallen asleep after letting Chris beat his ass all afternoon and he’d been too lazy to cook something at almost 9 o’clock at night. When he’d been in line, he had noticed a shady-looking couple watching him -- a guy who looked like an extra from Sons of Anarchy and a girl whose teased hair, short skirt and midriff top reminded him painfully of Erica. When his eyes had met the guy’s, there had been a flash of fur and a snarl for his trouble. Stiles had shrugged, grabbed his pizza and headed for the door.

The next thing he knew, Stiles felt an iron grip drag him into the shadowy alley behind the pizza joint and throw up against the wall. He liked it much less when it was someone other than Derek doing the manhandling.

“Grimm,” the creature snarled at him, his furry face decidedly feline before it melted away into vicious human features.

Stiles noticed a claw coming and he just reacted.
Somehow -- Stiles would wonder how for hours afterward -- the violent tableau that came into being wasn’t one of Stiles being clawed or maimed at the angry creature’s hand. Instead, while Stiles was still pressed up against brick, his knife was in his hand and it was pressed very insistently against his attacker’s jugular. He wasn’t sure who was more surprised, him or the cat-guy.

“Look, buddy, I just wanted pizza,” he said, nodding his head toward where he’d dropped his pizza box when he’d been grabbed. “So I don’t know what your problem is but I suggest you back the hell off.”

That earned him a growl and Stiles pressed the knife just a little bit harder into the flesh beneath. “But you’re a Grimm,” the cat-guy said. “I know what your kind does.”

“Am I the one who attacked you?” Stiles asked. “No. Am I the one who made this evening awkward? Again, no. So, I’m just going to say this once -- if you don’t want any trouble, you’ve got until the count of ten to get out of my sight. You hear?”

The guy looked confused and wasn’t making much effort to move, so Stiles gave him the best glare he could muster which seemed to do the trick. The guy practically ran away and Stiles stepped out of the alley in time to watch him grab the arm of his girl and drag her into a pick-up. Stiles watched until the truck disappeared into the night, tail lights fading. Only then did Stiles lower the knife, his hand shaking a little from the adrenaline.

“I’m impressed. You were almost scary.”

“Jesus Christ!” Stiles wasn’t able to repress his yelp of surprise at the sound of that smarmy, familiar voice. He whipped around to see that Peter Hale was standing a foot away, watching him with a smirk. “What do you want?”

Knowing Peter was alive and having to deal with him were two different things and Stiles definitely didn’t have the patience for the second one. He also couldn’t really forget that the last time they had spent time together on their own, it had been because Peter had kidnapped him and threatened to turn him.

Stiles didn’t even realize he had raised the knife until Peter held up his hands. “I just wanted to see for myself. Stiles Stilinski, Grimm.”

“And I’m sure it’s a complete coincidence that you just happen to be around when something attacks me,” Stiles said.

Peter shrugged. “Just lucky, I suppose.” He took a step forward, into Stiles’s space. Stiles still held the knife, body tense. “I’ve never looked into the eyes of a Grimm before.”

It was like a zap to his spine, something wild that wouldn’t let Stiles back down against Peter’s calculating gaze. They were the same height and he gave Peter what he wanted: he looked straight into his pale, evil eyes and stared hard. Unlike with the other wolves, Peter’s true face hadn’t flashed as soon as he’d seen him but it finally flashed after a long moment of eye contact, like it had taken a battle of wills to make Peter show himself. As soon as he did, though, Peter’s eyes tore themselves away from Stiles’s and it felt like victory.

“What are you even now?” Stiles asked. “Because your face...it’s not human and it’s not wolf.” It
had been the most gruesome thing Stiles had seen outside of the ghoul-faced woman from his first sighting, twisted and dead and rotting. There were traces of what might’ve been a wolf there, but it was just a faint impression. It was as terrible as Stiles assumed Peter’s soul was. “Definitely a monster.”

Peter’s lip curled back like he wanted to flash fangs. “I like you, Stiles,” he said. “But don’t push your luck with me. I’m not a sad little beta and I’m not my besotted nephew. Grimm or not, you’re not a threat to me, so don’t try to be.”

Peter had his hand wrapped around the wrist of Stiles’s knife-hand, further still in Stiles’s space. Stiles refused to step back, chin tilted defiantly. “You know, I’ve been reading my books like a good little Grimm,” he began. “And I saw something about that resurrection thing you did.” He glanced down at where Peter’s hand held onto his. “I read that it takes a lot to come back from the dead. I mean, a lot. At the moment, you’re basically a human, right? Strength-wise, I mean.” Stiles gave his wrist a hard twist and Peter was forced to let go. Stiles smirked. “And? These days I’m not.”

Peter stepped back. “Lovely as always to talk to you, Stiles.” He said before he turned sharply, walking away. “Don’t forget your dinner.”

Stiles waited until Peter melted away into the shadows before he finally sheathed his knife and grabbed his pizza box. Once he was sure it had survived mostly intact, he tossed it into his Jeep and headed home.

If his grip on his steering wheel was shaky, there was no one around to notice.

**

Derek didn’t bother to look up from his book when his uncle sauntered into the loft. There was no good reason for Peter’s visit, which Derek took to mean that the purpose of his visit was meant to rile Derek in one way or another. He refused to give Peter the satisfaction of even acknowledging his presence.

Peter didn’t even bother speaking; he just swept in and took a seat on the other end of the sofa, practically lounging as he held his tongue. Since Peter so loved the sound of his own voice, Derek was even more suspicious and more determined to ignore him.

That lasted until Peter slung his arm over the back of the sofa and a familiar scent filled the air between them, one that definitely shouldn’t be coming from Peter. Defeated, Derek closed his book with a snap.

“Why do you smell like Stiles?” he growled.

“What a simple question with such an obvious answer,” Peter chided. “I ran into him earlier this evening.”

“Purely by accident?” Derek’s eyebrows expressed his doubt.

Peter shrugged. “Be glad that I happened upon him. Your baby Grimm ran afoul of a Klaustreich. He was lucky I was there.”

Derek wanted to think that Peter was lying about the encounter but he caught the faint scent of the
other creature. “I’m sure you were very helpful.”

“Where’s the thanks for watching after your pet human?” Peter wanted to know. “I told you he was going to attract unwanted attention and he doesn’t even know how to defend himself. It won’t be long before the Alpha Pack notices him and that? That won’t end well.”

As much as Derek hated to listen to anything his uncle said, he knew Peter was right. Stiles was so vulnerable now that his Grimm blood announced itself with every flash of his eyes. Any supernatural creature who came across his path would recognize him in short order, unless Derek could talk him into wearing sunglasses at all times. He doubted Stiles would listen, even for his own good. Stiles was stubborn like that, a trait that Derek both bemoaned and found grudgingly endearing.

“He had a little knife with him,” Peter continued. “It was almost cute that he thought he was intimidating.”

Derek sighed. “Why are you here, telling me this?”

Peter pretended to be confused. “You asked, of course.”

Derek narrowed his eyes. “I don’t know what game you’re playing with Stiles and I don’t have time to figure it out. But leave him alone.”

“I don’t plan on bothering him,” Peter said with a wave of his hand. “I’ll leave that pleasure to the Alpha Pack.”

Derek stormed out of his own loft with the sound of Peter’s amused laughter ringing in his ears.

It was annoying but not surprising that Derek found himself sitting in his car a few blocks from Stiles’s house. He was angry at Peter for manipulating him into it and at himself for being so easy to read. Peter had made snide comments about his feelings for Stiles since his resurrection and he’d known exactly what to say to get Derek to leave his own home. But, Derek admitted to himself, even if Peter had his own reasons for doing it, it didn’t mean that Derek wasn’t also right to come by and check on Stiles.

Before he could second-guess himself further, Derek swung himself up to Stiles’s window and gave a soft tap against the glass. Even behind the half-closed blinds, he could see Stiles startle, flail and finally head to the window before it slid open. “The night just gets better and better,” he said with a sigh. His heart as hammering in his chest, though, and Derek couldn’t tell it was surprise, fear or something else. “Come on in, I guess.”

Stiles disappeared into the room and Derek followed, watching as Stiles threw himself down in his desk chair. “To what do I owe the pleasure of your company?” Stiles asked.

“You should’ve let me know you ran into trouble,” Derek said, for want of a real reason to be there. Peter’s words had driven him there, mainly on the power of his concern for Stiles and his need to make sure that he was fine. Stiles was obviously unharmed and in his usual spirits, although the scents of both Peter and the creature clung lightly to him, even though he’d obviously changed into his pajamas. There was also the faint spice of marinara sauce combined with Stiles’s personal scent, one Derek could pick out anywhere these days.

“Who told you? Peter?” At Derek’s terse nod, Stiles rolled his eyes. “It was only an hour or two
ago, I was going to tell you. And I handled it.” Something flashed over his face but it was gone before Derek could properly catalogue it. “The cat-guy and Peter, by the way.”

“Are you still training with Argent?” he asked.

Stiles nodded. “Almost every day these days. I didn’t tell him why I was so eager,” he added. “Just that I was.”

“I meant what I said the other day,” Derek told him. “I’d be willing to train you.”

Stiles looked dubious and Derek tried to suppress his irrational hurt that Stiles preferred an Argent over him. Stiles must’ve seen it, though, because he said, “Look, no offense, but I’m not one of your betas. I’m not going to heal if you break my arm to make a point.”

“I wouldn’t break your arm,” Derek told him. “They -- I’ve been rough on them for this reason right here. Danger was coming and now it’s here. But I know...I wouldn’t.”

“Calm down, jeez,” Stiles muttered. “Complaint rescinded. But it still feels like a better idea to leave the human training to the humans.”

“But you’re not a human,” Derek reminded him. He caught Stiles’s gaze and forced himself not to drown in the gravity he found there. He’d thought it’d be difficult to look into Stiles’s eyes after the first time but now he found himself drawn in again, mesmerized not only by their color and liveliness like always, but also by the added magnetism in the depths. “You’re Grimm. And you’re not going to be fighting against humans. How can you learn to handle yourself against supernatural enemies if you only train with humans?”

Stiles let their gazes lock for a long time, breaking the strange connection only to let his eyes rove over Derek’s face with intense focus. It made Derek uncomfortable even while he didn’t want him to look away. “You make a good point,” he said, tapping his index finger against his bottom lip in what had to be the most maddening nervous tic he had displayed to date. “So yeah, how about it? You’ll be my Yoda?”

Derek rolled his eyes, grateful for a reason to look away. “I’ll help you train, yes,” he said.

“You were a sucky Yoda when it came to Scott,” Stiles said. “You had better have improved since then.”

“Tomorrow,” Derek said, like Stiles hadn’t spoken. “Meet me at the old house. We’ll start there. Bring your weapons.”

“Be there, I will,” he quipped even as Derek turned back to leave. “Later, sourwolf.”

Derek was glad that no one was around to see the small smile the affectionate parting brought to his face.

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Even though he had agreed, Stiles still wasn’t sure if training with Derek was a good idea. For one, there was his point about not having fantastic healing powers; two, it just seemed weird. But Derek had had a surprisingly logical point about needing to test himself against actual supernatural creatures and Stiles figured he should reward Derek when he showed good behavior.
He had contacted Chris that morning to let him know that he wanted a few days off from their sessions and the hunter had agreed easily. Stiles made some vague noises about family stuff but he was pretty sure Chris just assumed he needed a break from getting his ass kicked every day. They even talked about shifting the focus of their sessions once they resumed; Chris suggested that Stiles come to the apartment to go over some lore he had found on Grimms and so Chris could teach him more about proper weapons care. It sounded interesting, so Stiles agreed to meet up with him the next week and do just that.

Stiles’s Jeep pulled up in front of the old Hale House, Derek’s Camaro already parked there. He shut the Jeep door with a bang, slinging his bag over his shoulder with practiced ease. It was early afternoon and even with the trees shading the area, Stiles was still struck by the uncomfortable prick of summer heat. He was troubled by a different kind of heat when Derek appeared out of the house, closing the blood-red door behind him. Not that Derek wasn’t always unfairly gorgeous, but there was something about him standing there in his faded jeans, white tank and goddamn motorcycle boots that did things to Stiles. He tried to tamp down on it quickly, though, since he wasn’t interested in having Derek smell it on him the way Scott always seemed to.

Sometimes he hated werewolves.

Stiles tried to cover his lapse by motioning toward the door. “Why did you paint it?”

“The Alpha Pack left a warning,” Derek answered. “I didn’t feel like looking at it.”

Stiles nodded, almost grateful for the reminder. Stiles had other things to worry about beside his teenage lidibo and his inconvenient attraction to Derek. “Okay, how are we doing this?”

Derek jumped from the porch -- as graceful as you please, goddamn werewolves -- and walked toward Stiles, a speculative gleam in his eyes. Stiles didn’t trust it. He shifted his weight a little, letting his duffel hit the ground at his feet. “Almost every supernatural creature you’re going to come up against is going to be stronger than you,” Derek began.

Stiles rolled his eyes. “No shit.”

“Faster, too. Probably better at healing,” Derek continued.

“Oh my god, I know,” Stiles said. “I’m not new to this werewolf thing.”

Derek snorted. “To me, you are,” he said. Stiles nodded his acceptance of the fact. “In just about every way, you’re going to be at a disadvantage when you’re up against, say, an alpha werewolf.”

“I’ve realized that.”

Derek stepped closer, even as he made a show of walking around Stiles in a slow circle, assessing. Stiles suddenly felt underdressed in his own jeans and T-shirt. Of course, the first time he felt like Derek was undressing him with his eyes, it was for the express purpose of thinking about how to kill him. “Because you’re basically human, most of the time, they’re going to underestimate you,” Derek finally continued. “That’s your advantage. That and your brains. Most of us have stronger instincts than humans which helps us but someone can exploit that if they’re smart enough.”

Stiles couldn’t help his little grin. “You’re saying I am, though, right?” Derek rolled his eyes but nodded. “Maybe you aren’t such a terrible Yoda.”
“But even Grimm powers aren’t going to help you if you’re caught by surprise. That’s when you’re going to be in trouble.” Derek rolled his shoulders, muscles gliding under the smooth skin. Stiles muffled a curse. “And that’s what I want to work on.”

“Surprise attacks?” Stiles asked with a sigh. “Why do I feel like I’m going to regret this?”

The grin Derek shot him was practically evil. “You’ve got ten minutes to get as far as you can,” he said.

“And then?”

Derek’s smirk widened. “I’m coming after you.”

Nothing about this idea appealed to Stiles’s supposed smarts, especially since part of him wanted to make a crack about whether or not this was some kind of weird werewolf mating practice. But since he’d only manage to embarrass himself if he said it, he wisely suppressed it. “That’s it? I run, you chase me? I don’t really stand much of a chance.”

“Take a knife with you,” Derek said.

Stiles touched a hand to where his sheathed knife lay against his spine. “I’m not going to use a knife on you!”

“It’s part of the practice and it’s not like it’ll really hurt me,” Derek said. “I’ll heal.”

“I’m still not sure I like this,” Stiles grumbled.

“Your ten minutes started twenty seconds ago,” Derek said with a pointed look toward the trees. Stiles sighed but took the hint and dashed off.

Even as he ran to put distance between him and the Hale house, Stiles was also thinking. Thinking was only his advantage, even Derek had said so, and it wasn’t like he was going to be able to outrun Derek. Not only were werewolves way faster than humans, Derek would be able to track him by scent. He needed to have some kind of plan in mind, as slapdash as it would be. Stiles made a sharp turn in his direction, settling on getting as close as he could to the clearing where he and Chris usually practiced. He was much more familiar with the territory there and maybe he’d find something they had left behind that he could use to protect himself. Maybe climb a tree and set himself up in a more defensible position.

It had barely been five minutes into his allotted ten when Stiles could hear the thunder of movement behind him and he instinctively turned toward it, only to see a blur before it collided with him. Stiles went down hard until Derek’s weight and they rolled across the bumpy ground before Derek got a good hold on him.

“You cheated!” Stiles said, still gasping for breath.

“Point of a surprise attack is surprise,” Derek said around a mouthful of fangs, his wolfed-out face inches from Stiles’s.

Stiles retaliated with what he knew had worked before -- he jabbed his elbow first into Derek’s nose and then into the vulnerable space just beneath his chin. He thought he could actually hear
Derek’s teeth clack with the impact and he definitely heard a rumble of growl but he didn’t stop to analyze it because his fight-or-flight was kicking in and fight was all he had at his disposal.

Derek’s goal was clearly to restrain him and not hurt him but Stiles had the luxury of knowing he couldn’t actually hurt Derek, so he fought back as hard as he could. Derek had just about everything on his side but Stiles was determined and strange bursts of superhuman-strength allowed him to keep his arms and legs free, enough to swing and kick at his sparring partner, drawing a few grunts of pain that gave him a wild satisfaction. One such moment of strength and a jerk of his knee that was dirtily close to Derek’s balls saw Stiles bucking up against Derek’s hold and twisting his body so that he was on stomach, launching himself from beneath the werewolf’s bulk.

He was scrambling across the dirt, basically crawling away, when he felt Derek’s fingers close around his ankle and drag him back toward him. He winced as he felt the scrape of rocks and sticks against his back where his T-shirt had ridden up but it reminded him of the knife he hadn’t wanted to use. It took a wriggle to get an arm beneath him with Derek once again trying to hold him down, but Stiles managed it and drew his knife, swinging it up in an arc with all his might. It surprised both of them when its edge sank into the soft skin of Derek’s cheek, just above his ridiculous stubble and that surprise was Stiles’s undoing because the next thing he knew both of his wrists were pinned to the ground on either side of his head, squeezing pressure on his right hand until he let the knife slip from his fingers.

Stiles could admit he was well and truly caught. Derek was above him, knees planted on either side of Stiles’s hips, his legs tangled with Stiles’s to forestall any more kicks. The grip Derek had on his wrists were iron and Stiles didn’t have the leverage to try to throw Derek off again. In fact, he’d probably just embarrass himself if he tried and not only because he’d fail miserably. There was also the fact that his body had seemed to catch up to the fact that he had Derek’s solid weight pressing down into his and his dick was starting to take an interest, thanks to a terrible cocktail of adrenaline, exertion and arousal. He just hoped Derek would be polite enough not to mention it.

When Stiles finally looked up into Derek’s face, he couldn’t help but feel a little proud of himself. Although the cut had already knit itself together, there was blood on his cheek where it had been and some on his lip, like maybe Stiles had busted it at one point with all his flailing. The werewolf actually looked a little winded and he was a little sweaty, too, streaks of dirt on his face that Stiles figured mirrored his own. Their eyes met and Stiles felt a shiver go down his spine at the intensity in the gaze. He was used to Derek’s glares and scowls but this was a different kind of focus.

“How did I do?” Stiles asked, mostly to break the silence.

Derek was still staring at him, gaze aimed somewhere around his mouth. “Not bad,” he finally answered.

“Not bad?” Stiles managed to wriggle a little in protest. “I did awesome!”

Derek’s fingers tightened ever so slightly around Stiles’s wrists, as if to remind him that they were.

“I’ve got you completely pinned.”

Because Stiles couldn’t stop staring at Derek’s staring, he didn’t think before he gave the flip, flirty answer on the tip of his tongue. “Maybe because that’s exactly where I wanted to be.”

Stiles felt the mortification begin to sweep heat across his face just as Derek’s eyes snapped up from his mouth to meet Stiles’s. The green of his irises was almost too much surrounded by the
summer growth of the forest and Stiles wanted to look away but he couldn’t.

He wasn’t sure what he’d been expecting Derek to do in response to Stiles’s classic foot-in-mouth line but it hadn’t been to groan and mutter, “You drive me crazy” before slamming their mouths together. Stiles whined when he realized that his hands were pinned and he couldn’t touch but he contented himself with the hungry contact of the kiss, tasting something metallic that he realized was the blood from Derek’s lip. Somehow that made it even hotter and Stiles tangled his tongue with Derek’s, trying to give as good as he got as Derek ravaged his mouth, all sharp teeth and swipes of tongue.

When Derek pulled his mouth away, he looked more wrecked by the kiss than he had by the mock fight, breath ragged. Stiles was still trying to process what it meant that Derek had kissed him when Derek buried his nose against Stiles’s neck and just breathed in as his fingers relaxed around Stiles’s wrists. But before Stiles could finally get his hands on Derek, Derek was pulling away, lithely rolling to his feet. Stiles was grateful for the assist when Derek pulled him up.

“So…” Stiles wasn’t sure what he even wanted to say or hear but he thought something needed to be said. “I drive you crazy, huh? The feeling’s mutual, I promise.”

Derek ignored him to bend down and collect Stiles’s forgotten knife. He held it out for Stiles to take. “Maybe you were right that this wasn’t a great idea,” he finally said.

Stiles could see the way Derek was shuttering away his emotions, eyes downcast and face going blank. “Hey, no,” he said, stepping boldly into Derek’s space, wrapping a hand around one of those ridiculous biceps. “Don’t do that thing where we pretend this didn’t happen.”

“It shouldn’t have,” Derek said quietly but his expression was less guarded.

“You have to know how much I like you,” Stiles confessed a little more desperately than he’d wanted. “Scott says it’s obvious to werewolves which is mortifying but whatever. Just…don’t pretend.”

Derek’s face actually softened and Stiles had never known that that was a real thing until Derek’s face did it. Derek touched a thumb to the bow of Stiles’s top lip and he shivered. “You’re sixteen,” he said and it was almost as desperate as Stiles’s voice had been.

“Almost seventeen,” he said. “And you’re a werewolf and I’m -- I’m a Grimm and things want to kill us pretty regularly and we could very well die before I get there and that’s a stupid reason for anything, Derek. Not if -- not if you like me, too.”

Derek’s arm wrapped around Stiles to slide his knife back into its holder. Stiles held his breath as he stepped back but he released it in a sigh of relief when Derek’s hands came up to cradle his face. “I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“That feeling is also mutual,” Stiles whispered between their mouths because Derek was leaning in again, lips brushing against Stiles’s. Derek didn’t reply in words but he kissed Stiles again and again in the warm, sun-dappled shade of the forest and Stiles took it as answer enough.

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Chapter 3

Training with Derek didn’t go the way he’d planned but Stiles definitely wasn’t complaining. He found himself in a disgustingly chipper mood once they had parted (many, many kisses later) and Stiles decided it was his right as best friend to inflict said mood on Scott.

Scott was less than pleased.

“Oh, god,” he said, wrinkling his nose as soon as Stiles burst in his bedroom. “Gross.”

“I think I know what you’re smelling this time,” Stiles gloated.

“You and Derek and sex,” he announced. “Ew.”

“That’s a matter of opinion,” Stiles said. “And there was no sex. Not yet anyway.”

Scott still seemed disconcerted by the whole business but he did give Stiles one of those “you’re my best bro, I love you” looks. “As long as you’re happy,” he said philosophically. “And you seem to be.”

“As much as one can when death waits around every corner, I guess,” Stiles said. “I’m...cautiously optimistic.”

Stiles tried to hold onto that feeling for the rest of the week during which he saw zero of Derek. He did get a few texts, letting him know that Derek was going out of town with his betas for a few days, tracking down some information on the Alpha Pack. He didn’t feel safe leaving the pack behind, so it had turned into an impromptu road trip that included Jackson and Isaac. Most of Derek’s texts were terse reminders to BE CAREFUL FOR GOD’S SAKE which Stiles decided to take as a sign of Derek’s warm and fuzzy feelings toward him.

He probably should’ve picked back up with his Argent training after nothing but make-outs came out of his and Derek’s one try at it but Stiles decided he’d take the vacation for what it was. He could go five or so days without spending hours killing imaginary enemies and listening to Chris’s subtle warnings about what happened to humans who allied themselves with werewolves. Angst and tears, according to Chris. So much angst and tears.

Stiles was a teenager; angst and tears were part of the package.

Lying was also a part of the teenager package and Stiles had been doing his fair share of that since werewolves entered his life. His dad had gotten the brunt of it and Stiles often felt guilty when he saw the new worry lines on his father’s face. They were doing okay so far this summer but that was mostly because Stiles had his entire day to do what he pleased when his dad was tied up at work.

Stiles wasn’t sure he would ever feel ready to tell his dad about all the terrible supernatural shit that went down in Beacon Hills but maybe he could share a little of the truth with him.

“Hypothetically,” Stiles began during dinner.

The Sheriff’s fork paused halfway to his mouth. He set it down. “Oh god.”

“Hypothetically,” Stiles said again, refusing to comment on his dad’s premature dismay. “Let’s say I was dating someone...kind of.”
“Okay,” the Sheriff said.

“Some...guy.”

The Sheriff gave Stiles’s ratty T-shirt and shorts an unimpressed look. “So being gay hasn’t improved your fashion sense.”

Stiles pretended to be offended. “The term is bisexual,” he said. “I didn’t say I was giving up on girls.”

Maybe Stiles meant a little of that offense because the Sheriff looked serious and a little sad. “Stiles, you know it doesn’t matter to me what gender you date.”

“Yeah, I know,” he said, because he did. Well -- he assumed because his dad was cool like that. “But maybe this guy...he’s a little older?”

His dad pushed his dinner plate away so he could let his forehead bang against the kitchen table. Clearly, Stiles now had visible proof of where he inherited his penchant for melodrama. “Let me guess,” his dad said. “You might’ve once suggested he was a murderer. And his name might be Derek Hale.”

“I...what...huh?!” Stiles sputtered. “Where did you get all that?”

“Kid, first, I’m not stupid, no matter what you think. Second, do you actually think Cindy at Lou’s Diner keeps her mouth shut? Or anyone else in this town who recognizes you out with a dangerous-looking guy who was once the subject of a manhunt?”

For a brief moment, Stiles hated everything about the well-connected gossip mill of the Beacon County Sheriff’s Office. Then he relented when his dad didn’t look as murderous as he’d expected. “It’s the leather,” Stiles explained. “It lends a certain aura.”

“Why the sudden need for honesty, son?”

“It’s not sudden,” he said with a shrug and that was true -- anything about him and Derek as himandDerek was very new. “Like, this might’ve just come up with us? I didn’t want you to freak if you found out through your apparently extensive network of spies.”

“Stiles, you know I don’t like this,” the Sheriff said. “But I know you won’t listen to me if I say no and I’d rather know that you know you can come to me if you need to. If anything happens with Hale, anything you’re not ready for, or...”

“Oh god, Dad, I get it,” Stiles said. “I’m...I know you don’t know him and what you do know kinda sucks but he’s...that’s not going to be a problem.”

His dad was still giving him a measuring look. Stiles met it with a look of his own but his Grimm powers didn’t extend to human parents. “And if you even dare to give me any kind of sex talk, you’ll never eat red meat again,” he warned him.

That earned him a smirk. “What, you don’t want all these pamphlets I’ve got? Melissa said we should go over them together, just in case, you know....”

“Oh my god!” Stiles jumped up from the table. “I mean it, another word and it’s nothing but chicken and tofu for the next month.”

The sound of his dad’s laughter followed him up the stairs and Stiles felt something loosen in his
chest. It was such a small thing but he had told his dad the truth and his dad was laughing and didn’t seem to regret Stiles’s existence, so he considered it a win. It was another tally chalked into the “cautiously optimistic” column.

Stiles didn’t completely slack off during his break in training. Thanks to Marta, Stiles had so many books on the supernatural that he was in information-overload heaven. He was still working his way through her book on werewolves but that didn’t stop him from looking through the other books, some of which were straight-up diaries from his other Grimm ancestors. Those were really interesting, if only to see how different it had been for them. Stiles felt like he was only Grimm in the Gajos line whose life had been so commandeered by one particular brand of shifters.

By the time Monday morning came, Stiles had probably read hundreds of pages of Grimm lore, which made him even more excited about his afternoon meeting with Argent to go over the hunter’s collection. Stiles had gotten up early that morning -- and what was his life, wasting his summer of sleeping in? -- to eat breakfast with his dad before he’d went in for his shift and was back in his bedroom, trying to decide if he wanted to organize some notes to take over to Argent’s that afternoon when he heard a quick tapping on his closed window. His heartbeat sped up as he opened it so that Derek could slip inside.

Derek looked unfairly gorgeous, like always, but he seemed hesitant, which was unusual. Stiles understood the sentiment because he felt shy all of a sudden, somehow more awkward around him now that they had spent an afternoon making out in the forest. Stiles looked away and cleared his throat. “How did your fact-finding mission go?”

Derek shook his head. “I didn’t learn anything new.”

“How was the beta bonding time?”

Derek snorted and he turned toward him in time to see his eyeroll. “I was trapped with Jackson for almost a week,” he said. “How do you think it went?”

“Like something out of one of my worst nightmares,” Stiles said with a laugh. The noise seemed to relax Derek who offered something close to a grin in return. Stiles decided that shyness was something that needed to be powered through, so he stepped into Derek’s space and let his fingers come up to fiddle with the open edge of his leather jacket. “Whereas this is kind of the exact opposite.”

Derek rolled his eyes again but Stiles could see the fondness behind the action. Then Derek’s hand was in his hair, tilting his head just so and they were kissing, wet and a little desperate, like maybe Derek had actually missed Stiles over the last week. He felt Derek’s other hand slide under his shirt to lay heavy and possessive just above the waistband of his jeans. Stiles might’ve made a noise at that, just the suggestion of Derek’s bare skin against his, but it was swallowed by Derek’s mouth. The second very wanton noise he made, however, was not because by that time Derek’s mouth was on his neck, leaving soft bites that Stiles really hoped didn’t turn into marks he’d have to explain to his dad.

Sadly -- so much sad, from Stiles’s perspective -- Derek got himself under control, even though he did end up lounging on Stiles’s bed as he filled him in on the details of his trip while Stiles continued to try to make sense of all the stacks of paper and books on his desk. That didn’t mean Stiles didn’t eventually take advantage of the supernaturally hot werewolf sprawled on his sheets, pretty much climbing into Derek’s lap when he couldn’t resist any longer. Derek continued to kiss Stiles like he’d die without it, which Stiles found both flattering and hot, even if Derek refused to let his hands wander to non-PG places. Stiles made do with what he could get, scraping nails over
Derek’s abs and chest, flattening his hands along the expanse of his shoulders while Derek definitely did leave a mark along the juncture of his neck and shoulder where he could probably hide it from his dad until it faded.

As much as Stiles had been looking forward to comparing notes with Chris that morning, he was almost pouting about the appointment when it meant he had to kick Derek out of his bedroom so he could get his shit together and head over. Derek looked a little smug as he left, like he knew exactly how ruined Stiles’s concentration was and would probably continue to be for the rest of the day but he left willingly enough. Stiles hated him to see him go but, damn, he loved to watch him leave.

Stiles was still a little punch-drunk -- kiss-drunk? -- and hoping that Chris didn’t notice the beard burn he was definitely sporting by the time he slid into the elevator at the Argents’ apartment building. He pushed the button for his floor and watched as the doors started to close -- until a cane jammed itself between the doors and the sensors had them opening back up to admit the man wielding the cane. The guy, wearing red-tinted glasses, offered a vague nod toward Stiles as the doors finally closed.

“Could you push the button for the penthouse?” he asked, a faint accent to his words.

“Uh, yeah, sure,” Stiles said.

The man shifted his weight a little until he was closer to Stiles. Stiles wasn’t exactly sure why but it unsettled him. The man turned his head toward Stiles like he was studying him which was stupid because the guy was clearly blind. Still, the whole thing was vaguely creepy in the same way Stiles had felt when it came to Matt Daehler all those months ago. Stiles took a step back and watched the man warily until the elevator dinged on the Argents’ floor. Stiles let out a sigh of relief as he slid by the guy to exit -- at least until he felt the man’s hand close around his arm and stop him.

“It was interesting to meet you,” he murmured with a strange little grin.

Stiles threw himself out of the man’s reach and out of the elevator. He looked up in time to watch the door start to close. But just before they did, Stiles did his double-vision thing and he was looking at what he could only consider the black-skinned, red-eyed face of a demon. There was just enough wolf in it, though, that Stiles knew exactly who he had met.

He was halfway into a full blown panic attack by the time Chris Argent opened the door. “Stiles?” he asked, pulling the boy into his apartment. “What’s wrong?”

Stiles took a series of deep breaths and let Chris guide him to a seat while he got himself under control. “Are you going to tell me what happened?” Chris asked.

Stiles shook his head, although he wasn’t sure if that was an answer or not. His hands were shaky as he fished into his pocket for his phone.

“I need to make a call,” he said.

He was grateful that Chris Argent just nodded as he listened to his phone connect.

**

When Derek got back to his loft after leaving Stiles’s house, Peter was waiting for him.

“I’m starting to doubt that you actually have an apartment,” Derek said.
Peter smirked. “You smell like Stiles and sexual frustration. I wonder what you’ve been doing?”

Derek ignored him, although he had to admit it was one of the reasons he’d wished Peter hadn’t been waiting for him when he got home. He hadn’t really wanted to give his uncle more ammunition to use in his malicious teasing. Derek could admit to himself that he would’ve been happy if Peter never had any idea about what was happening between him and Stiles. It was stupid and likely not something that could remain a secret with werewolves involved but he was...protective of the recent changes in their relationship. That it had even become something befitting the word ‘relationship,’ at all.

Derek hadn’t ever really had any plans to act on what lingered between them but Stiles had turned out to be harder to resist than he had expected, especially once he’d gotten his hands on him. Now, he couldn’t imagine trying to go back to before, when he couldn’t touch.

And it had been less than a week.

Peter refused to leave and Derek refused to talk to him, so silence lay heavy over the loft. Derek wondered how long it would’ve taken for it to break if Derek’s cell phone hadn’t rang.

Derek was confused as he answered because he knew for a fact that Stiles was supposed to be at Chris Argent’s. “Stiles?” he asked by way of greeting.

“Are you at home?” Stiles asked and Derek tensed because he could hear the brittle emotion in Stiles’s voice. There was fear and agitation and -- panic.

“Yes, why?” Derek asked urgently, his own emotions keying up in sympathy to Stiles’s. “Stiles, what’s wrong? Did Argent...”

“No, no, just -- I’m coming over. Right now. Don’t leave. Okay?”

“Okay,” Derek agreed and he felt a little better when he heard Stiles let out a shaky noise of relief.

“Great. See you.” Then the line was dead.

Peter watched in great amusement as Derek paced the loft like a caged animal, unable to relax while he waited for Stiles. Something obviously had happened in the spare hour between him leaving the Stilinski house and Stiles’s call and it worried Derek when he tried to figure out what it could be.

Both werewolves looked up when they heard Stiles making his way up to the loft. Derek couldn’t help but focus on the frantic heartbeat coming his way. He met Stiles at the door and couldn’t stop himself from reaching out, running his hands down Stiles’s arms in an attempt to soothe the same panic on his face that he had heard in his voice.

“What the hell happened?” he grated out, his own concern making him sound angry.

Luckily, Stiles seemed used to that and he didn’t react. “I know where the Alpha Pack are,” he said without preamble.

“What?” That question had come from Peter who stood up, almost in alarm. “How?”

“I ran into one of them at Chris’s apartment,” Stiles explained as Derek gently led him further into the loft. “In the elevator. I knew something was off and then he grabbed me, said it was interesting to meet me. That’s when I saw his face.” Stiles shuddered as he gratefully sank down on the sofa next to Derek. “His face, Derek. It was a thousand times worse than Peter’s.”
Peter let out a short laugh. “I’m right here.”

Stiles glared at him. Derek was glad to notice that the panic was starting to fade from Stiles’s scent. “I’m just saying. I thought your zombie-ass true face was a terror but this guy?” Stiles shook his head. “All I can think is demon. That’s all that came to mind.”

Peter nodded. “He killed all of his betas. I’m not surprised that would look horrifying through a Grimm’s eyes.”

Derek didn’t realize he was still holding onto Stiles until he felt his fingers tighten around his arm. “Did he seem to recognize you? As a Grimm?”

“I don’t know,” he asked. “Don’t you guys see it in my eyes? He was blind, or at least pretending to be.”

“He obviously knew something or he wouldn’t have grabbed you,” Peter pointed out. “If nothing else, I’m sure he smelled Derek all over you.” Peter shrugged but Derek could detect the sadistic amusement his uncle was known for as he added, “Either way, I’m certain you’ve gotten his attention.”

Stiles sighed. “Yeah, I figured.”

Derek couldn’t stand another minute of Peter. He turned to Stiles. “Come on, I’ll walk you out.”

If he was worried that Stiles would take the suggestion as a sign he wanted to get rid of him and be hurt, Derek would’ve been proven wrong by the way Stiles gladly leaped to his feet and all but dragged Derek out of the loft. When they got to the Jeep, he finally spoke. “I hate your uncle.”

“Me, too,” Derek agreed. “Maybe I should just kill him again.”

Stiles let out a snort of laughter. He was still uneasy but the panic was almost gone. It helped Derek calm down, too. “That’s sweet but let’s keep the murdering to a minimum if we can.”

“What?” Derek asked. “You were scared.”

“I was freaking terrified,” Stiles corrected him. “I spent the entire time leaving the building and driving over here worrying that he was going to attack out of nowhere.”

“You should go home and put down a circle,” Derek advised. “Peter’s right that you’re probably a target now.”

“And keep it up for how long?” Stiles asked. “We still don’t know what their play is, why they’re waiting to make it.”

Derek sighed. “I have a feeling we’ll find out soon enough.”

Stiles leaned his head back against his Jeep. “You know, all I wanted was a quiet summer. Time off, you know? The last semester sucked.”

“I remember.”

Stiles was looking at him, brow furrowed. “I want to ask you something and just hear me out.”

Derek steeled himself. “What?”

“I want to tell Chris Argent about the Alpha Pack,” he said. “I mean, I don’t have to give him...
details about anything but the guy deserves to know that he’s living in the same building as those crazies.”

The idea of sharing anything with any Argent made his fangs want to drop but Derek knew that Stiles was right. Plus Chris, if nothing else, seemed to be ally of Stiles’s and it would help keep Stiles safe if Argent knew. Derek found himself nodding. “Tell him whatever you think he needs to know.”

Stiles flashed him a smile. “Thanks.”

“I’d rather you didn’t go back to his apartment, though.”

Stiles was nodding rather emphatically. “Yeah, I am down with that. Back to meeting in the woods for all of our training adventures.”

“Are you heading home now?” Derek asked.

“Yeah, I’m pretty much ready to hide under the covers until I recover from today’s surprises,” he joked. “Think I’m going to see what I can find out from Marta’s books. Maybe there’s something helpful in there.”

“Be careful,” Derek warned.

Stiles grinned and reached out, pulling Derek closer with a hand fisted in his shirt. “You’re cute when you’re worried, did you know that?” Derek rolled his eyes even as Stiles leaned in and grazed a soft kiss against his mouth. “I told you. I’m not looking to die any time soon.” He wrapped his arms around Derek. “Make sure you listen to your own advice, okay? These guys came into town after you, not me. I’m, like, a side-quest at most. You’re the boss battle.”

Derek kissed him instead of trying to come up with a reply to Stiles’s ridiculousness. Stiles didn’t seem to mind. It still amazed Derek how sweet Stiles could be in these quiet moments when he usually all sharp retorts and loud brilliance. But here, he just yielded to Derek’s touch, soft mouth and quivering skin. It made the wolf in Derek howl in triumph at the sign of submission but Derek knew that submission wasn’t a word in Stiles’s vocabulary. Derek liked that, too.

“Ugh, I should go,” Stiles said when they finally broke apart. “I feel like Peter is creeping on us from the window, even if it’s physically impossible.”

Knowing Peter, Derek wouldn’t doubt it. “Let me know if you find anything in your books.”

“Of course,” Stiles said, as he got into the Jeep. He paused to waggle his eyebrows at Derek in an exaggerated leer. “You could always stop by. Window’s always open.”

“The window should be closed,” Derek deadpanned. “And probably lined with mountain ash.”

Stiles muttered under his breath about *a spoilsport, oh my god* before he gave Derek one more quick kiss and tore away from the building. Derek watched him go like the infatuated idiot he was. It terrified him how much he cared when Stiles was so fragile. Whatever advantage being a Grimm gave him, it would be no match if any of the alphas attacked him.

With that happy thought, Derek headed back into the loft to face whatever snarky comments Peter had had time to come up with in his absence.

**
As much as Stiles wished he would’ve been able to go home and hide from what had happened that day, his mind pretty much worked in the exact opposite way. So, instead of doing nothing, Stiles sprung into action as soon as he got home.

First, he called Scott to tell him about everything that had happened and the two of them traded ideas between them. Truthfully, it was mostly Stiles running off at the mouth as his mind worked but Scott listened and offered input where he could. The problem was they still didn’t know much of anything and Stiles was running mostly on baseless assumptions and lingering panic. Still, it was nice to get it off his chest with someone he trusted. He trusted Derek, sure, to keep him from dying and to probably not screw him over on purpose. But that wasn’t the same as what he and Scott had; it allowed for a different kind of sharing.

Next, there were some carefully worded texts for Chris Argent, warning him of a werewolf problem in his building. Argent didn’t appreciate the vagueness of it all but he agreed to keep most of his questions until the next morning when they could meet at their usual spot. He didn’t question Stiles’s decision to steer clear of his building.

And, finally, Stiles did what he was best at: he hit the books. He spent most of his night reading and double-checking and getting distracted and re-reading. Occasionally, he took a break to text Derek to see if he wanted to come over but after Derek firmly declined, Stiles stopped bothering him and doubled-down on the research. There had to be something useful in the freaking Grimm encyclopedia he had gotten from Marta.

Stiles knew he fell asleep at one point, face smashed into the parchment pages of one of his ancestors’ books, but when he woke up, he just wiped away the drool and went back to work. The problem with most of his Grimm resources was that they weren’t in any kind of order. The books were in either journals, told chronologically with no way to cross-reference based on subject, or they were vaguely collected by subject but with no organization beyond that. Stiles could read for days and never know if the answer he wanted was waiting on the next page or not.

Around sunrise, when he was halfway through the Grimm tome on werewolves, Stiles found the first piece of useful information in all his research. The few paragraphs were in English but he thought that they were probably translations of the Polish on the opposite page. The entry looked to be from the 19th century and it talked about ways that werewolf packs could add to their powers, one that mentioned that sacrificing one’s betas could add to an alpha’s strength. The Grimm who had written it made it seem like it was more something an alpha might do as a last, desperate attempt against an enemy but Stiles couldn’t shake the idea that these alphas had done it just because they were power-hungry assholes. They had killed their own packs to be more powerful, then joined together as an unstoppable force that had come to Beacon Hills to...what? Recruit Derek?

Stiles hated werewolves.

Stiles barely felt awake when he pulled up next to Chris Argent where they stashed their vehicles when they went into the woods to train. The hunter was waiting for him with a frown.

“I’d like the whole story now, please,” he said, with no preamble. Stiles could respect getting to the point, even if it wasn’t his usual method of communication.

Chris listened pretty stoically to the facts as Stiles laid them out -- missing betas, ominous symbols, etc -- but when Stiles gave him the run-down of his encounter in the elevator, Chris stopped him.

“Did you say blind?”

Stiles nodded. “He had glasses, the cane, the works. Can werewolves not be blind?”
Chris shook his head. “My father,” he began and then paused, grimacing. Stiles realized it was probably because of whatever passed over his own expression when Gerard was mentioned. “My father,” he continued. “He had an encounter with some werewolves here in Beacon Hills. They -- he said they met to discuss a peace agreement but the werewolves ambushed them.”

Stiles snorted. “Yeah, okay, sure.”

“He said that the alpha was left blinded from their fight. His name was Deucalion,” Chris continued. “We didn’t hear much of his pack afterward. I wonder…”

Stiles cursed under his breath because, of course, things always went back to the damn Argents who couldn’t follow their own family code. “Maybe he killed his own pack to be strong enough to deal with whatever he thought might be coming from you guys.”

Chris nodded. “This is about…six, seven years ago?”

The name and the timing didn’t mean much to Stiles but if it happened in Beacon Hills, it might have meaning to the two werewolves he knew who had been around during the time. He reached for his phone and called Derek, frowning when it went to voicemail. He checked his messages and realized that none of the texts he had sent the alpha that morning had been answered.

Stiles didn’t like the icy fingers of dread and swept up his spine. “I’m sorry but I’ve gotta go. Again.”

Chris looked understanding even as he ordered, “You need to let me know what you figure out, Stiles. This is bigger than Derek and his pack. These alphas…”

“I get it,” Stiles promised, already starting his Jeep. “I’ll circle back when I can!”

He left Argent in his dust, barrelling from the Preserve toward Derek’s loft.

Even as Stiles pulled up at the loft, he still wasn’t sure if the fear in his gut was some kind of sixth sense or just plain old paranoia. But he let it lead him up toward Derek’s place, heart hammering in his chest. He reached under his T-shirt and grabbed his knife as he approached. The knife didn’t do him much good when he barely blinked and there were huge claws wrapped around his throat.

“Shit!” he gurgled, trying to breathe around the grip but it was difficult. Even as he kicked out against the mountain of alpha that had him, he could see spots gathering on the edge of his vision, a sign that he was going to lose consciousness sooner than later and probably never open his eyes again.

“When, now, Ennis, not so rough.” The voice was familiar, accented, and deceptively pleasant. “Why don’t you bring our young friend along so he can join the conversation?”

Stiles was pretty sure he wasn’t going to like any conversation that that voice was involved in. When he thrown down on the loft floor, mere feet from where Derek was huddled, panting and bleeding, Stiles knew he wasn’t.

**

When he was ambushed by the Alpha Pack early that morning, Derek’s only consolation was that he had been alone. Isaac was helping out Deaton, Jackson was being forced to spend quality time with his parents and Stiles was out in the woods, training with Argent. If they were going to kill him, he'd decided, at least the rest of his pack was safe.
They had burst into his loft and Derek had had little chance against the two alphas, although he had tried. Even as he'd fought them, he had recognized them from his childhood; he had remembered them coming to his mother for help and guidance. And now they -- Kali and Ennis -- stood over him, preparing to kill the last of Talia Hale's line.

Instead, Kali had just rammed a pipe through his chest and impaled him to the floor, leaking blood everywhere as his body tried to figure out what to do about the foreign object so close to his heart. It was hard to concentrate around the roaring in his ears, but Derek had been aware when Kali had left only to come back with a third alpha on her arm. A man, wearing sunglasses and carrying a cane. The alpha, Derek realized, that Stiles had met in the elevator at Argent's.

The alpha had barely greeted his bleeding captive when the alphas tensed. "We have a visitor," the blind alpha said. Derek thought he should recognize him but his mind was sluggish, hampered by pain. "Ennis, won't you do something about that?"

Derek somehow managed to turn his head toward the massive alpha in time to see that Stiles was there, helpless as he was being strangled by Ennis. Derek let out a low growl but there was nothing else he was capable of doing and the idea of having to watch Stiles die, like he had with Paige, stole his breath as much as the pain had.

But then Ennis released the pressure on Stiles's neck and instead dragged over and let him collapse in a ragged heap at Derek's side. Stiles's eyes met his and Derek could see wetness shining in them, either from what he saw or from what Ennis had done. "Derek," he whispered, voice cracking.

"You're just in time," the blind alpha said. "It's fitting since you're the reason I moved things up a bit."

"Sorry to inconvenience you, Deucalion," Stiles practically snarled, even though it must've been painful to speak.

The name snapped through Derek’s memories, slotting into place. He remembered this alpha, too. Deucalion laughed. "You're very clever, boy," he said. "I appreciate that."

"Not just boy," Kali growled. "Grimm."

"I thought there was something about you," Deucalion said. "Other than that you were clearly Derek's pet human. But I couldn't really see the truth for myself on that." He pointed his cane at Stiles. "Now be good and sit quietly while we alphas have a chat. I think Derek needs to understand what I'm offering here."

"You want me to kill my betas," Derek gasped. "I won't."

"I only need you to kill one," Deucalion said. "You'll kill the others willingly once you realize the power it'll give you. Kali can tell you all about that."

"Amazing," she said. Derek shuddered at the delight in her voice.

"It took me losing my sight to really see," Deucalion went on. "One of my betas didn't think I was fit to lead, after my eyes. So I killed him and that's when I realized the power it gives you, that you take their power as your own."

"I was planning on waiting a little longer before I approached you. I had some things in place to help you along." Deucalion made a noise of disapproval. Derek was half-blind himself from the pain but he kept his blurry eyesight focused on where he could see Stiles's hands curled against the
floor. It gave him an anchor, something to focus on outside of the pain. "But then I knew this one
realized who I was and, well, plans changed.

"Don't fight me, Derek," Deucalion continued. "You can't defeat me. I'm far more than you can
even imagine."

"Demon," Stiles spat. Not for the first time, Derek wished Stiles knew when to keep his mouth
shut. "That's what you are."

"Exactly," Deucalion said, sounding almost impressed. "You're full of information for such a
young Grimm."

Derek's growl abruptly became a grunt of pain when Kali twisted the pipe. "Are you done, Deuc? I
don't know how much more time Hale has."

"I suppose I am done," he said. "You have until the next full moon, Derek, to make the right
decision. Free yourself from your betas and join us. Or else. Either way, your pack is going to die."
Deucalion paused right in front of Stiles, reaching out to tap his cane against his knee. Stiles jerked
back. "I'll even let you keep this one if you do. If you don't? He'll be the first I gut."

Then Kali was pulling the pipe out of him and it was agony, pure and simple. When the world
righted itself into something coherent again, all Derek could hear was Stiles's frantic voice in his
ear and all he could feel beyond the pain was Stiles's warmth as he pressed his hands against the
gaping wound in Derek's chest.

"Don't you dare fucking die on me, Derek," Stiles was saying, hysteria and tears in his voice. "I did
not save your ass all these times for you to give up now. Do you hear me?"

"I'm fine," he gritted out.

"You're a liar," Stiles said.

"I'll be fine," Derek amended. "Werewolf healing."

"I hate you," Stiles said and his hands were now on Derek's face, bloody fingers on his cheeks,
holding his chin. "How can you be so calm?"

"I'm not," Derek said. "And you don't."

"I do," he said and it was a still a lie. "You're a lot more trouble than you're worth." Then Derek
could feel his consciousness slipping away and Stiles's voice was growing dim but still frantic as
he said, "Scott? Scott! I need you, man, I, shit, it's Derek. He's not good."

Finally it was just darkness and Derek was grateful for the reprieve.

When he woke up, the first thing Derek noticed was, while he was still in pain, it was manageable;
he could already feel where his body had mostly knit itself back together. Hours had passed,
obviously, not only by the healing his body had accomplished but by the obvious shades of twilight
on the other side of the loft windows.

The second thing Derek noticed was that he wasn't in his bed alone. When he looked to his side, he
could see that Stiles was curled up next to him, fast asleep. He was on his stomach, face pressed
into a pillow while his body curved toward Derek's, one arm wound around Derek's. As his
memories came back, he remembered the choking fear he'd felt when Ennis had dragged Stiles into
the loft, when Kali had recognized him as Grimm. Derek remembered the tears in Stiles's voice as
he had demanded that Derek not die.

Derek closed his eyes against the fear that wouldn't fade even as he cupped a gentle hand around the line of Stiles's jaw, thumb against his slack mouth. He let himself take comfort from the simple contact despite the audience he knew he had.

Scott cleared his throat as he approached the bed. "I don't think he slept, like, at all last night," he said in a hushed voice. "And then with everything that happened with the Alpha Pack, he passed out once he was sure you weren't going to die."

"I'll be fine," Derek said.

"I know," Scott said with a ghost of a smile. "At least for the next four or five days. Until the next full moon."

"I'm not going to kill my pack and I'm not going to let them either," Derek said. I'm not going to let them kill Stiles was the unspoken message between them. Because as much as Derek wanted to claim Stiles as his and would accept Scott as a beta, they weren't there. Stiles, for all that he wrapped himself around Derek in his sleep, was loyal to Scott and Derek had always known that.

"We'll help," Scott said. "We'll figure this out. Well, Stiles probably will. It's what he does."

"Yeah," Derek agreed, remembering that Stiles had known Deucalion's name before the alpha had said it, had called him Demon and been told he was right.

"I told his dad he was staying with me tonight," Scott said. "So I'll let you guys...rest."

Derek nodded, not sure what to say. Scott didn't move to leave, though. He just stood there, looking at Derek with a frown on his face. "What?" Derek finally asked.

"Just...don't screw this up, okay?" Scott said. "This. Stiles, I mean. He's the best, you know?"

Derek had to look away from the naked affection in Scott's eyes because it made jealousy flare up even when it was absolutely baseless. "I know," he said quietly, as he leaned his forehead against Stiles's. The boy continued to snore quietly, little whistling huffs of air against Derek's face.

He listened as Scott left, then let himself sink into the simple, precious comfort of Stiles's sleeping warmth. Derek knew nothing was simple for them, not with Deucalion's ultimatum hanging over their heads, but, at that moment, he was content with this.

The steady beat of Stiles's heart and the spice of his scent lulled Derek back into sleep.

**

When Stiles woke up the next morning, it took him a minute to realize that he was cuddled up with a werewolf and not, in fact, being smothered by an electric blanket. He forgave himself for the error, though, because Derek was like a furnace and the arm slung around him made it pretty impossible to escape without his cooperation.

Derek must've sensed his return to wakefulness, though, because the arm around him tightened for a second before pulling away.

"Hey," Stiles croaked, rolling over. "You didn't die."

Derek, as always, was a sight to behold; sleep-mussed and shirtless was a good look on him. "I told
you."

Stiles rolled his eyes and landed an ineffectual punch to his shoulder. "You're an asshole. I was worried."

Derek caught his hand and gently smoothed the fingers out of the fist. "I'm sorry." The words were quiet and sincere and Stiles's heart skipped a beat, which Derek probably heard.

"Yeah, well..." Stiles glanced away from Derek's searching eyes. He was saved from having to figure out what the hell he actually wanted to say because Derek leaned in and kissed him. Stiles gratefully let his thoughts slide away for a while, happy to focus on Derek, his hands and mouth, the miracle of his unblemished skin where there had been a gaping wound the day before.

Unfortunately not even Derek Hale could distract Stiles's worry for too long.

"We should probably get up," Stiles said with a sigh. "We have actual things to do."

Derek nodded as he pulled away. "I need to call Peter," he admitted with a frown.

"Ugh, yes, sadly I agree," Stiles said with a groan. He forced himself to sit up.

While Derek took a quick shower, Stiles distracted himself by texting Scott and checking in with his dad. His dad didn't seem to question the cover of staying overnight at Scott's or the continuance of that lie when Stiles said they were going to hang out all day but Stiles thought he detected a hint of suspicion in his dad's tone. Of course, it might've also just been Stiles's guilt talking.

Stiles freshened up and borrowed a clean shirt from Derek, feeling almost human by the time Scott and the remnants of Derek's pack began to arrive. It was the first time Jackson and Stiles had ever been in the same place that summer and Jackson glared at him, if only out of habit. Stiles pretended he didn't get a thrill when he glared back and Jackson flinched before he looked away. Points for Grimm powers, once again.

Peter, always one for dramatic entrances, showed up last and Stiles just rolled his eyes at him over the rim of his coffee cup.

"The Alpha Pack made their move yesterday," Derek told them. Most of the room was already aware of it, except Jackson. "They're trying to recruit me."

"He has until the full moon to murder all of you or else the alpha pack will murder him and all of you," Stiles explained. "Fun options, right?"

"Obviously, neither option is on the table," Peter said. "I assume we're here to discuss alternatives?"

Derek nodded. "We need to figure out how to take them down."

After that, it devolved into a round of sharing who knew what piece of information. Derek explained his encounter with the alphas in detail, Stiles added what he had learned from Chris about Deucalion and Gerard while Peter filled in the gaps about each of the alphas -- Ennis, Kali and Deucalion. He told them about the werewolves' side of the story that Gerard had given Chris.

But even with everything they knew, they had little idea of how to defeat a trio of alphas.

"So, basically, we're screwed," Stiles said when everyone else had fallen silent.
"We're not screwed," Scott said, ever the optimist. "Come on, we can figure this out."

"Yeah, right, I know. Just..." Stiles sighed. "Trying to process everything."

"We'll have to fight," Derek said, although his eyes weren't on Stiles. They were focused on the werewolves in the room. Jackson didn't look excited by the prospect but Isaac nodded slightly. Scott looked determined.

"Why the full moon?" asked Jackson. "Why wait until then?"

"Because Derek will be at a huge disadvantage then," Peter said.

"Why?"

"Because you'll be useless," Stiles said. Jackson glared but Stiles ignored it. "There's no way you've got enough control that you can fight on a full moon. Isaac, maybe? But Derek will have to leave someone with you in case something happens. And he --" Stiles waved an arm at Peter "-- he's still not up to fighting weight. Derek won't have anyone to watch his back other than me and Scott."

"Not you," Derek said. It was Stiles's turn to glare.

"Excuse me?" he asked.

Six months ago, Derek's eyebrows of doom scared Stiles; now all they did was piss him off. "You're no match for one alpha," Derek pointed out. "Let alone several. You don't have any business being involved."

"Did we miss the part earlier this summer where we found out I literally have magical hunter blood? Because that happened. I was practically born to do this."

"What are you is practically defenseless," Derek retorted. "You have less training than Jackson, point of fact."

"So will you or do you not remember yesterday?" Stiles snapped. The fear from the day before was still fresh, adding another level of sharpness to his tone. "Because I remember yesterday."

Derek's stoic expression wavered for just a second. "Stiles..."

"No," Stiles said. He hadn't realized it but he was standing toe-to-toe with Derek. "You know that thing about me not dying? I feel the same way about you. I'm not sitting this out."

They just stared at each other for a long moment, continuing the fight without words. Stiles refused to let Derek's stubbornness put him in greater danger. He was an idiot to think that Stiles would stay away while he was trying to fight for his life. Stiles hadn't done that when he pretty much didn't care if Derek lived or died -- he certainly wasn't going to do it now that he cared a great deal.

"Guys, this isn't helping," Scott said when no one else would.

"You're right," Stiles said with another glare at Derek. "I think I'm just going to head out." As he turned to grab his keys, Derek's hand closed around his bicep.

"Stiles," he said again. There was too much in Derek's eyes for Stiles to decipher and he didn't think he'd do himself justice if he did. He knew it was probably just the lingering effects from the day before for both of them but Stiles was blindingly angry. He needed some space to breathe and
let his mind catch up.

Stiles yanked his arm out of Derek's grasp. "It's fine," he said. "I'll see what else I can find in my books. Research some shit." He waved at the assembled werewolves. "You guys...do whatever."

He didn't wait for a reply before he grabbed his keys and pounded down the stairs. Stiles didn't care what Derek said, he wasn't going to sit at home and let Derek or Scott face the Alpha Pack alone. He wouldn't have before he'd found out he was a Grimm and he certainly wasn't going to now. He'd figured out some way to be helpful -- thinking was his strength and it was certainly something that his werewolf acquaintances needed help with. Frankly, they sucked at thinking without him.

After a quick stop at the convenience store to load up on snack foods, Stiles bunkered down in his room and got to work.

**

Three hours later, Stiles's room -- and mind -- were a mess.

He didn't know if it was actually some kind of instinct or just the fact that he sometimes veered toward arrogance but Stiles was sure that the answer to the Alpha Pack was something he would find there, in all the stuff he'd gotten from Marta. The werewolves didn't seem to have any special knowledge and the hunters only had their usual tricks. Grimms, though, they had both of those in spades, if the journals he'd read were to be believed. Stiles just needed to be clever enough to find the solution which he just knew was waiting for him.

Because he had always been a visual learner, Stiles started by dragging everything out of Marta's chest, laying everything out across the floor of his room. He started with books, stacking them in several bunches based on languages and potential utility, then he set out all the weapons, the ones he already had in his duffel, along with the other pieces of medieval badassery he hadn't tried yet. Soon he was surrounded by knives and maces and crossbows, a wicked-looking sword, a vambrace with a hidden spring-loaded dagger hidden in it, and the various ammunition that went with the weaponry. Once he had emptied the entire chest, he realized that it had a false bottom and from there he pulled out a case that held what looked like an actual elephant gun, complete with the huge rounds it fired. It joined the collection ranged across the floor.

When Scott found him several hours after he had left Derek's, Stiles was sitting amid the items, at the center of his Grimm tools. Stiles looked up from where he was carefully checking each of the potions Marta had sent along, rifling through the grimoires he had for potential use. He carefully set down a bottle of amber-colored liquid as his friend carefully opened the door to his room.

Scott's eyebrows rose. "You've been busy."

"Of course I have," Stiles said, running a finger over the book he was consulting about the use of whatever "Siegbarste Gift" was. "What did you expect?"

Scott shrugged, leaning against the closed door. "Have you found anything?"

"I've found a lot of things," he said, reading a line about the poison and how it could shatter ogres from the inside. That sounded useful, so he made a note of it on the pad next to him. "Just trying to figure out how to use it." He looked up at his friend. "Did you guys figure out anything?"

"Not really," he admitted. "You were right about how there's really only me and Derek who can go up against the alphas."
"And me," Stiles reminded him.

"Derek really doesn't want you to be there," Scott said.

Stiles grimaced. "Yeah, I got that and I've got a lot of things to say to Mr. Alpha about that the next time I see him."

"But you're not going to listen and sit this one out?" Scott's voice said he knew that Stiles wasn't planning to do anything of the kind but it also said maybe he wished he would. Stiles rolled his eyes and grumbled to himself about overprotective werewolves.

"Why would I?" he asked instead. "When have I ever sat things out? Especially on Derek's say-so?"

"Things are different now," Scott said. "I thought his opinion would matter more now."

Stiles huffed because he knew that Scott was also talking about his own romantic history when he said that. It would've really mattered to Scott what Allison thought, even if it couldn't sway him from his course. But Stiles was a different animal. "Just because I like making out with the guy doesn't mean he gets to tell me what to do."

"It might mean that there's no more of that," Scott said quietly, again his words a reflection of his own romantic woes. Stiles was sympathetic but, again, he wasn't Scott and Derek definitely wasn't Allison.

"You know what else would stop any chance we have of making out ever again?" Stiles asked. "The alphas killing him. I'd rather Derek be alive to be pissed at me than go to his death happy with the knowledge that I followed his stupid orders."

"So you're making your own plan," Scott stated.

"Duh," Stiles answered.

"Even though Derek will be pissed."

"Yup."

Scott was giving him a sad, knowing look, much too wise to be coming from Scott. "You really care about him, don't you?"

Stiles ducked his head, mostly to hide the blush crawling up his face. "What do you think?"

Scott didn't reply immediately, like he was trying to figure out what to say. Finally, he changed topics. "Am I in on this plan of yours?"

Stiles looked up from where he had been skimming his notes. "If you want to be. I wouldn't cut you out deliberately."

Scott used his werewolf reflexes to gracefully navigate over to the bed so he could sink down on its edge. "Any ideas so far?"
Stiles waved an arm at...everything. "Lots of weapons to kill supernatural assholes. Just gotta find the right ones for our set of assholes." He looked around at everything and thought about all the ideas already running through his head. "Do me a favor?"

"Of course."

"Whatever my plan is, you stick with Derek," he said. "Whatever I do is not going to be something a werewolf will be able to help me with because I'll be looking for ways to kill them. And if you stay with Derek, at least someone will be watching his back while I try to do...whatever I'm going to do."

"You know, you going off by yourself is, like, reason one that Derek doesn't want you involved."

"Which is why we're not going to tell him exactly," Stiles said. "And if he's not smart enough to know I'm going to ignore him and do what I want, that's his problem."

Scott sighed. "I know you can do what you want, Stiles, but...aren't you at least a little worried about getting yourself killed? It took all of us to take down Peter and now there's three of them."

Stiles set down his pen. "Scott, I'm terrified," he admitted. His breath left him in a rush and he tamped down on the fear he had had in him since yesterday, since being forced to watch Derek tortured and almost killed when he had been helpless to stop it. "I'm terrified a lot of the time because I don't have superpowers like you guys. And -- Derek almost died yesterday and that was just their opening move. And I wasn't prepared. I couldn't do anything to help him. But I have time to prepare for the next time and that is my superpower. Like, literally. My superpower is the application of knowledge to upcoming events. Whatever else Grimms can and can't do with their magical whatever, they are badasses at collecting knowledge and then using it. So that's what I'm going to do."

"Okay," Scott said, like something had been decided. "I'm here for you. Whatever you need. Even if it's just for me to stick with Derek."

Stiles released a breath of relief. "Thanks, man."

"Can I help you now? With this?" Scott asked with a vague wave at everything laid out on the floor.

Stiles shook his head. "I've got to take it all in myself if I'm going to figure it out. But thanks."

Scott hung out a little longer but he eventually left, giving Stiles's shoulders a quick squeeze as he headed for the door. Stiles was glad that Scott seemed behind his idea of having his own plan, which was good since Scott's disapproval wouldn't have stopped him any more than Derek's had. But he would need some details about the upcoming clash that he wouldn't be able to pry from Derek. Scott would be good for that.

But Stiles did need an actual ally, someone who could help him with the plans forming in his head. And there was really only one choice left to him, given everything that was going on.

This was why Chris Argent was standing in Stiles's bedroom the next morning, once his dad had packed off to work.

Argent let out a little whistle when he saw the weapons that Stiles still had set out. He'd thrown some dirty clothes over them to hide them from his dad but he had dug everything out once Argent had been on his way. The hunter now surveyed them with an impressed eye.
Stiles wished he had had a little more sleep before this part of his planning kicked in but he had been up all night, going through all his books and double-checking what he had come up with. The werewolf book had turned out to be very useful once he had gotten deep enough into its secrets and he had had an ancestor at the turn of the century who had spent a good chunk of his life dealing with Stiles's particular brand of werewolves. When Stiles had found his journal, he had wanted to cry out of desperate hope that it would yield something. And it had.

He hoped.

"I need your help," Stiles said. "I can't take down the alphas without it."

"Don't you usually run with wolves, Stiles?"

"Sometimes even the good ones are idiots," Stiles told him. "Their way to deal with this is a fight to the death and that death will be Derek's, maybe Scott's, too. Followed by Isaac and Jackson. And I know you have your Derek and Scott shaped problems but you have to admit they're the lesser of two evils here. The Alpha Pack is dangerous to everyone."

"I know," Chris admitted. "They need to be stopped."

"I agree," Stiles said. "But just understand that I'm here to save Derek, not necessarily kill werewolves. But I'm good if that's what it takes. I'm not going to have a problem if lethal force is necessary as long as it means he makes it out the other side."

"Derek, hmm?" Chris repeated quietly, shaking his head. "I'm not sure what's more ridiculous, an Argent and a werewolf or a Grimm and an alpha."

Stiles sputtered when he caught Chris's meaning but he didn't deny it. There was no point to, and wouldn't be even if he hadn't spent so much time lately with his hands and mouth all over Derek. Because the feelings had been there for a while, even before Stiles had probably realized. "Just -- whatever. Are you in?"

Chris gave him a look heavy with parental -- something. Maybe resignation but also maybe pride. It made Stiles deeply uncomfortable, either way. "I'm in."

"You have to make me one promise, though," he said.

Chris rolled his eyes. "I'm not going to go after Derek or Scott during this."

"That's not what I mean," Stiles said. "But just understand that I'm here to save Derek, not necessarily kill werewolves. But I'm good if that's what it takes. I'm not going to have a problem if lethal force is necessary as long as it means he makes it out the other side."

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"Stiles, I've been hunting longer than you've been alive," he said. "We've got this down to a science."

"Maybe," Stiles conceded, a smirk playing at the edges of his mouth. "You've got it down to a science but we Grimms have it down to an art. Prepare yourself, Chris, you're going to learn some shit, I promise."

Later, though he wouldn't admit it, Stiles could see in his face that Chris Argent got himself some education that day, even if he did offer some of his own, in the form of some surprising intel on the alphas.

They were both hunched over the mostly coherent notes that Stiles had spread out on his desk. "So,
we have three alphas to take down," he began.

"Five, actually," Chris said.

"Who, what, huh?" Stiles asked. "Five? We've only seen three!"

Chris looked smug when he explained. "I've tapped into the security cameras in the building -- just a precaution, mind."

"Of course," Stiles said.

"I've seen five people consistently come in and go from the penthouse. Deucalion, the blind one, a dark-haired woman..."


"A really big guy."

Stiles touched a hand to the fading bruises around his neck. "Ennis."

"And two young guys, maybe your age, maybe Derek's," he finished. "Twins."

"Huh," Stiles said. "Sneaky, sneaky Alpha Pack." He scribbled that down on his notepad. "Okay, then. Five. Thanks for the heads up."

By the time Chris left, Stiles was running on fumes and he knew he needed to crash because he still had more things to do before the full moon and he'd need to be at his best. He closed his window and shut his blinds against the light and fell face-first into bed.

He didn't dwell on the fact that he hadn't heard anything from Derek since he had stormed out of the loft the day before. Stiles knew Derek's creeper tendencies enough to know that Derek would show up when he was ready and, until then, Stiles had things to do. No time to mope about the possible ending of whatever-they-were, even if they both survived. He could worry about that once they were all alive when the moon began to wane.

It didn't stop Stiles was dimly missing the feel of Derek next to him in bed as he finally fell to sleep.

**

Stiles had almost started to believe he was wrong and that Derek would avoid him all the way up until the full moon. He spent the few days he had left until then working and reworking his plan with Chris Argent, making sure they had everything they could figured out. Stiles cleaned weapons, he mixed a potion or two, he bought a pair of sturdy boots better for traipsing around in the woods than his usual sneakers.

He waited for Derek.

Derek didn't show himself until the night before the full moon. He was cutting it a little close, Stiles decided when he heard the telltale creak of his window being pushed open. As expected, there stood Derek, the grave expression on his beautiful face highlighted by the silvery light of the moon. Stiles pushed up on his elbows from where he'd been laying flat on his bed, staring up at his ceiling.

"My dad's home," Stiles said softly. "You'll have to be quiet."
"He's asleep," Derek said as he took a step further into the room. "I wanted to give you something."

Stiles raised an eyebrow as he watched Derek dig something out of the pocket of his leather jacket. It was a bottle, which he sat down on the corner of Stiles's desk. "Mountain ash," Derek said. "From Deaton. Use it tomorrow night."

Stiles let out a sigh as he collapsed back onto the bed. "I hope you didn't come here to fight because I'm not going to do it."

"There's nothing to fight about. You need to stay here tomorrow. Safe," Derek said.

Stiles pulled himself back into a sitting position. "You're an actual idiot, aren't you? If you think you can tell me what to do."

"I wasn't telling you what to do. Not really," Derek added at Stiles's obvious disbelief. "Fine. I'm asking. Just...stay out of it tomorrow."

Derek's face actually looked pained and Stiles didn't want that. He knew Derek had had enough pain in his life and he never wanted to add to it. But Stiles also knew he wanted Derek to live and there was a certainty in him that Derek wouldn't if he didn't intervene. "I can't," he said quietly. "I can't tell you I will because it'd be a lie."

Derek actually growled. "Damn it, Stiles, they'll kill you," Derek told him. "Deucalion's not going to let you live, not if he gets a chance to take you out."

"I know that," Stiles said. "But do you really think you'll be able to take on five alphas with just you and Scott?" At Derek's surprise, Stiles offered a grim smile. "Yeah, five, not three. He's got a pair of twins with him, too. You're welcome for the intel."

"If I have to worry about you, I'll be distracted," Derek said. "That's not going to help."

"Leaving you to your own devices isn't going to help, Derek," Stiles told him. He didn't know when it had happened but he was on his feet, pushed into Derek's space. His words were quiet so he wouldn't wake his dad but they were fierce. Because he was right and he wanted Derek to understand that. "It's leaving you to die. I can't do that. I won't."

Derek's fingers were curled around his arms, hot and heavy, like he wanted to shake some sense into Stiles. "You're not any more of a match for them," he said instead. It was probably as close as Stiles would get to a concession, to an acknowledgment of the fear that roiled in his gut, that reminded him that Derek was no match for the alphas out for his blood.

"Hey, Grimm here, remember?" Stiles said, trying to make a joke of it. "Deaton says I'm not nearly as squishy as I used to be."

"You're still human," he said. Those fingers tightened, biting into his flesh, just to the point of pain. Stiles winced and Derek let go, like he had made his point.

"So are you when it comes to your ability to die horribly at the hands of other alphas," Stiles snapped.

"I have to do this," Derek said. Stiles could see the determination in his clenched jaw and slanting eyebrows. He could also read the desperation in his eyes that begged Stiles to listen. "They came for me and I can't..." Derek looked away, toward the moon framed by the curtains of Stiles's window. Stiles couldn't stop himself from reaching out, a tentative hand on Derek's shoulder. "They've probably killed Erica and Boyd," Derek continued. "Now they want everyone else and I
can't let them, not without a fight. I have to try and stop them."

"So do I!" Stiles said, volume rising. He snapped his mouth shut and took a deep breath. His next words trembled with emotion despite the lowered volume. "Do you think I can sit here and do nothing while you -- and Scott, my best friend -- go up against them alone?"

Derek was still glaring, still frowning. Stiles could swear there was even a flash of red in his eyes when they met his. "Don't you understand? Everyone I've...it's always my fault." Derek looked like each word was breaking him, like they were scraping against his throat to force them out. Stiles stepped closer until they were breathing each other's breath, feeling the tension in Derek's body where they pressed together. "They're all dead and it's my fault. You can't be one of them." Derek's hands were back on his arms, grip as desperate as his words. "That would kill me. Do you understand?"

Unfortunately, Stiles did understand. He understood because the truth was written on Derek's face and carried in his voice and it was terrible to see it there. Stiles couldn't find words for what he wanted to say because there weren't words for what he wanted to tell Derek -- that he understood, that the idea that he could mean that much to Derek made something in his chest ache, that it broke something inside Stiles to see Derek lay himself bare for him. There was how he was just as determined and desperate to see Derek survive the coming full moon. That he had his own guilt and he couldn't let Derek be another piece of it in his heart.

But Stiles, for once, didn't have the words, so he did the only thing he could think to do, which was grab Derek's stubbled face between his palms and crash their lips together.

This was different from the kisses they had shared until then, because it was like they were trying to devour each other, greedy and without finesse. Stiles poured everything into the inelegant way he pushed his tongue against Derek's and he got it back because Derek's hold on him hurt but in the best kind of way. It was so good when there was so much between them that couldn't come out in words; Stiles knew how easy it would be to let their hunger sweep them along until they moved past the simple touches they had shared so far but he made himself slow down, pull back before they did that. He gentled his mouth against Derek's and Derek eased his caresses in return until they were almost chaste. When Stiles pulled his mouth from Derek's, though, he didn't step away, instead resting their foreheads together as he waited for his heartbeat to slow.

"I told you I didn't want to fight," he said quietly. "We weren't doing so well at that with the talking."

They'd somehow ended with Derek's hands on Stiles's sides under the fabric of his T-shirt, hot like brands. "Stiles..."

Stiles lifted a hand to press a hushing finger to Derek's mouth. "No," he said. "No fighting, no desperate "we're going to die tomorrow" confessions. No speeches about this being our last night on earth. None of that." Stiles lifted his finger away and replaced it with his lips. "Let's not jinx ourselves, okay?" he said when he pulled away.

Derek looked like he wanted to argue but he finally settled for closing his eyes, as he once again leaned into Stiles. "Fine," he said.

Stiles let out a relieved sigh. "Thank you."

"So what are we going to do?" Derek asked.

Stiles couldn't tell if he meant that moment or in general, so he decided to go with the former...
because the answer was easier. He grabbed one of Derek's hands and tangled their fingers together. "Now? We're going to get some sleep," he said. "I'm pretty sure we could both do with some Zs." He tugged on Derek's hand and pulled him toward the bed. Stiles gave him a hint of a teasing grin. "Come on, sourwolf, come cuddle with me."

Derek let out a snort that was probably in amusement but he complied with the request. Stiles watched from the bed as Derek shrugged out of his jacket and stepped out of his boots. He held his breath as he watched Derek loosen and remove his belt but his jeans stayed on. Stiles wasn't sure if he was disappointed or relieved.

Stiles's bed wasn't made for two; some nights it was barely wide enough for him and his own sprawling limbs. But they made work as Derek slid into bed with him, pulling Stiles into the heated circle of his embrace, until they pressed against each other almost from head to toe, no space left open between their bodies. Derek tilted Stiles's face up to him and they kissed slowly, softly, everything dream-like in the quiet of the night when they could still pretend tomorrow was far away.

"You know," Stiles said later, drowsily, as he carded fingers through Derek's hair, then over the edge of his human ear. "If this was a last night on earth, it wouldn't be a bad one."

Derek kissed him again before he tucked Stiles's face against the curve of his shoulder. "Shut up, Stiles," he said softly but Stiles knew what he meant: me, too.

Stiles smiled a little as he finally gave into the tug of his own exhaustion, clinging to Derek like he was scared he'd disappear.

Point of fact being, of course, that he would.

Stiles wasn't surprised to wake up to an empty bed, the heat of Derek's body long since faded. He hadn't expected anything else and it was probably better anyway. There wasn't much left to say between them that they both might not regret later.

Stiles was still in bed, reluctant to leave, when his phone chimed. It was a simple text from Scott: "Old distillery @ moon rise."

It was the last thing he needed for his preparations. He had twelve hours to prepare for a battle he was only half-sure he was going to win.

"Showtime," he said and then he was up.

He had a lot to do.

**
The hours leading up to his confrontation with the Alpha Pack were some of the longest of Derek's life. With the effect of the full moon in play, he wasn't the only one who was edgy and trying to keep his betas calm was a decent enough distraction. Without something to do, Derek might've decided on a rash course of action.

Like driving over to Stiles's and chaining the kid up so he couldn't go through with whatever stupid plan he had in store. No matter how rash, it was definitely tempting.

But he didn't.

He did interrogate Scott about what Stiles might be planning when the young werewolf showed up at the loft, but Scott didn't have anything of use to tell him. "He told me he wanted me to stick with you," Scott said. "I don't know anything more than that."

Derek was irritated to realize he was telling the truth. "You didn't try to talk him out of this? He's your best friend and he's going to get himself killed."

Scott frowned. "Look, there's something you've gotta understand," he said. "No one tells Stiles what to do. Not if he's got his mind set. Not even his dad. And I'm not going to insult him by pretending I know better than him. Stiles is, like, scary smart. He's not going to listen." He paused in thought. "Not to mention, I trust him. If he says he's got it figured out, he probably does."

Derek knew that Scott was right about Stiles not listening but that didn't make him any happier about the situation. He was even less happy when he made a last pass by the Stilinski house only to see that Stiles's Jeep was already gone. Whatever Stiles had planned, it seemed to be in motion.

Scott helped him get Jackson secure for the full moon and they left Isaac to watch him, even though Derek could see that the beta hated it. They all hated what was coming that night but it wasn't like any of them were in a position to stop it. All they could do was hope they made it through.

And that the others did, too.

Derek and Scott met no resistance from the Alpha Pack as they made their way through the woods toward the old distillery. Derek wished that Deucalion had picked a different place for their meeting but he knew enough of the story to know that it had symbolic meaning to the alpha. The memories it held for Derek were bittersweet and thinking of Paige, of watching her die in his arms, made him think of Stiles. There had been no sign of him anywhere in the woods so far but Derek knew better than to hope that Stiles had listened to him about staying away.

It was anti-climatic when they walked into the distillery in the light of the full moon to find a sedate-looking Deucalion waiting for them with a smile. But Derek knew that looks were deceiving. He glanced around uneasily as he and Scott stepped inside, looking around for the rest of the alphas.

"Where's everyone else?" Scott asked.

"Oh the others will be joining us," Deucalion said. "I wanted to talk to you first. Both of you."
Derek tensed, letting his claws come out. "I don't know what we have to talk about."

Deucalion shook his head. "I'm disappointed that you didn't take my advice, Derek," he said. "Disappointed, but not surprised."

"I told you I wasn't going to join you," he said.

"We'll see about that," he said. "And, you, Scott. You know Derek wasn't the only reason I came to Beacon Hills. From what I hear, you have great potential of your own. Alpha to your own little pack of humans."

Scott growled. "You leave them out of this."

Derek glanced at Scott because he realized what Deucalion was implying. Scott, a true alpha? It seemed far-fetched but it had turned out Stiles was a Grimm. Derek could accept that maybe he hadn't been thinking big enough when it came to his once-reluctant allies.

Deucalion's hand tightened on his cane. "We'll have time to deal with them once I'm done with Derek," he said mildly. "But first things first." He cracked his neck. "Maybe it's time I show you why your Grimm calls me the Demon Wolf."

Derek watched in horror as Deucalion began to transform, skin turning black and gnarled as his eyes shone red out of a face that, yes, Stiles had been right to call a demon. Derek could feel himself transforming in reaction and he knew Scott was doing the same beside him, both of them vocalizing growls. Deucalion's smug smile looked even worse on his transformed face. "I don't know why you try to resist," he sneered. "I am the alpha of alphas. The apex of apex predators. I am the Demon Wolf and I will destroy you."

The sound of a booming gun shot very near the distillery managed to surprise all three of them.

Scott looked sharply toward the open door over his shoulder. Derek refused to look away from his enemy, so he watched as surprise and then something darker crossed over his distorted features.

When he heard Scott's choked-off whisper, Derek felt like his heart stopped. "Stiles."

"I hope you weren't expecting back-up, because that? Was the sound of the last one going down." Stiles's voice was clear and close, with only the slightest tremor to it. That didn't stop Derek from hearing the rapid hammering of his heart which betrayed his fear, easy for any of the three werewolves to discern. He finally risked shifting his position so that he could look toward the door and, there, like something from his nightmares, stood Stiles, looking like he hadn't just walked into certain death. He was dressed like always, jeans and flannel, but he looked unusually pale lit only by the moon, making the moles across his cheek stand out in relief. And while, for some reason, Derek couldn't smell Stiles, he could smell blood and wolfsbane rising from his skin.

"Grimm," Deucalion rumbled. "How foolish of you to come."

"Yeah, I don't think so," Stiles said as he walked further into the distillery, closer to danger. Derek was still reeling but he finally took in the ancient-looking crossbow Stiles had clutched in one hand. Of course, because he was Stiles, it wasn't actually loaded. "I think three-on-one evens the odds out pretty well."

Deucalion growled and Derek couldn't stop himself from taking a step, putting himself between Stiles and the alpha. "You're lying."

"Does my heart sound like I'm lying?" Stiles scoffed. Derek wanted to kill him. "Your little plan
was to have them sneak up here, right? Yeah. Too bad. Those twins were bleeding out the last time I saw them and I'm pretty sure Kali's not getting up ever. And that gun shot?" Stiles stopped to smirk. "That was the sound of Ennis's bones calcifying from the inside thanks to a big-ass bullet from a big-ass gun. Neat little Grimm trick, yeah?"

Somehow, Stiles had managed to take out the four other alphas. He was damned proud of it, too. And while his heart was still thundering in his chest, it didn't sound like it skipped a beat. Truth, as far as Derek could tell.

Deucalion must've realized it too because his expression had turned from knowing to confused to murderous. That was when everything started to happen at once.

Deucalion lunged forward at Stiles but Derek was there to block him. He got Deucalion's massive claws raked across his stomach for his trouble but he hardly recognized the pain because Stiles was there and he was an idiot and Derek wasn't going to let him die. He twisted away, only to get another set of claws buried close to his spine. Scott made a lunge at Deucalion's back but it didn't take more than a minute before the alpha had shook both of his opponents off like they were nothing. Derek hit the ground with a painful impact and a rush of air out of his lungs. Scott let out a gasp as he did the same.

That meant there was nothing between Deucalion and Stiles.

"Stiles, run!"

But Stiles wasn't running; he had dropped the crossbow and was pushing back the sleeve of his flannel where Derek could see some kind of metal armor wrapped around his forearm. The smell of his blood was heavier as he touched his other hand to it and a long blade slid out. Derek could see that the blade was already flecked with blood. "You know what?" he said, as he focused his eyes on Deucalion. For the first time in a while, all Derek could see in Stiles's eyes was the burning darkness of the Grimm. "I think it's time we settled our differences. Violently."

The alpha and the Grimm met in a clash of claws and the ringing metal sound of Stiles's vambrace. He swung his armored arm in time to block the first slash of Deucalion's claws at his face, but the second claw surged up and only an ungraceful lunge back saved Stiles's flesh from being rend in a way that humans wouldn't heal from. Derek let out a low growl and was struggling to his feet even as Stiles swung the blade in a wide arc that sliced across Deucalion's face. He roared and flung out an arm that sent Stiles flying across the space.

"Shit, shit, shit," Stiles was muttering under his breath as he struggled to stand. There was blood blooming across his chest where Deucalion had managed to catch him with his claws, soaking into his shirt.

Deucalion was so focused on Stiles that when Derek launched himself at the alpha, he was able to sink his claws into his back, twisting up with every bit of strength he had.

"Stiles, are you okay?" he heard Scott asked as the beta scrambled over to help his friend to his feet.

"Yeah, peachy," he panted. "I got this. Don't worry."

Derek couldn't help but be relieved with how like himself and relatively unharmed Stiles sounded but the distraction cost him because Deucalion jerked away from his claws and was turning to attack. He dodged but Deucalion only struck out again, relentless. Derek gasped as he took another blow, blood dripping from the multiple wounds -- back, side, chest. Deucalion seemed past
Derek watched through somewhat-hazy eyes as a bloody human hand flew toward Deucalion's face, palm flat like Stiles actually thought he had a chance to break the alpha's nose. The blow landed with a grunt from both Stiles and Deucalion. Stiles tried to dance away from the huge hand that wrapped around his throat but he wasn't fast enough. Derek growled and moved to attack but Stiles was gasping out words even as he was struggling for breath.

"Scott, get him away, I got this!"

Derek didn't realize that Stiles meant him until Stiles kicked at his chest to push him away from where he grappled with Deucalion and then Scott was there, hauling him farther away. Derek tried to pull away but he was injured and the lack of healing from the alpha-inflicted wounds was starting to catch up with him.

Meanwhile, Stiles had punched up with his bladed arm to force Deucalion to release the hold the alpha had had on his throat. He fell to the ground in a heap of unmoving limbs and Derek howled as he tried to get Scott to let him go. He didn't understand why Scott was holding him back until his words from earlier that day came back: *If he says he's got it figured out, he probably does.*

The sentiment was nice but it was also incredibly stupid when Scott applied it to Stiles's ability to single-handedly take down an alpha werewolf.

"Stiles!"

Stiles was still on the ground but he had struggled up to his knees. He made another swipe at the alpha with his blade but Deucalion had no distractions this time and easily captured Stiles's arm in his massive hand. Stiles winced when his arm was wrencher but Deucalion merely seemed intent on breaking the blade off from the vambrace. It fell with a clatter when Deucalion dropped it and that was when Derek noticed that Stiles had been reaching into his pocket with his free hand. He pulled out a familiar-looking jar of mountain ash. He thumbed open the cork and glared up at Deucalion as he tipped it over into his palm before he tossed it up in the air. Derek watched in amazement as the powder didn't just scatter on the wind but followed some unknown guidance until it floated into a perfect circle around where Stiles knelt. Derek stepped forward and could already feel the power of the barrier pushing back against him.

Unfortunately, Stiles had been too close to Deucalion when he had formed it because the alpha was trapped inside of the circle with Stiles.

Deucalion let out a satisfied sound even as Scott rushed the circle, pressing against the barrier. "Stiles!" Scott was yelling, beating his hands against the magical field created by the powder.

Stiles was still unsteady even as he managed to stand to face Deucalion.

"Another neat Grimm trick?" the alpha taunted. "You didn't quite pull it off like you planned."

Stiles grinned at him and there was blood in his mouth. "How do you know?"

Deucalion grabbed him before Stiles could even think of stepping out of the barrier and then it was Derek pushing himself to his feet, despite everything.

"Let him go," he demanded, standing beside a frustrated Scott at the edge of the barrier.
"I don't think so." Deucalion had his claws wrapped around Stiles but he wasn't choking him this time. It was a hold, another taunt, as he pulled Stiles back against his chest, claws poised at his jugular. "I told you he'd be the first I'd kill if you refused. I should thank him for making sure that I could."

Derek slammed himself against the barrier, which brought a grin to Deucalion's face. Stiles was uncharacteristically still but his eyes still burned with the eternal deepness that marked him as Grimm. Those eyes darted from Derek's face up to Deucalion's. "What are you going to do? Rip my throat out with your claws? Your teeth?" Stiles made a show of rolling his eyes. "I've heard that before."

Now it was Deucalion who was looking between Stiles and Derek, something speculative in his gaze. "How would that make you feel, Derek?" he asked. "If you had to watch while I bit your little pet here?"

Derek knew that horror had to be spreading across his features because all he could do was think about Paige -- slowly dying from the bite, wrecked with pain, staring up at him and begging to die. He couldn't do that again, couldn't watch Stiles die like that, too. "Grimms are immune to the bite," he said, remembering Peter's words.

Deucalion's mouth curled up in satisfaction. "That just means he's guaranteed to die." And without hesitation, Deucalion bit down on Stiles's shoulder.

"No!" Derek wasn't sure if he was the only one who cried out but he knew that the anguished voice in his ears could only be his own. Scott was again throwing himself against the mountain ash barrier.

Stiles was pale and bloody, shuddering in pain and twisting in Deucalion's hold. He didn't cry out, although the set of his jaw said he wanted to. His eyes met Derek's and behind the pain, the werewolf could've sworn he saw a hint of...relief? It didn't make sense.

At least not until it was Deucalion who let out a pained cry as he ripped his teeth away from Stiles's flesh. He took a step away from Stiles like he wanted to escape him. He bounced against the mountain ash barrier as he doubled over in pain. Derek watched as Deucalion went to his knees, whole body shaking. Now it was Stiles who towered over him. Derek noticed that Stiles was shaking, too.

"What have you done to me?" Deucalion growled.

"Do you know why werewolves don't bite Grimms?" Stiles asked. "It's not because we're immune like you guys think. Well, we are, but that's not why."

With that last statement, Stiles managed to lift his foot over the ash barrier and take one tiny step out of it before he collapsed to the ground.

"Stiles!" Derek knelt beside him but Stiles threw up a hand to stop him from touching him.

Behind him, Deucalion was still moaning and twitching as Stiles's blood ravaged his system, neatly contained by the mountain ash circle.
"Don't, don't," Stiles was saying, even as he was unbuckling the vambrace from his arm, shrugging out of the tattered flannel that he then threw it across the room. "I'm covered in wolfsbane."

Derek could still smell faint hints of it on Stiles's skin but he didn't care. He hauled Stiles close and yanked at the fabric of his shirt until he could see the nasty bite mark in all its glory. Derek felt his stomach twist at the twinned rush of grief in him -- for Paige and Stiles. "You're an idiot," he told Stiles. He wanted to say so much but the words choked him.

"You mean awesome," Stiles said, shivering. One shaking, bloody hand closed around Derek's.
"Don't look at me like that. We won."

"I don't care," Derek said and he realized it was true, not when he was watching someone else he loved slip away. "You're dying."

Stiles leaned in, resting his forehead against Derek's shoulder. "God, you're depressing."

"You're not going to die," Scott said, suddenly at Derek's side where he watched Stiles with sad, dark eyes. "He's immune, right?" he asked, with a glance at Derek for confirmation. "Like with Lydia. She didn't die when Peter bit her."

"No, but she needed medical attention," another voice said and the werewolves looked up to see Chris Argent standing in the open doorway. "So does he."

"Are the other alphas really gone?" Scott asked the hunter as he joined them at Stiles's side. Argent remained standing, crossbow casually aimed toward Deucalion.

Argent gave a curt nod. "We killed two, de-powered the other two. They were still unconscious when I left them."

Scott nodded, then started pulling Stiles out of Derek's hold. Derek growled and held tighter.


"You need to stay and deal with this," Scott said. "And it's going to make way more sense for me to be with him than you."

As much as it felt like he was ripping his own heart out, Derek let Scott take Stiles from him. He watched as Scott pulled Stiles up with him as he went to his feet. He gave Derek a last long look before he tucked Stiles in close and started dragging him away.

Derek watched until he couldn't see them anymore, until the slow sluggish beat of Stiles's heart could no longer reach his ears. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened them, Argent was still there, waiting patiently.

Argent nodded toward Deucalion, still trapped in the mountain ash circle. The former alpha was laying flat on his back, chest heaving. His face was back to its completely human features, sightless eyes still moving aimlessly in the sockets. "Do you know what we should do about him?" asked Argent.

Derek stood and rolled his shoulders, trying to calm himself for the tasks ahead. "I have some ideas."

From the smile he got from Argent at that, it seemed like -- for once -- an Argent and a Hale would be on the same page.
The first time Stiles woke up in the hospital, he was confused: about why he was awake, why he hadn't been before, why he was surrounded by the antiseptic whiteness of a hospital, why he felt like he'd been hit by a mack truck.

Basically, he was confused about everything and his mind refused to cooperate when he tried to use it to think.

He must've made a sound because suddenly there was someone at his side, a heavy, familiar hand pushing the hair back from his forehead.

"Stiles," the voice said and Stiles instantly relaxed, leaning into the hand.

"Dad," he managed to reply, his voice scratchy and painful.

"Everything's alright, son," his dad said but Stiles wasn't sure he believed him because he could hear tears in his dad's voice.

Stiles frowned, struggled to make himself think, move, to open his eyes wide enough to check on his dad.

"Everything's okay," his dad said again. "Just calm down and rest. I'll be here."

Stiles didn't mean to but he did as his dad asked and let darkness sweep him under again.

The next time he woke up, Stiles was much less confused but he still felt like he had been hit by a mack truck, though now he could remember why: epic showdown with the Alpha Pack. And from his vague recollections, everything had come out fine in the end.

He slowly turned his head toward the figure sitting by his bedside. He wasn't surprised that it was his dad, surrounded by his laptop and casefiles, obviously camped out.

"Dad?" he said, voice still hoarse but less painful.

He was able to focus properly on his dad's face so he could see the fatigue and worry etched into his features. Stiles could also see the relief that washed over it when he heard Stiles call out to him. "Stiles," his dad said in reply as he shoved aside his work. His hand curled around Stiles's arm. "Feeling better?"

Stiles made a noise that didn't really mean yes or no because he wasn't sure. "Better" was relative. "Howzit?" he asked and even though it was barely a real word, he was sure his dad would know what he meant.

The sheriff did. "It's been almost a week since Scott dragged you in here with your mysterious wound," his dad informed him. "One suspiciously like that Martin girl's from a few months ago."

"Yeeeeeeah," was the only thing Stiles could think to say. In all his planning on how to take out Deucalion and his pack, he hadn't thought about how to explain it in the aftermath.

"Yeah," his dad repeated, that sheriff-y look in his eye. Still, his hand on Stiles's arm was gentle and he gave it a squeeze before he spoke again. "I had a long talk with Scott and Melissa while we waited to see if you were gonna make it, kid."

Stiles's eyes widened in alarm and he could feel his whole body tense. "Whu...?"
"And I have to say," the sheriff continued. "Never did I think werewolves was the answer I was missing."

Stiles let out a thin, reedy laugh, clearly edging into hysteria. "I..."

His dad hushed him. "Don't blame Scott," he told his son. "Him telling me the truth was about the only thing that stopped me from going out and putting a bullet in Derek Hale when I saw the shape you were in."

"He didn't do anything," Stiles croaked.

"Oh he's done enough," the sheriff muttered. "But I know he didn't hurt you." His dad shook his head. "How many times have you almost died when I wasn't paying attention?"

"Dad..." Stiles began but he didn't know what to say. He wanted to tell the truth but the truth was hard and he was still so tired. "I..."

He didn't get any further than that before his dad was leaning in and kissing him on the forehead like he was still young enough to be tucked into bed at night. "We'll talk about it all later," he said. "Just rest now. I'll be here when you wake up."

Despite the safety that flooded through him at his dad's promise, Stiles was still kind of relieved that it was Scott at his bedside when he woke up again -- and not just because his friend was happy to drain his pain away to help ease him into full consciousness.

"I love you," Stiles groaned in relief as the pain ebbed from his body. "And I forgive you for telling my dad about werewolves."

Scott rolled his eyes as he lifted his hand away. "Hey, that was also a favor," he said. "I did that so he wouldn't go after Derek and I protected Derek for you."

"I know," Stiles said, smiling. "Thanks."

Of course, Scott smiled back, mouth wide with it. "Anything for you, man. You know that."

"Tell me what happened after -- you know," Stiles prompted.

"Mr. Argent and Derek took care of Deucalion," he explained. "Not -- they didn't kill him! They let him go, like the twins."

Stiles's eyebrows rose. "I wasn't expecting that."

Scott shrugged. "Me neither. But from what Derek said, it was like...Derek's mom used to think Deucalion was a good guy and then Mr. Argent felt guilty that Gerard blinded him and everything. Since he's nothing more than a regular werewolf now, power-wise, they told him to go but they'd be watching. If he knows what's good for him, he'll stay off their radar."

"Yeah," Stiles agreed.

"But he...wow, I should've led with this," Scott said with a laugh. "As a gesture or something, he told them where Boyd and Erica were."

Stiles felt a little swell of happiness overcome him. "And they're...?"

"Fine!" Scott finished. "I think the captivity was rough on them, something to do with blocking the moon? So I haven't seen them but Derek took Isaac and Jackson to get them. He called and said
they were good but laying low, recovering."

Stiles had been manfully not asking about Derek but he was weak. He had thought they had come to some kind of compromise about his involvement in taking down the Alpha Pack that last night together but he couldn’t pretend he wasn’t also worried that Scott had been right and he’d pushed Derek too far. That Derek had reevaluated the decision to get involved with a spastic, mouthy, teenaged Grimm. "And our favorite growly alpha?"

Scott rolled his eyes. "Maybe your favorite. What about him?"

Stiles let his fingers nervously play with the edge of his sheet. "Has he...been around?"

Scott actually looked pained. "I haven't seen him? He called me about Erica and Boyd and stuff. He asked about you," he added, the proverbial bone. "But he hasn't been here that I've seen. Sorry."

"No, no, it's fine," Stiles said. "Almost dying in somebody's arms might make things awkward, I get that."

The next thing Stiles knew, Scott was hugging him. “It’ll work out,” he promised. “You probably didn’t notice how he reacted when you...but, man, there’s no way he’s bailing on you.”

Stiles didn’t have a chance to reply before Scott pulled away. “Your dad’s on his way,” he explained, sliding off the bed. “I’m going to head out.”

“Coward,” Stiles called out as his friend slipped out of the room with a grin. And, sure enough, when his door opened a few minutes later, it was his dad, carrying a cup of coffee from the hospital cafeteria.

“Was that Scott I saw in the hall?” he asked.

“Yeah, he had to go,” Stiles said with a handwave. “What’s up?”

“I spoke to the doctors,” his dad told him as he settled in his chair next to Stiles’s bedside. “They said you should be good to go home in a day or so.”

“Yes!” Stiles said with a fist pump that he regretted when he felt the edges of pain started to creep back in. “I mean, cool,” he added at his dad’s raised eyebrow.

“We’re going to have to talk about some new rules,” his dad said. “Also talk about the parameters of your grounding that will probably last until you’re 30.”

“You’re grounding me? I almost died!” Stiles objected. “And I stopped the bad guys.”

“I feel like I should start by banning all werewolves from your life,” the Sheriff said.

Stiles shook his head. “It wouldn’t work because, let’s be honest, I wouldn’t listen. And, also, this is...I fell into by accident but you know about the Grimm stuff, too. This is going to be my life regardless.”

His dad let out a heavy, defeated sigh. “Your mom had said some weird stuff about her family but she always kept it vague. I guess now I know why.”

“I’m in too deep,” Stiles said. “I know you see that.”

“I do,” his dad admitted after a moment. “I just don’t like admitting it.”
Stiles settled back against his pillows in relief. “So no banning werewolves.”

“Maybe just one then,” his dad. Stiles’s eyes narrowed in suspicion. “I’d rest better if I could continue to keep Derek Hale at arm’s length of you.”

Stiles opened his mouth to argue but then he fully processed his dad’s words. “What do you mean, continue?”

“Stiles, while I trust Scott, I wasn’t about to let anyone around here until I heard your side of the story,” his dad said. “Especially not once werewolves were in the mix. He came by to check on you and I told him to keep his distance until I said otherwise. I’m amazed but pleased that he’s done it.”

Stiles scowled. “Dad, how could you? I thought he...you know.”

“Actually, I don’t know,” his dad said. “Are you two really dating or was that just a cover for werewolves?”

Stiles was torn between being relieved that Derek had come by to check on him and annoyed that the alpha had decided now would be a good time to start respecting boundaries. He was also annoyed at his dad, too, but that was a milder, familiar feeling. “We were...something,” he hedged, not sure how to define it, especially given recent events. “But he didn’t want me involved in this and I don’t think he was happy I got myself in the middle of it.”

“I know how he feels,” his dad deadpanned.

Stiles shrugged. “So right now? I have no idea what we are.”

The Sheriff sighed but his expression was almost sympathetic. “Oh, son, nothing can ever be easy with you, huh?”

“Nope,” he admitted.

“You couldn’t just keep pining over that Martin girl,” his dad continued. “You had to fall for a guy who’s not only entirely too old for you but also is a freaking werewolf.”

“Um, basically?”

“I think I’m changing my mind about this honesty thing,” his dad said, mostly a joke. He looked down at his cup in sorrow. “And I definitely need something stronger than coffee for any more of it.”

“No one asked for you to come in here and get all sheriff-y on me,” Stiles pointed out.

“Habit,” his dad said with a small smile. “I love you kid,” he said after a moment, eyes soft but serious. “Even if you’re driving me to an early grave.”

“I love you, too,” Stiles said back, wincing at the slight crack in his words. “And I think you’re confusing me with your bad dietary choices.”

At that, his dad laughed and the mood lightened with the sound. They talked about stupid things after that, things that didn’t have to do with werewolves or near-death experiences and Stiles floated off into one of the best night's sleeps he had had all summer, the knot of anxiety in his chest slowly unraveling as he let himself realize the stark truth: he had won and all his friends were safe.

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Even though it had been over a week since the Alpha Pack had been defeated, Derek still had a hard time accepting that it was over. That, for once, everything had worked out for him in the end -- he hadn’t lost anything and he had gained so much. The situation was so unusual for him thus far in his life, Derek could understand his own reluctance to let his guard down even in the face of the facts.

And, of course, there was still his worry for Stiles burrowing in his chest, worry he could not rid himself of as long as he couldn’t see him and the Sheriff had made it clear that he needed to stay away. He understood the Sheriff’s sentiment and he had accepted it but that didn’t mean that Derek wasn’t going out of his mind, dependent only on Scott’s assurances that Stiles had been improving. His last update from Scott had been that Stiles was awake and almost completely better, doctors as baffled by his illness and recovery as they had been by Lydia’s. Derek hoped that once Stiles was no longer under the watchful eye of the hospital staff, Derek might be able to see him, despite the Sheriff’s similarly protective instincts.

In the meantime, there was his pack and that was amazing. All of them together -- Erica, Boyd, Isaac and Jackson. Even though they had spent the months apart, the events had still somehow bonded them together even more closely, even Jackson, who had been the one with the least connection to the others and to the pack. But he must’ve felt it in the pack bond because he had been just as relieved to have Erica and Boyd back as Isaac was. They were actually forming into a unit right before Derek’s eyes and he could feel something primal, some alpha part of him, start to settle in his chest with that knowledge.

But even more amazing than any of that was Cora.

When he and Argent had arrived at the old bank where Deucalion had said he was holding Derek’s betas, he hadn’t expected the third wolf in their cage and he never could have imagined that it would be his younger sister, long believed dead. Once he and the hunter had freed the betas and gotten them to safety, Derek had been able to revel in her presence, to hold her as tight as Laura had once held him as Cora told him about her years in hiding and the hope that had been kindled in her when she heard that an Alpha Hale had returned to Beacon Hills. There were going to be rough patches, he knew, as they learned to be family -- pack -- again but Derek was willing to go through anything to have his sister beside him.

Saving Cora, however inadvertent, was another thing he had Stiles to thank for.

And Stiles -- he didn’t stay far from Derek’s thoughts, even with everything else going on. Aside from his worry about his recovery, Derek remembered with too-vivid clarity watching Deucalion bite down into Stiles’s flesh, holding Stiles in his arms as he shook and shuddered from the bite’s effects, convinced that he’d have to watch him die. He’d had nightmares about it almost every night, memories of Stiles and Paige mixing together into a particularly painful cocktail of dreams that he saw every time he closed his eyes. It was one of the few dark spots on the fragile but bright present.

Derek had a sneaking suspicion that it wouldn’t get better until he actually saw Stiles.

Eight days after Stiles almost died in his arms from Deucalion’s bite, a week since the Sheriff told Derek to stay away from his son and three days since Scott’s last text letting him know that Stiles was fully on the mend, Derek was on his way back to the loft after picking up dinner for him and Cora when he heard sirens and saw the telltale flashing lights of a police cruiser behind him. He wasn’t sure why he was being pulled over but, with a sigh, he stopped safely on the side of the road. When he saw that it was the Sheriff himself who stepped out of the cruiser, Derek immediately understood.
“Sheriff,” he said in greeting when the Sheriff reached his open window.

“Hale,” the Sheriff replied. “We both know this isn’t a traffic stop, so why don’t you go ahead and step out so we can have a little conversation, huh?”

When the Sheriff stepped back, Derek complied, coming to stand beside the Camaro while the Sheriff regarded him with laser-like focus. They weren’t the same color but Stiles still had his father’s eyes -- assessing, inquisitive, suspicious. Derek was getting the brunt of it now from the Sheriff and steeled himself for whatever the man had to say. He doubted it was anything good.

Derek was surprised when the Sheriff scrubbed a hand over his face. “I’m not going to arrest you,” he said. “You can relax.”

Derek nodded, forcing some of the tension out of his body.

“Stiles is fine,” the Sheriff said. “I wanted to let you know.”

“Scott told me,” Derek said. “But...thank you, sir.”

“Sir,” the Sheriff repeated with a snort. “There are so many reasons for you to stay away from him,” he said. “The werewolf thing coming a distant third to your age and your troubled relationship with the law.”

“I know,” Derek said because he did. There was a lot of things that the Sheriff didn’t know that made him bad for Stiles, reasons that Derek had tried to remember when he fought against getting involved with him. But his resolve hadn’t held against the combined forces of his and Stiles’s desires and now, Derek didn’t know how to go back to before, even if that was what he’d have to do.

“There’s nothing I want more than for my son to be safe and happy,” the Sheriff continued. “But I’ve come to realize this week that “safe” is a probably just a pipe dream at this point. Not with the Grimm thing and werewolves and alphas and whatever else running around.”

“I never wanted him to get caught up in this,” Derek said. “I tried to get him to stay out of it.”

“He told me,” the Sheriff said. “He also was pretty sure you and Scott would be dead without his involvement.”

“That...was a possibility,” Derek admitted.

“Yeah,” the Sheriff sighed. “I figured.”

“Sir…”

“Look, Hale,” the Sheriff snapped. He paused and sighed. “Derek. My point is, if my son can’t be as safe as I want him to be, maybe he can at least be happy.” The Sheriff shot him a look. “He came home from the hospital today. He should be up for visitors tomorrow.”

Derek’s confusion must’ve been on his face because the Sheriff rolled his eyes -- a very Stiles-like action. “My son is sad, Derek,” he said, like the very idea of it disgusted him. “Sad because he’s worried you don’t actually want to see him. Apparently Stiles doesn’t think I’m scary enough to be the real reason you’ve stayed away.”

“No, I…” Derek cleared his throat and hoped that honesty wouldn’t get him in more trouble. “I would like to see him. But I wanted to respect your wishes. You are his father.”
“If only he thought that was enough,” the Sheriff said with a grimace. It was somehow comforting to know that Stiles drove everyone who loved him crazy, not just Derek. “Anyway, I’m just saying...if you want to see him, go see him. Because he wants to see you. Okay?”

Derek was pretty sure he’d just gotten the Sheriff’s permission to date his teenage son but that seemed impossible. Instead of questioning it, though, he just nodded. “Okay.”

“There will be rules going forward,” the Sheriff warned. “So many rules. If my son is going to go around fighting and...fraternizing...with werewolves, there will need to be some guidelines. Stiles can’t be trusted to think of his own safety.”

“I would protect him with my life, Sheriff,” Derek said. “I want you to know that.”

That earned him a glare but Derek could see it was to hide something softer, kinder. “Just because I’m allowing this, don’t think I won’t bust your ass if you don’t do just that,” the older man told him. “Werewolf or not, you won’t be able to get away from me if you hurt him. Understood?”

“Understood,” Derek repeated. Then, quietly, he added, “Thank you, sir.”

The Sheriff made a derisive sound in his throat then waved a hand in Derek’s direction. Derek almost smiled at how like his son the action was. “Just get the hell out of here,” he said, already striding back toward his cruiser.

Even though his food was probably cold and Cora had probably sent him a few texts wanting to know what the hold up was on dinner, when Derek settled back in the car, he felt better than he had all week. His betas were fine, he had Cora back, and Beacon Hills was currently safe from supernatural threats. And tomorrow…

Stiles.

With the unusual feeling of hope curling through his chest, Derek pulled back on the road and headed toward the loft, a place he could almost let himself call home.

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Stiles barely remembered the day he came home from the hospital; as soon as he made it up to his room, all he managed to do was dry swallow some pills before he’d passed out on his bed. He slept soundly through the night, waking up at the crack of dawn the next day in time to see his dad off to work. After that, he sprawled on the sofa in the living room, idly flipping through the channels on the TV, content to drift in his medication haze for a few hours. His dad had promised to come by with lunch, and Stiles knew that Scott wouldn’t wait too long to make an appearance.

He was almost asleep a few hours later when he heard the doorbell rang. Stiles didn’t know who he was expecting it to be, but he had to admit that a subdued, clean-faced Erica was nowhere in his thoughts.

“Erica! Hey!” he said, opening the door wide enough to see that she wasn’t alone. Derek and a dark-haired girl he didn’t know were standing behind her. They wore matching blank looks and Stiles was too busy trying to search for something in Derek’s eyes that he let out an ‘oomph’ of surprise when Erica suddenly threw her arms around him.

“Thank you,” she said quietly as she crushed him in her werewolf-powered embrace.

“Oh...kay,” he said, a little lost. He looked toward Derek for help and relaxed a little when he saw some fondness in that piercing green gaze. “For what?”
Erica pulled away to frown at him. “What do you think?”

“No idea,” he said. “But how about we take this inside, huh? Otherwise one of the neighbors might call my dad.”

The trio followed him back into the living room where Erica promptly gave him a playful punch to the shoulder. “Ow,” he said. “What?”

“Thank you for saving my life, stupid,” she chided. “Derek told us how you took down those alpha nutjobs.”

“I didn’t do it by myself,” he said.

“I’m not about to thank an Argent,” she said.

Stiles rolled his eyes. “There was a werewolf or two there, too.”

“Just take the gratitude, Stiles,” Erica said.

“Fine,” he said, mock glaring. “You’re welcome.”

Erica smirked at him, like she won something in his acquiescence. It was the first time she looked completely like herself since she had appeared on his doorstep and it made Stiles’s heart clench in relief. The last time he had seen her, it had been in the Argent basement after Gerard had captured her and Boyd. To see her now, smiling and sassy and clearly well, eased some small anxiety Stiles carried with him.

“I guess I owe you some thanks myself,” the dark-haired girl said, reminding Stiles of her presence. “Deucalion had me with Erica and Boyd.”

“Oh, well, you’re welcome, too,” Stiles said.

“Cora,” she said in introduction. She glanced over her shoulder, at Derek. “Cora Hale.”

“Cora Hale?” Stiles repeated, also looking toward Derek. “As in your…?”

“Sister,” Derek said and the quiet happiness in his voice made Stiles hurt in the best way. “My younger sister.”

Stiles suddenly noticed the similarities between them -- the dark hair, the general hotness, a certain stoicism in their expressions. “Holy shit,” he said.

“Yeah,” Derek said and he was smiling.

Stiles couldn’t help but smile back, letting himself drink in his first sight of Derek since the night of the full moon. He looked good -- of course -- but Stiles also thought he looked lighter, less weighed down by troubles. His sister being alive probably had something to do with it, along with the return of his betas.

“I bet that’s a hell of a story,” Stiles finally said.

“One for another day,” Erica piped up. “Boyd’s waiting for me and Cora in the car,” she explained. “We just wanted to come in and say thanks.”

“Well, it was good to see you,” he said, honestly.
Erica smiled. “You, too.” The smile she shot toward Derek was slyer, more wolfish. “We won’t wait up, boss,” she said.

Before Stiles could react and Derek could do more than scowl, Erica blew them both a kiss and all but dragged Cora out of the Stilinski house. That left Stiles alone with Derek for the first time since that night in his room and, as much as he’d been wanting just that, it also made him nervous.

“Your sister, huh?” he said. “That’s pretty amazing, I can’t even…”

Stiles didn’t get a chance to finish his sentence because Derek took two steps forward until he could pull Stiles into his arms and then he was kissing him. Stiles definitely didn’t have a problem with the turn of events and his arms came up to wrap around Derek. Stiles had thought in the past that Derek had kissed him with desperation but the past had nothing on this -- the way Derek held on with a grip that almost bruising, the way that Stiles could barely pull away long enough to breathe before Derek’s mouth was back on his. The next thing Stiles knew Derek was hauling him up with hands wrapped around his thighs and then Stiles felt himself settle flat on his back against the rough fabric of the sofa, Derek’s weight bearing down on him as he followed.

“You are an idiot,” Derek said between biting kisses on Stiles’s throat. It took a moment for the words to sink through Stiles’s lust to his brain.

“Hey!” he protested. “What the hell?”

Derek finally stopped attacking Stiles’s skin with his mouth -- unfortunately, said Stiles’s libidio -- as he answered. “You couldn’t come up with a plan to defeat Deucalion that didn’t include you almost dying?”

“That’s wasn’t the plan,” Stiles sputtered. “And neither could you!”

“Shut up,” Derek growled and Stiles shivered at the sound. Derek almost grinned as he leaned down to kiss Stiles again, cutting off the squawk of indignation that Stiles might’ve been about to make.

Stiles didn’t really have an idea how long they remained entwined on the sofa but when Derek pulled away to bury his face against Stiles’s neck, Stiles knew that his mouth felt bruised from Derek’s and his skin was roughened from a serious case of beard burn. A heavy warmth had also settled somewhere in his chest, good but aching, still there as he let his fingers brush through the dark strands of Derek’s hair. His companion was silent, still; suddenly content to brush his nose against Stiles’s neck in a constant almost-caress. Stiles was content, too, but he didn’t take the silence as well.

“So you’re not mad at me?” he guessed.

“No, I’m furious,” Derek rumbled, although the way he swept his nose up Stiles’s neck, toward his jaw, belied his words. Weird werewolves and their weird scenting, Stiles thought to himself. “I was also terrified that you were going to die in my arms.”

Stiles did feel guilty for that. He’d even dreamed of Derek’s panicked voice in the days since and he’d woken up with tears in his eyes at the thought of making Derek hurt like that. “The bite wasn’t part of the plan,” he admitted. “I managed to get the twins to ingest my blood by force, by incapacitating them long enough to bleed into their mouths. But Deucalion was way stronger, so I couldn’t. Him deciding to bite me worked in a pinch.”

Derek shifted his weight until he was staring down at Stiles once more, his expression painfully
vulnerable. “I’ve lost too many people I care about, Stiles,” he said. “I don’t want you to be another one.”

Stiles’s heart was beating so fast, with so much emotion, he was sure that Scott could probably hear it down at Deaton’s. “Then you better plan to stick around and help me out,” he said. He meant it as a tease, but he knew his own voice was probably too raw, too needy to pass for it.

“You certainly can’t be trusted to watch out for yourself,” Derek agreed. The kiss that followed was soft, adoring; it made Stiles’s breath catch in his throat. “You’re almost as bad at self-preservation as Scott.”

“Rude!”

Derek grinned at Stiles’s fake outrage, transforming his face from handsome to devastating and Stiles’s heart couldn’t take it anymore, so he surged up to capture Derek’s mouth with his own, an arm curling around Derek’s neck to pull him close. Derek let him and they sank back into each other, oblivious to the outside world.

At least until Stiles remembered that his dad could show up at any time and ruin everything with his judgment and displeasure.

Derek went easily when Stiles gently pushed at him so they could put sit up on the sofa. “Sorry,” he sighed against Derek’s mouth, still reluctant to pull away. “But my dad will probably show up soon.”

Derek sat back against the cushions, pulling Stiles along with him until he was tucked against the side. “He knows I’m here,” he said.

“Yeah?” Stiles asked, interested.

Derek nodded. “He pulled me over last night to let me know I could come visit.”

Stiles laughed, silently thanking his dad for being the marshmallow he was. “Sounds like him.”

“I wanted to see you,” Derek told him and Stiles figured his dad must’ve said something. “But I know how you hate lying to him and I hoped…”

“If you listened, maybe he’d cut us some slack?” Stiles finished. “Sounds like your plan worked.”

“Maybe not if he catches us like this,” Derek said dryly, even though he made no move to untangle himself from Stiles.

Stiles made a dive at Derek’s mouth. “I’m willing to chance it,” he said. “And you’re a werewolf. You can listen out for him.”

Lucky for them both, by the time the Sheriff did show up with takeout from the diner, they were pretty decent, if still cuddled together on the sofa. Stiles was half-asleep when he heard the door slam shut, face smashed into Derek’s shoulder. He startled at the sound and looked up to see Derek looking back at him, fond but amused.

“Derek,” the Sheriff greeted with a put-upon sigh.

“Sheriff,” he said in return, a little warily but standing his ground. Stiles found it adorable that his dad did actually seem to frighten Derek a little.
“Hey, Dad, lunch smells delicious,” Stiles said with a yawn, stretching as he stood up.

His dad rattled the bags in his hand in response. “Let’s eat,” he said. He sent a pointed look toward Derek. “You, too. I got extra.”

Stiles was pretty sure his face was going to split with the size of his smile, both at his dad and then at Derek’s obvious surprise. The Sheriff sighed again and headed toward the kitchen. “Come on!”

“Yeah, come on, Derek,” Stiles teased, grabbing at Derek’s hand to pull him to his feet. “Lunch with the Sheriff, where could that go wrong?”

“I wonder,” Derek said, deadpan, but he was standing close to Stiles, hands entwined. His free one came up to brush along Stiles’s cheek and jaw.

“You can run while you still can,” Stiles said with a nod toward the door.

“No,” he said after a long moment where his eyes watched Stiles like he’d find some heavenly answers in the lines of his face. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Stiles just had to kiss him at that, father be damned.

He was too happy to worry about much at the moment and he hoped -- probably naively, given that it was Beacon Hills and he was a Grimm and he was in love with a werewolf -- that the feeling would last for a long while.

(The End)

Chapter End Notes

All of the weapons and most of the "tricks" that Stiles uses are based on things from the Grimms' arsenal as shown on the TV show. In the episode “Love Sick,” we learn that Grimm blood can de-power certain creatures and so I used that as my ultimate weapon against the alphas. The line Stiles says about settling his differences with Deucalion violently is lifted directly from the aforementioned episode of Grimm.

I promised Pookaseraph (my light, my love, my brain twin) that I would write a silly one-shot sequel to this with a few more Grimm-related cameos, so we'll see if that materializes. In the meantime, I just want to thank everyone for reading and reviewing!

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