Nothing is really what it seems anymore... no one is really who they seem anymore either.

The darkness and the fight to remain themselves was hard enough before shapeshifters started pouring into Beacon Hills. Peter was never going to come at them straight on-- especially when he had so many other faces waiting in the wings to become them instead.

Notes

Title is shameless derived from Shakespeare’s line in Hamlet, "God has given you one face, and you make yourself another."
“It’s been a week since…” Cora wasn’t able to find the words, but Derek knew what she meant.

“The eclipse?” he suggested, and she nodded gratefully.

“If we’re ever going to go, we have to go now,” she told him, and he couldn’t disagree. They’d packed, gotten passports in hand, and called Scott inside an hour.

The Saturday afternoon flight to New York hadn’t been cheap, but Cora was right. Go now or never, and Derek knew they needed to go, for a while at least, so he’d pulled out the card connected to the insurance accounts, telling Cora that it was time to put a dent in it, to use it to decide on what their lives would be. She had scowled and knocked him upside the head when she learned that he and Laura had only touched the money in emergencies, pointing out that the life insurance policies had been there so Talia Hale wouldn’t have to worry about her children’s survival should the worst happen.

From New York, they planned to head out of the country, though they hadn’t decided where yet, just decided that they’d pick somewhere once they got to LaGuardia.

Scott and Stiles had come to see him and Cora off, Scott reluctant and hanging back, as though he was refraining from either asking Derek to stay or admitting that he would miss him, while looking as if he wanted to do both. He was rocking on his heels in an awkward fashion as he silently watched Derek load their bags into the back of the SUV, while Stiles rambled a mile a minute to Cora about his totaled Jeep, aluminum bats, and did she understand just how much riding bitch on Scott’s bike sucked? If Derek hadn’t already made his decision about the keys in his hand, that would have clinched it.

He closed the hatch back on the last of the bags, clearing his throat slightly to end Stiles’ rambling. Stiles shut up abruptly, giving Derek a long look, unusually still. “Scott,” Derek turned to the alpha instead, not willing to face Stiles yet, nodding and offering his hand.

“See you around, Derek,” Scott said, accepting the handshake. He didn’t sound hopeful, more searching, looking to see if Derek would give him some clue as to his intentions. He gave Scott a hint of a smile, then let go, turning back to Stiles, who was wrapped up in a tight hug from Cora.
Their eyes met over her shoulder, and Stiles offered him a wobbly parody of his usual bright grin.

“You’re getting the same treatment once she lets go, buddy,” Stiles informed him, his smile blossoming into something more like his usual cheerful expression when Derek bared his teeth in reply.

“Don’t be absurd,” he quipped, tossing Stiles his keys once Cora had released him. “You’re driving us to the airport.”

“What?” Scott and Cora chorused together, blinking oddly at Derek.

“Couldn’t find anyone to buy it, no sense in letting it sit unused,” Derek replied, shrugging as though handing off the car wasn’t a big deal. He knew Stiles couldn’t afford a new car, and it was true. The Toyota was staying behind while he and Cora went exploring. He just hadn’t decided if they were going to look at the world or to look at the world for a new home. Besides, if they came back, responsibility be damned, the Camaro was coming out of storage. He wasn't the Alpha anymore.

“What… but… dude!” Stiles sputtered, turning the keys over in his hand.

“You’ve got keys for the loft, train station, and Hale house, not that you really need to keys to get in,” Derek continued, steamrolling the conversation easily. “But if you need them, they’re yours. Of course, if the county reclaims any of it, that’s your problem now. Loft is paid up through the end of the year.”

“Derek, seriously,” Stiles managed finally, looking over the keys.

“We’ll be late,” Derek gestured to the car. He watched as Scott and Stiles had a brief silent conversation of significant looks, then Stiles climbed into the driver’s seat of the SUV. Derek waited till Scott had turned in the opposite direction from them, headed home, while Stiles headed toward the small airport on the outskirts of Beacon Hills.

“I don’t know if I’m coming back or not,” Derek answered the unasked question. Cora sniffed and looked out the window, making a great show of ‘not paying attention’.

“I know,” Stiles replied, shrugging. “Thanks for trusting me with your stuff, man.”
“Just don’t use it to throw parties,” Derek replied dryly, and Stiles chuckled, nodding.

“Come on, Halloween at the Hale House? Crawl through creepy tunnels to get to the keg?” Stiles joked weakly.

They fell quiet until they pulled into the lot at the airport, Stiles pulling into a spot and shutting off the car. “I’ll help you with the bags,” he muttered, scrambling out of the driver’s seat with his usual grace.

Cora beat him to the suitcases, nudging him with enough force to knock him into Derek as he came around to the back of the vehicle. Stiles stopped short, and Derek rolled his eyes, before tugging Stiles into a hug. “You’ll always have a place here,” Stiles said softly, and Derek let himself lower his head slightly, scenting Stiles’ neck catching the usual blend of soft scents, tinged with a gentle sadness and something darker, unfamiliar and new, hovering just at the heart of his scent.

“Keep Scott and Isaac out of trouble,” Derek said gruffly as he let go of Stiles, biting back any other sentiments that wanted to escape and accepting his bag from Cora.

“See you later,” Stiles waved them off, looking oddly resolved.

Cora followed Derek into the terminal, and he looked back briefly. Stiles had climbed into the car and was pulling out, waving as he drove away. Derek didn’t wave back, just turned to Cora, who sighed in exasperation. “Come on, Derek.”

-Stiles spent an hour driving aimlessly around Beacon Hills, rambling at the ridiculous number of features Derek had packed into the SUV and generally blaming the vehicle for being too fancy, pretending he wasn’t ranting at it for being there in place of its owner.

“You’re gonna have a lot of work to do to live up to my old girl,” he warned her, finally turning up a street with a destination and purpose in mind. Good God, there were seat warmers. In California. Who went in for seat warmers in California? “And frankly you’re as prissy as Jackson on a good day, so I’m not sure you’re up for it. I mean, if I take you through a warehouse wall, are you gonna cry and get your suspension in a knot?”
He pulled into the parking lot of the veterinary clinic, shutting off the SUV and hitting the automatic locks as he slid out. “Okay, that part is cool,” he admitted, forcing himself to grin. He could do a modern car. Remote start might even be handy for a quick getaway.

He stepped inside the front door, waiting on the outside of the Mountain Ash line purposely. Deaton came around the corner and lifted an eyebrow at Stiles as he pushed the gate open. “Mr. Stilinski,” he greeted the teenager. “I thought I heard Derek’s car.”

“Mine now,” Stiles replied, dangling the keys out as he passed the druid. “You didn’t realize the Hales had left town?”

“I knew it was a possibility,” Deaton replied, gesturing Stiles toward his office. “I have a feeling this is a discussion for a closed door,” he explained when Stiles shot him a curious look. “And perhaps coffee?”

“No, thanks, I’m a little over buzzed as is,” Stiles replied. “Your office is warded against werewolf eavesdropping, isn’t it?” he guessed, and Deaton nodded, closing the door as Stiles dropped into a visitor’s chair. “Scott mentioned once that he couldn’t hear you in here.”

“I value my secrets, as I’m sure you are aware,” Deaton replied, not settling at his desk but instead reaching for a book on the high shelves behind his desk. “Now, what did you want to discuss, Mr. Stilinski?”

“You told me I had a spark,” Stiles said, grabbing a pen off the vet’s desk, to give his twitching fingers something to play with. “And you gave me the Mountain Ash to cast a circle at the rave.”

“Yes,” Deaton agreed, setting an old, leather bound volume on his desk and sitting down, looking across steepled fingers at Stiles.

“And it worked,” Stiles added, and Deaton nodded again, still watching him carefully. “Could you… I mean, could I be… like you, and Ms. Morell? Could you teach me?”

“You want to be an emissary.” Deaton didn’t make it sound like a question.
“I want to do more,” Stiles said, struggling with the words to describe the pressure sitting in him. “The darkness you told us about… I can feel it, almost like I can see it, but…”

“Go on,” Deaton urged him, a flicker of interest betraying his cool exterior.

“It’s like it’s thrown something else into relief,” Stiles admitted. “Something bright and hot and chaotic and mine and I want to… put it in order. That sounds stupid, but that’s the best I can describe it,” he finished, swallowing when Deaton’s lips curved up in a slight smile.

“I think you described it very well,” he said, sitting back in his chair. “The book,” he indicated to it, and Stiles reached out pulling it closer and examining the symbols on the cover. Long vertical lines ran down it, with shorter bisecting and branching lines breaking them at regular intervals. The top and bottom of each vertical line was split wide like a snake’s tongue, not quite touching the neighboring branch. “The language is Celtic Ogham. Roughly translated, it’s the Apprentice’s Journal.”

The leather felt cool in Stiles’ hand, and more importantly, felt right. “Okay,” he sighed, running a finger over the slightly raised edges of the Ogham.

“If you want it, it’s yours,” Deaton said, but he reached out and took the book back from Stiles. “But only if you still want it after I tell you this.”

“Comes with a price?” Stiles guessed darkly, and Deaton didn’t bother hiding the slight smile.

“Many,” he agreed. “But you already knew that. As an emissary, I do have a slight gift for precognition. If you become an emissary, I suspect you may also develop a gift, though I cannot tell what, which should give you an idea of how limited my gift is. What I see is never wrong, but I rarely know that much in advance. A place to be or a nudge in the direction of an answer, nothing more. You should know, one of the things I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, is that you have the potential in you to become one of the most powerful magic workers on the planet, Stiles. But you will never be Scott’s emissary.”

“But…” Stiles’ mind was whirling, unable to land on a solid thought. “If I have all that potential, why can’t I?”

“I’ll give you a week to think about it, come to your own conclusion,” Deaton told him, standing and replacing the Apprentice’s Journal on the shelf and taking down a smaller, red leather journal.
“Come see me in a week, let me know if you still want me to train you, knowing you will never be Scott’s emissary. I suspect when you put your mind to it, you’ll be able to let me know why you won’t be.”

He held out the red leather book, and Stiles took it, trying hard not to sulk in front of the druid. “A bestiary,” Deaton explained. “Talia Hale’s bestiary, in fact, though she tends to treat it more like a journal than a formal learning tool. No reason you can’t study while you make up your mind.”

“Thanks,” Stiles replied dryly, even though he felt a strange tightness at holding Derek’s mother’s book in his hand. “Your foresight didn’t do her much good,” he observed a little bitterly as he stood and dug his keys out of his pocket.

“I’d have given anything if it worked that way,” Deaton said quietly, nodding to Stiles. “One week, Stiles. You’re a bright young man. You don’t need my skills to figure it out.”

“Thanks, Doc,” he tossed over his shoulder, stepping into the parking lot, staring at the new car and Derek’s mom’s journal. “Jesus, Derek, I really hope you come back,” he muttered, a little rocked by how deeply carved into his life the Hale family was becoming, just when the last remaining members had left his life.

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Scott came around the corner toward the English Department, paused and back peddled the way he came and collapsed against the lockers, not really caring who he was probably blocking. Didn’t help much, the quick glimpse of Isaac and Allison kissing was burned into his brain. “Come on,” he urged himself, fighting both the swell of anger from his wolf and the darkness feeding it. “You’re in control.”

His wolf nudged at the memory of the kissing couple, then offered up a quick flash of sharp white teeth closing over the pale pink skin of Allison’s shoulder, bright red blood welling up, showing him just how easy it would be to make Allison theirs.

“Hey, buddy,” Stiles punched him in the shoulder hard, breaking the thought from Scott’s mind, the darkness snapping back down, and he could suddenly take a clear, deep breath again. “Scott?”

“Manic Monday,” he gasped, which was code for having a bad day because of the darkness inside. If Stiles was having a good enough day to anchor Scott back, he’d tell him it was actually Tuesday,
which was a little flawed on Mondays, Scott supposed, but if Stiles was struggling too—

“Wish it was Sunday,” Stiles agreed, adjusting his backpack straps. Scott couldn’t breathe a moment later, the wolf offering an image of how easily they could bite into Stiles’ wrist, bare and pale and right there, fiddling at his stupid backpack strap.


Scott scowled, but followed Stiles around the corner, breathing a little easier when he saw Allison and Isaac had already left the hallway. Stiles went straight for his desk, tucking his nose into a red leather journal that had become a familiar sight the past few days. Scott wasn’t sure what it was, as Stiles had snatched it quickly out of his reach the one time he’d tried to get a closer look.

The woman at the blackboard tilted her eyes sideways at him when he entered the room, and Scott sniffed reflexively. Objectively, she was pretty, but probably just a little younger than his mother, with a cap of sleek brown hair that hugged short and close to her scalp. Her eyes were a murky blue green that quickly darted down from Scott’s gaze in a manner that troubled him nearly as much as the smell that clung to her. It reminded him of spring break, cold ocean water and crisp seaweed. She nodded subtly to him, and Scott sighed. Not human then.

She wouldn’t be the first supernatural creature to have moved to Beacon Hills, three so far in the little over a week since they had performed the sacrifice for the Nemeton, all of whom had presented themselves to Scott, to assure Alpha McCall they were absolutely harmless, but drawn in by the power unfurling in Beacon Hills. He sighed, settling in as the bell rang.

“Good morning,” she greeted the room, nodding to the chalkboard. “My name is Siobhan Kelly, and contrary to what I’m sure you’ve come to expect lately, I am not another substitute teacher. I’ll be spending the rest of the year with you.”

“Unless something eats you,” Stiles muttered, barely looking up from the journal in front of him. Scott listened with one ear as she handed out a revised version of Ms. Blake’s syllabus, adjusted for weeks of subs and hit or miss teaching.

“Mr. Stilinski,” Ms. Kelly said as she set the syllabus down on his desk. “However fascinating your book may be, might I suggest turning your attention forward?”
“Sure, no problem,” Stiles replied, tucking the journal away and making a face at Scott when the teacher turned her back. For one moment, Scott grinned, feeling his darkness lighten for a moment. Isaac’s quiet snort at Stiles’ antics brought his attention back over to his right side, where Allison sat behind Isaac, who was in the desk next to him. He slumped down, face forward and tried not to envy Stiles who was probably holding onto straight A’s even though he was reading that damn journal in every class the teachers didn’t pay enough attention to him in. The bell ringing was ridiculous relief.

“Mr. McCall, a moment,” Ms. Kelly called out, and Scott slumped further down, nodding to Isaac when he hesitated.

“It’s fine,” he said softly, though Stiles stayed firmly planted next to him, which made the wolf inside him grin at his friend’s silent support. “Ms. Kelly,” he greeted the woman when the door closed behind Isaac. “Welcome to Beacon Hills.”

“Alpha McCall, Apprentice Stilinski,” she replied, and Stiles looked up sharply, rolling his eyes slightly when she looked demurely away. “I hope my being here won’t be a problem.”

“No, we’ve had some others come through thanks to the Nemeton,” he replied, folding his arms. “Most didn’t declare an intent to stay.”

“It’s a good fit for me,” she admitted, shrugging. “Close enough to the ocean when I feel the call to go home that I’m just a short drive away, but still teaching, which is something I haven’t been able to do for ages.”

“Call of the sea,” Stiles repeated, something skeptical wrinkling his forehead. “You’re not a werewolf then, so what flavor of creature of the night are you?”

Kelly looked to Scott as if asking permission, and between that and his darkness flaring up and his wolf shoving the image of Stiles’ blood and skin and teeth into his mind, he struggled for a breath for a moment.

“Selkie,” Ms. Kelly answered when Scott didn’t speak. “I have my pelt, and I understand some Alphas prefer to hold onto it when I’m in their territory.”

She unsnapped her briefcase and tilted it open over a desk, a soft spill of brown fur slowly sliding free. Stiles was looking over the pelt, waiting for her permissive nod before he ran his hand over the
soft, smooth fur in her briefcase, frowning as he did. Scott watched, but didn’t touch, feeling odd about the offer. “Uh, Scott,” Stiles started to say, and the darkness spurred his wolf into rearing up again, bite, bones, crunch, blood…

“It’s fine,” he blurted out, desperate to be done with the conversation, every interruption from Stiles’ feeling somehow like a challenge. “You can hold onto it.”

“Scott, I don’t think—” Stiles tried again, and the thread holding back Scott’s temper slipped.

“Stiles, I have this, it’s fine,” he snapped. “You should get to Econ, make sure one of us is on time.”

“But—”

“Just go!” he barked at Stiles, his mind awash in images of just how fragile Stile’s throat must be.


“Sorry about that,” Scott breathed out, his control slipping back into place as the door closed behind Stiles. “I’m sorry, I don’t know much about Selkies.”

“Not much to know,” she admitted, shrugging. “Kind of like werewolves, I guess, we can become seals. But if we lose our pelts, we can’t transform anymore. And the sea is a bit like the full moon. Sometimes the tide is so strong I can’t fight the call to go swim, to go home.”

“And there are Alphas who ask you to surrender your pelt?” Scott demanded, looking over at the delicate fur in the case once more. “It’s beautiful, but I can’t take away your ability to go home.”

“Thank you,” she said softly, closing the case gently. “I don’t have the kind of powers you do, but if I can ever be of help, just ask.”

“Sure,” he replied, adjusting his bag as the warning bell rang. “See you tomorrow, Ms. Kelly,” he nodded to her and she smiled back, looking much more at ease now as she met his gaze.
He headed out to the hall, surprised when Isaac was waiting for him, leaning up against the locker. “All good?” Isaac asked, tilting his head curiously.

“Selkie?” he said to the other teen, who grinned uncertainly.

“Like sailors steal the sealskin and force them to get married?” Isaac asked, raising an eyebrow. “Want me to dig into it, make sure they’re as harmless as all that?”

“I can’t imagine being much more helpless,” Scott admitted, the easy way Isaac deferred to him and fell into step right at his shoulder feeling right in a way Isaac never felt when Scott would see him with Allison. “Maybe if there are were-kittens?”

“There’s an internet meme waiting to happen,” Isaac nudged his shoulder playfully, and the wolf eased up into the front of Scott’s mind, though not dragging the darkness for once. He inhaled sharply at the image of nuzzling Isaac’s neck the wolf presented him with, showing him that Isaac would let Scott lick, taste, would submit deliciously if they just pushed a little…

Scott damn near tripped over his own feet for the first time since he became a werewolf.

-Stiles waited in the SUV down the alley until the green motorbike was well out of earshot, then pulled up behind the veterinary clinic. Deaton was in the process of locking the door, computer bag slung over his shoulder as Stiles stepped out of his car. “Mr. Stilinski,” he greeted Stiles, and Stiles caught the vet examining him in the door’s reflection. “You still have four more days to decide, I wasn’t expecting you back till Saturday evening. But I suspect as usual, you’re ahead of the curve.”

“It’s because I’m the annoying kid brother,” Stiles said, scuffing the toe of his Adidas on the pavement. “Scott thinks of me as… I mean, I used to have the Plan B at least. But… since Deucalion at least… I’m not that, am I?”

“You’re not meant to be someone’s plan B, Stiles,” Deaton replied, finally turning around and fixing his gaze on the younger man. “You have every potential to be Plan A, to be an Alpha’s right hand, to be the first and last voice he or she listens to, like I was for Talia. But Plan B? You’ll wither and die there, Stiles, and you can be so much more. You need an Alpha who needs what you bring to the table, but unfortunately, that isn’t Scott.”
“So…” Stiles hedged, fighting a flush at the praise. “You are, though, he looks up to you. So you should maybe talk to him about how our English teacher offered him a Selkie pelt today. Said it was hers.”

“But?” Deaton prompted, and Stiles tugged the red leather journal out of his back pocket.

“It didn’t have claws, shape, it was just folded flat,” Stiles said, tapping the journal with his fingertips. “Skinned. And, she called me Apprentice Stilinski. Inside knowledge.”

“Or perhaps just an accurate guess. But you are right about the skin. You tried to tell Scott there was something wrong with it, didn’t you?” Deaton guessed, unzipping his computer bag and slipping a hand inside.

“Yeah, but he didn’t—”

“Welcome to your first lesson as my apprentice,” Deaton pressed the Apprentice’s Journal into Stiles’ hands. “If an Alpha does not listen to the first warning you offer, we do not offer a second warning. They have to grow and learn, that’s part of balance. And mistakes are important learning tools.”

“Yeah, but…” Stiles started to protest, but then processed the book in his hands. “You knew I was coming.”

“I had a hunch,” Deaton replied, unlocking the clinic door again. “Now, tell me anything else you noticed about your Selkie slayer, and we’ll start researching and hopefully be ready with a solution when Scott discovers his mistake and comes to us for help.”

“I’m not sure I like that plan,” Stiles grumbled, the secrecy not settling well with him.

“That, Stiles, is the second reason you would be ill suited to be Scott’s emissary. You can’t always save your pack from themselves. We sometimes have to be willing to step aside.”
“Hello?”

Siobhan Kelly stepped through the open apartment door, rapping her knuckles on the frame as she entered. “Are we playing a game?” she called out, grinning as she slid into the darkened kitchen. “I do enjoy your games.”

“I know,” Peter replied, locking his arms around her waist as he pulled her into the shadows with him. “It’s why I invited you.” He slid his hands down her abdomen, fingers trailing at the jean line.

“You didn’t invite me to play those games, not with you, anyway,” she retorted, pulling away and flashing a quicksilver smile. “I’m a little old for you right now anyway.”

“Don’t have to be,” he reminded her, reaching out and catching the belt loops on her jeans to reel her back in.

“Hmm, you have a point,” she replied. “As long as you have what I need.”

Peter stepped back, flipping a low kitchen light on. “I’m sure you’ll want to check it for yourself,” he said, picking up an ornate perfume bottle from next to the kitchen sink. “Druid’s blood, juniper, seaweed ash and vinegar, buried under a nice top note of hyacinth. You’ll smell nice and human when you wear it.”

“Druid’s blood?” she remarked, holding the crystal vial up to the light. “You do treat a girl well, Hale.”

“Only the finest for you,” he flashed his eyes, no longer a brilliant blue but a muddled deep purple, at her. “I trust you snagged the same for me.”

“Wasn’t sure which one you wanted, there were two who seemed like your type,” Siobhan admitted impishly, spinning in place and slowly transforming. Short brown hair spun into long red locks, tan skin grew fair. “The only thing that goes farther than this one’s legs is this mind and power,” she observed in Lydia’s voice, sliding her hands up her thighs experimentally. “But I do love the legs.”
She sauntered closer, pouting slightly. “But you’ve already sunk your fangs into this one, cast yourself a nice little banshee spell with her blood. I’d love to know how you knew what she was before you bit her. I’d have enjoyed watching you torment her from the grave too, making her scream over and over, just to call power back into your corpse.”

She stepped back, spinning slower this time, the hair receding into short ashy locks and the fair skin growing freckled as she grew taller. “But you have a thing for virgins too, don’t you?” she asked in Stiles’ voice.

“This one’s trouble,” she told him, tugging off the t-shirt. “Prettier under the wrapping than you’d expect, in so many ways…” she mused. “Not the type you suspect of having that sort of mind or power. Or muscles, these are nice aren’t they?” she asked, stroking over surprisingly defined biceps, grinning as Peter pounced, dragging her down and tearing into her shoulder with sharp fangs.

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Stiles frowned in the general direction of the door, but the knocking didn’t let up. In fact, it sounded more frantic as it continued. Scott was working at the veterinary clinic, his dad was midway through a double, and he was not expecting anyone, especially as it was headed into pretty late for a Wednesday night and he’d been thinking of heading for bed.

Deciding he couldn’t really ignore it when most of the lights were on and he had music blaring loud enough to be heard outside, he dragged himself off the couch, dropping the Hale Bestiary on top of the homework he’d already finished and flicking the remote at the stereo to pause the music, before he tugged the door open.

Ethan’s hand was still extended, as though he intended to keep right on knocking on the empty air, which made Stiles’ frown deepen. Danny was behind Ethan on the porch, arms folded over his chest, looking more upset than Stiles had ever seen him, and that included when the loser he’d been dating the year before had shown his true colors. He looked at Ethan’s crestfallen face and sighed. “Danny, want to come in?” he offered, standing aside to let his classmate in.

He put out a hand, stopping Ethan at the threshold, rolling his eyes when the werewolf flashed bright blue eyes and a hint of fang at him. “Chill out, beta boy,” he said, apparently not above continuing to enjoy that whatever Jennifer had done to the twins had reduced them to betas. He may have made some jokes about Alpha Reduction Flu going around the week before and ended up with Aiden in his face, but as far as Stiles was concerned, Derek had been far scarier than the twins when he was a beta. Or maybe he’d just gotten past it.
“Doesn’t look like he’s in the mood to talk to you, and given the way you’re flashing the wolf eyes around, I’m guessing you told him all about the world beyond the rabbit hole, and it didn’t go so well.”

“Just…” Ethan huffed out a growl, ruffling a hand through his hair. “You’re the normal one, help fix it.”

“I’m the normal one?” Stiles almost laughed, barely managing to school his face when Ethan reared up like he was giving serious thought to punching Stiles, which for some reason, pissed him off royally. “Hey, try it, wolf boy,” he snapped, pulling a pouch of mountain ash from his pocket. “I’ll have you in a ring of ash so fast you’ll barely have time to blink, reflexes or no.” He wasn’t sure he could actually do it that fast, but he must have believed it enough that Ethan’s werewolf senses didn’t pick up any hesitancy or lie.

Ethan backed down, taking deep breaths as he did. “I’ll talk to Danny,” Stiles continued, once he was sure the werewolf was in control of himself. “I’ll make sure he understands. But I’m not in it to help you keep him, he’s had enough shitty boyfriends for a lifetime and if he decides he doesn’t want any part of this, wants to get the hell away from you, then you better believe I plan on helping him make sure that happens. And next time, maybe check in with the rest of the pack before you drag someone into this mess?”

Ethan paused, and the fact that he was processing that, that it was calming him more, actually seemed like a good sign to Stiles. “That’s fair,” Ethan agreed at last, nodding to Stiles. “Tell him I’ll see him at school tomorrow, if he wants to see me.”

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed, watching Ethan get on his bike and leave before closing the door and turning back to Danny, who still looked hunched in on himself uncomfortably. “Okay, swear to god, I’m not hitting on you, but you look like you need this,” he informed Danny, giving him fair warning before he wrapped his arms around the other boy.

Danny was stiff and unresponsive for a long moment, then ever so slowly, he began melting, arms loosening and dropping to his side so Stiles could pull him into a proper hug, then his arms came up, fingers clenching hard in the loose flannel over Stiles’ shoulder blades, face buried into Stiles’ neck. Stiles waited, gently patting at Danny’s back, hoping fervently his friend didn’t start crying or anything because he wasn’t sure he could handle that. “So the whole ‘what to do when I find out my boyfriend is a werewolf’ thing didn’t really come up in Finstock’s health class, huh?” he tried joking, coaxing a weak, choked out laugh from Danny.

“To be fair, his ‘What to do when I think I like boys, not girls’ speech was a loser too,” Danny managed, and Stiles squeezed a little tighter before letting Danny pull away and then guiding him back to sit on the sofa, shoving his homework aside.
“I’m not sure he’s ever been more flustered than when my follow up was ‘does all this still apply if you like girls but maybe like boys too?’” Stiles reminded Danny who chuckled reluctantly.

“I don’t think you managed that level of coherence. I seem to remember the words, ‘shiny special third set of rules’ coming into play,” Danny said, shrugging before he gave Stiles a suspicious look. “Besides, everyone knew you were completely gone on Lydia, why would you be asking about guys?”

“Uh, because, relevant?” Stiles flailed his arms, knowing Danny was trying to keep them off topic for a little longer, get his bearings again. “Dude, I asked you if I was attractive to gay guys. I mean, really? It’s like I’m cursed. No one, not even you, believes I’m bisexual. And not to like, buy into the whole gay-dar stereotype or whatever, but can you seriously not tell? Is bisexuality not a setting on gay-dar? I mean, not even when I was totally checking you out?”

Danny blinked, suddenly looking apologetic. “Curse broken, I promise,” he said, and Stiles suddenly deflated, fighting a smile.

“Yeah?” he asked, a little shyly. “Okay, cool,” he said. “So, werewolves?”

“I didn’t believe him, I thought he was punking me,” Danny admitted, raking a hand through his hair in frustration. “He’s telling me all these things about how he and Aiden used to be trouble, but they weren’t going to kill people anymore, but oh by the way, they may have helped kill Vernon Boyd…”

Panic was creeping up in Danny’s voice, and Stiles set a hand on his arm, trying to ground him. “Breathe, come on,” he said. “You can’t have a panic attack, because I’m afraid of your boyfriend and the only method I’ve ever had really stop me from having one was Lydia kissing me.”

“Lydia kissed you,” Danny said skeptically, then started laughing helplessly. Stiles waited till he’d gotten it out, wiping his eyes and chuckling still. “Ethan has claws, freaking glowing eyes, and he’s trying to tell me he promises he’s a good wolf, not the big bad wolf now.” Danny managed to get it all out this time, his breathing still shallow, but in control.

“I’m pretty sure that yeah, he really is trying to be a good guy,” Stiles told Danny, settling in, now that Danny seemed to have gotten his panic and anxiety out finally. “Look, I don’t know the whole story, but I know that he and Aiden were in a really bad situation, abusive bad, and Deucalion, who was a really bad guy himself, got them out. The price he asked was that they kill their old pack, and
that they do whatever he said. I think a lot of what they did, even Boyd, was because they were afraid. Doesn’t make it right, doesn’t mean I’m anywhere close to forgiving them, but Scott’s a big believer in everyone deserving a second chance.”

“Because now Scott’s in charge?” Danny filled in, and Stiles nodded.

“Derek Hale used to be the Alpha, like the head werewolf in a pack, but Scott is now.”

“And Ethan and Aiden used to be Alphas, more powerful,” Danny was repeating back what Ethan had told him, Stiles figured, nodding to confirm it. “But they lost that power when Ms. Blake tried to kill them.”

“She was a druid, but gone really, really wrong,” Stiles explained, surprised when Danny blanched a little.

“Magic,” he said, hunching his shoulders uncomfortably. “Not really big on any of the supernatural,” he admitted. “I had nightmares after Jackson made me watch an episode of Lost Girl. That might have been the lesbians though.” Stiles wanted to grin at the weak joke, but saying Jackson’s name seemed to have dropped pieces into place for Danny. “Jackson?”

“Oh boy,” Stiles muttered, settling in for what he suspected would be a very long talk. “Let’s try this the way I did it with my dad. The third time, the first two went badly. I’ll start at the beginning, tell you everything. Here,” he handed Danny his chemistry notebook, flipping it to a blank page and tossed him a pen. “You write down a question when you have it, but don’t ask, don’t talk. Then when I’m all done, we go through them.”

“Sounds good,” Danny agreed settling into the couch, notebook braced on his knees.

“But I’m not giving you advice about Ethan,” Stiles added. “Give him a second chance, don’t, that’s completely your call. And no matter your call, this is officially your invitation to join the human contingent of the McCall pack.”

“Like I’d want to stay out of it,” Danny scoffed, and Stiles felt something unclench in his chest, a worry he hadn’t wanted to acknowledge. "If you weren’t saddled with the ADHD, I figure you’d have blown Lydia and I out of the running for Valedictorian ages ago. I want you for your research, Stilinski.”
“Allison?” Chris called down the hallway, keeping a wary eye on Isaac. “You have a guest.”

Allison came into the living room, smiling over at Isaac, beckoning him toward her room, and Chris shook his head, keeping Isaac in place. “I don’t think he should come in when I’m on my way out, do you, Allison? We agreed on Friday night for dates, not Thursdays, and you both have school tomorrow, unless Isaac is taking up delinquency again?”

“Dad!” she protested, but Chris didn’t budge.

“No, it’s fine, I’m actually here for school reasons,” Isaac replied, smiling at Allison and holding up a notebook. “I was just dropping off my English essay for you to proofread. And I actually have to get home.”

“Sure,” Allison agreed, catching the mischief in Isaac’s eyes as she came the rest of the way into the living room to accept the notebook. “I’ll look it over.” She took the essay and he leaned in, about to kiss her. Chris cleared his throat pointedly, and Isaac diverted his aim to her cheek.

“See you tomorrow,” he told her, smiling as Chris closed the door behind him.

“There are plenty of human boys out there,” he told Allison, who shrugged.

“Not ones I like,” she replied, turning and heading to her room. She waited until she heard her Dad’s car leave, watched around the edge of a curtain till she saw his SUV leave the underground parking and wind its way up the driveway, counted another 30 seconds in her head past him turning out of the apartment complex, then unlocked the front door.

“I almost went up on the elevator, then I remembered Deucalion is still camped out in the penthouse,” Isaac informed her as he strolled back in. “Did you know Ms. Kelly lives down on the fourth floor? She got on when I got off there.”

“Supernatural English teacher and living in this building?” Allison replied, arching an eyebrow. “Well, that’s got trouble written all over it.”
“I looked into it, looks like Selkies are just as harmless as Scott was thinking,” Isaac told her.

“Yeah, but you’re working from Peter’s bestiary, right?” she pressed, frowning. “Did Stiles look into it?”

“He may be the research guru and all, but I think I can handle a Selkie,” Isaac replied. “Besides, ever since he started training with Deaton, even Lydia can’t keep his attention off those books he’s reading.”

“So, you wanted help with that English essay?” Allison asked, and Isaac grinned.

“Pretty sure my grade is better in English than yours,” he reminded her. “I was thinking maybe… biology?”

“We’re not taking biology,” Allison reminded him, even as she let him reel her in closer, biting down on a giggle.

“Should really get a jump start on next year, right?” Isaac replied, slowly backing her toward the living room as they kissed, Allison laughing as she tripped back into the couch. Isaac let her drag him down with her, carefully landing so he was still supporting his own weight.

She lifted her head into the kiss, letting Isaac gently ease her back into the couch, enjoying the easy slide of his tongue into her mouth. He was timid, gentle, and Allison enjoyed it, though she could sometimes tell how much he held back with her, too aware of her human fragility.

She slid her hands up, managing to get her hands under his shirt, but he eased them back down, laughing softly, awkwardly, into the hollow of her throat. “Not on your couch, in your Dad’s living room,” he said, and she bit her lower lip, grinning.

“I have a bedroom,” she pointed out.

“Slow,” he reminded her, and she sighed.

“Because of Scott,” she observed, and Isaac, as usual, pulled back from her.
“It’s not that easy, Allison,” he reminded her. “He’s my alpha, and as much as I want to be with you… it’s awkward.”

“Right,” Allison bit back her sharp comment, and Isaac’s phone rang before she could come up with a new strategy. “Speak of the Devil?” she asked when Isaac frowned at his caller ID, looking a little alarmed.

“Uh, no, it’s your dad, actually,” he told her, answering the phone and directing it to speaker phone for Allison’s benefit. “Hello?”

“Isaac,” Chris greeted him in wry tone. “I thought I’d call to remind you that the bi-weekly parents’ meeting is being held by Melissa McCall tonight, and if you wanted to beat me here so I don’t suspect you lied to me and are currently making out with my daughter, you should probably leave now.”

“I… um. See you there,” Isaac finished lamely, grinning sheepishly at Allison who had buried her mouth in her fists to stop her laughter. “Oh my god,” he said, once he’d hung up, scrambling to his feet.

“You’d better go,” she said, voice full of laughter.

“Yeah,” he agreed, sighing as she kissed him once more at the door. “I run fast,” he promised her, leaning in for another kiss, and she let him linger over it for a long moment before shoving him backward into the hall.

“No that fast,” she laughed, then shut the door quickly, collapsing against it in amusement, listening to his footsteps and delaying how long until she had to turn and face the empty apartment.

The ding of the arriving elevator forced her to turn back into the too quiet apartment. She blinked sleepily, heading for the bathroom and tugging open the medicine cabinet. She let her hand hover indecisively over the sleep aids the doctor had prescribed for her nightmares, and her reflection wavered in the mirror, her mom looking back at her disapprovingly. “You meddled with the supernatural, Allison,” the reflection reminded her. “Now accept the price.”

She let her hand drop, shutting the cabinet. If she didn’t sleep, she had no-doze tucked away in her bag for school the next day.
The elevator moved awfully slow for such a modern building, and Isaac was pretty sure unless Chris hit every red light on his way across town, he was screwed. He sucked back in a curse word or two when the elevator stopped on the fourth floor.

Ms. Kelly stepped on, head moving in time with the tinny beat Isaac could hear through her headphones, a laundry basket in hand. Her tanktop revealed an impressive amount of cleavage her frumpy teacher shirts never did, Isaac couldn’t help noticing, though he didn’t catch the briny smell Scott had claimed he’d noticed when she’d first arrived. The elevator smelled more like the old familiar tones of his mother’s perfume than seawater.

She hit the button for the basement before noticing Isaac, offering him a half smile as she tugged out an earbud. “Hi Isaac,” she greeted him. “Sorry to wreck the illusion, teachers in a home environment,” she said awkwardly. “You live in the building?”

“Just visiting a friend,” he offered. She nodded, and he rocked on his heels, uncertain what to say. “The last English teacher was a psychopath dating my former Alpha,” he blurted out, cursing how much more awkward he’d just managed to be. “So, you know, illusion pretty much shattered,” he continued babbling. “With the killing and all.”

Fortunately she smiled, cutting him off. “Yeah, guess so,” she agreed. The ding of the elevator opening for the lobby saved him from further embarrassment. “Have a good night, Isaac.”

“Thanks,” he muttered, heading out of the building and shifting as soon as he reached the shadows, taking off at a run.

Siobhan watched him as the elevators closed, sliding her ear bud back in. When the elevator deposited her in the basement, she wove her way through the gym area toward the laundry room, humming along as she went. “Running with the shadows of the night,” she sang along as the track hit the chorus and she opened her washer. “So, baby, take my hand, it’ll be all right. Surrender all your dreams to me tonight. They’ll come true in the end.”

A hand entered her field of vision, proffering her a sock, and she yelped, tugging out her earbud. “I’m a fan of the original Pat Benatar version myself, but you have a lovely voice,” Deucalion informed her. “And you dropped this.”
“Thanks,” she said, taking the sock. “For the compliment, I mean, not the sock. Well, for the sock too, really. Um. Siobhan.”

“Siobhan?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’m Siobhan,” she clarified. “Sorry, I’m not usually this socially inept.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” he replied, a smile tugging slightly at the corners of his lips. “And you’re welcome. For the compliment and the sock.”

He turned, collecting his own basket, and she called out, “Wait! I don’t get your name?”

He looked back, nodding as he crossed back and offered her his hand. “You can call me Duke.”

“It’s the accent right?” she asked, offering a half smile. “Someone making fun of the Brit, nicknaming you Duke?”

“You’ve a hint of Ireland in your own voice, when you sing,” he informed her.

“Most people don’t notice,” she said, blushing a little as she tucked a stray wisp of hair behind her ear.

“Well, I suppose it could have been worse,” he replied, smiling back. “They could have nicknamed me Prince, and I’d have been in for hundreds of jokes about turning my name into a symbol.”

“Well, nice to meet you, Duke,” she replied, smiling shyly. “Um. I don’t suppose you know a decent place to get a cup of coffee around here? I’m kind of new to the area and the last few places I’ve tried have been awful.”

“I do know a place, though it’s awfully late for coffee,” Deucalion remarked, hovering in the doorway.
“Tomorrow afternoon perhaps?” she suggested, tucking the last of her clothes in the washer. “I usually need a pick me up after I get done at school, you know, before I spend the weekend grading.”

“I’ll meet you in the lobby,” Deucalion said, eyes lingering curiously on Siobhan, as though he couldn’t decide what to make of her. “Tomorrow then.”

-1-

“Isaac,” Melissa greeted the beta as he slid through the living room, hightailing it up to his room with a quick, panicked glance at Chris. “Honestly, Chris,” she scolded him as she shut the dining room door, and the Hunter flashed a broad grin.

“You can’t blame me for enjoying it,” he told her, shrugging. “Scott was never that properly terrified of me.”

“Beer, wine, anything for you, Alan?” John Stilinski asked as he came back into the dining room, handing the beer to Chris and the wine glass to Melissa.

“No, thank you,” Deaton replied, shrugging out of his leather jacket and setting it on the back of his chair before drawing a small wooden crucible from his pocket and two vials, one filled with black ash, the other with a pewter colored liquid, setting them out on the table the chairs were clustered around.

Shortly after their rescue from the Nemeton, the guardians had come to Deaton for answers, and Chris had proposed the four of them meet once a week to discuss what each of them knew, keeping themselves in the loop, in case their children had ideas about leaving them out.

“One moment,” Deaton murmured, finishing mixing the ash and liquid, and Melissa felt as though the air in the room got thin for one moment, then eased back in. “There, we can speak freely,” he told them, settling into his seat. Everyone was uncomfortably silent for a long moment.

“I suppose we should start with the darkness from the sacrifice,” Chris volunteered awkwardly. “Allison is still having nightmares, and I’ve noticed she’s skipping the pills to help her with it.”

“Isaac mentioned she seems tired, that she’s mainlining caffeine at school,” Melissa admitted to
Chris. “He’s worried. I’m not seeing much with Scott, but he seems to be pulling away from me, and from Stiles too. Do you know why?” she asked Deaton.

“Scott has mentioned he’s having some trouble with his alpha urges, to make a pack of his own. His pack was entirely inherited from Derek Hale and Deucalion. Put together with the breakup from Allison and seeing Isaac with her, which means one his best friends is hers, not his… well…”

“And Stiles pulling away?” the sheriff asked, nodding at Melissa. “It’s a two way street, Mel. I can barely get him out of the books he’s getting from you, Doc, and I don’t imagine Scott’s managing much better since I watched Lydia Martin fail to pull him out of his studies before I left tonight. She’s camped out in my living room, wearing a skirt I’m pretty sure can’t be dress code compliant, going through bestiaries with Stiles and Danny Māhealani, and Stiles is completely focused on catching Danny up on their research. I don’t think he’s even noticed!”

“Interesting,” Deaton remarked, and John scowled.

“Look, Alan, if you’d asked me a few weeks ago how I felt about the idea that Stiles was getting over Lydia, I’d have been thrilled. But he’s gone from 100 percent to zero.”

“And his darkness? Have you perceived anything about—”

“I just asked him,” John replied dryly. “We’re trying a new honesty thing. He said his darkness is focus. And then he makes a comment about maybe going off his Adderall. I’d be worried, but he’s not wrong. He’s so focused it’s almost unnatural.”

“It is unnatural,” Deaton agreed. “From what Stiles has told me, I think the darkness has suppressed his background noise, the things that would hinder him from reaching his potential. On a good day, he perceives it as a bad day, because he can see the things he’s neglecting, the things that used to consume equal attention all at once and once again is trying to pay attention to them all. On a bad day, he will probably forget to eat for studying, his devotion to the pack he someday serves as emissary to will be fairly total. As far as Ms. Martin is concerned, she is lovely, but she’s no Alpha. Unless he dates the Alpha of his pack, Sheriff, I wouldn’t expect him to date much at all. Singular focus.”

“A few weeks ago that might have been reassuring too,” the Sheriff joked weakly, and drew chuckles from the other two parents. “But what you just said… you don’t expect him to be Scott’s emissary, do you?”
“He told you,” Deaton stated, and John smirked.

“No, you just did,” he replied. “I just suspected from a few veiled comments.”

“I don’t understand, of course Stiles is going to be Scott’s emissary, that’s why he’s doing the witch training or whatever,” Melissa broke in, looking pale. “No one’s told Scott otherwise, Alan, and you’re talking about a fragile support system at the moment.”

“If Scott realizes Stiles isn’t going to be his pack emissary, he’s going to feel even more compelled to bite him,” Chris put in, deadly quiet. “And Stiles doesn’t want it.”

“He might,” John started, but Chris shook his head.

“If he’d wanted it, Derek would have gone to Stiles first when he began building a pack,” Chris replied. “Derek wasn’t an idiot for all his faults, and he knew Stiles was an asset. If Stiles had wanted it, Scott probably would have joined Derek’s pack as well. It’s a smart bet Derek offered or maybe Stiles just told Derek that he didn’t want it.”

“I think you’re underestimating just how much Scott dislikes Derek,” Melissa put in, shrugging. “Though he seems to have gained some sympathy of late.”

“I thought of trying to ask Derek to come back, provide some guidance, but his line has been disconnected,” Deaton admitted. “And I doubt he would have returned for me or Scott.”

“You’d have had Stiles ask,” John guessed shrewdly. “He’d have done it for Stiles, mutual life saving based friendship, that’s what Stiles calls it.”

“True enough,” Deaton agreed. “But Derek is no longer an option. For his own safety, the truth about Stiles’ training must be kept secret, agreed?”

Deaton waited until there were nods around the table, then drummed his fingers on the tabletop. “The presence of Scott’s father here contributes to the instability of Scott’s life. Can we remove him from Beacon Hills again?”
“Charlie thinks he needs to be here for Scott and I,” Melissa admitted. “And he’s got quite the vendetta against John.”

“Yeah, he’s really got a hard on over something,” the sheriff groaned, rubbing his face tiredly. “He passed on a case in Sacramento to stay here.”

“He… may have come to the mistaken conclusion we’re dating?” Melissa hedged, wincing at John’s scowl. It wasn’t that the thought had never occurred to her, but there were secrets and tangles they had in their past that would never unweave to allow anything more than friendship. “I know, I tried to tell him it was ridiculous, but you know how he gets.”

“So we redirect that impulse,” Chris put in, smiling slowly. “Publicly, and in a manner he can’t compete with. You need a wealthy, successful suitor, someone whose job he can’t touch. Someone out of his line of competition, who can make it clear he can treat you much better than he managed.”

“Yeah, I stumble over those kinds of men all the time, especially at my age,” Melissa replied sarcastically, blinking when all three men stared at her. “I missed something.”

“I believe Chris was offering to date you to help discourage your ex-husband,” Deaton put in.

“I can put on a good show,” he offered with a wolfish grin. “It would also help with certain pressures I’m facing in the Hunter community.”

“To restore a matriarch, rather than rely on a teenage girl,” Deaton realized, then smirked a little. “I imagine you have blind dates dropping from the woodwork, Chris.”

“Always glad to amuse you,” Chris sniped back, making John laugh. “Dinner, tomorrow night, Melissa?”

It was late when the sheriff returned to his house, finding Stiles camped out in a massive spread of research along with Danny and Lydia. “How was date night?” Stiles asked smartly when he entered, not looking up from the book on his lap.

“Who’s dating whom?” Lydia retorted before John had a chance to, and Danny looked appraisingly at John.
“Your dad seems like Deaton’s type, if Deaton is into DILF’s,” he informed Stiles, who shuddered playfully.

“Dear god, never repeat that again, Danny. And that’d mean Scott’s mom and Allison’s dad were dating. Wasn’t living through them bad enough?” Stiles griped. “I mean, the universe can’t be that cruel.”

“Yeah,” John hung his coat up. “About that.”
Two Weeks Since... Part A

Chapter Notes

Chapter contains recreational drug use, boys kissing, a really good fantasy life for Stiles, and minor character death. So... viewer discretion advised? You can use the jump to the bottom link for specific and spoiler-ific descriptions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Stiles arrived at the coffee shop Deaton had directed him to Friday after school, surprised to find the vet already seated at a small table with two steaming coffee mugs. “Hey, Doc,” he greeted the older man, sliding into his seat and sipping the coffee. Unsurprisingly, Deaton had known exactly how Stiles took his coffee. “Shouldn’t you be dealing with flea baths and bunny vaccines?”

“Let’s just say I felt this afternoon would be a good time for us to take a break, have coffee here,” Deaton replied, sipping at his coffee. “How’s your reading going?”

“It’d be faster if you’d provide a translation,” Stiles replied, not wanting to admit he’d spent the better part of the previous night curled up reading Talia Hale’s bestiary. Most of it read like anecdotes, such as an amusing tale about Derek convincing Laura there were kelpies in the lake. Talia had kept her mouth shut as it was so rare for Derek to pull one over on his older sister, up until Laura started refusing to swim in the lake during the summer. Stiles had a hard time reconciling the mischievous, quiet Derek she was describing with the man he knew, but then he remembered that nearly everyone in Talia’s narratives had burned alive, and Derek blamed himself.

“You’ll manage,” Deaton replied mildly. “And Talia’s bestiary?”

Stiles flushed, shrugging. “It’s interesting,” he retorted, and Deaton smiled enigmatically. “Great,” he muttered, sipping his coffee, shifting his weight back and forth as he glanced around the café. “So what are we doing here, Deaton?”

“Not a good day for your focus, is it?” Deaton observed, and Stiles felt himself scowl.

“I’m a little scattered,” Stiles grumbled. “That’s all.”
“Perhaps a night off?” Deaton replied mildly. “After we’re done here, you should take advantage of your lack of focus and go out with your friends. I’ll suggest it to Scott as well. You should all take a night off.”

“Okay,” Stiles replied, confused. “If you say so. So… your spidey senses were all tingly and we’re camped out here…”

“And I believe I’ve just discovered why,” Deaton replied, looking over Stiles’ head. Stiles carefully looked to the window, perusing the reflection like Deaton had taught him to do instead of turning. Deucalion, he noticed, and buying a cup of coffee for a woman in a purple and white checked dress. He frowned, unable to see the woman’s face, but the dress was tugging at his memory. Where had he seen it?

“Deucalion on a date,” Stiles observed quietly, snorting softly. “That’s worth getting your spidey senses in a tangle over, Doc?”

“Look again,” Deaton murmured, so as the couple came down to the pick up end of the counter, Stiles glanced over, sipping his coffee as he did. A moment later, he was coughing violently as he choked on the drink.

“That’s Ms. Kelly, my English teacher,” Stiles said, under his fit of coughing.

“Indeed?” Deaton asked, barely sounding surprised. Deucalion approached their table at Deaton’s wave, ignoring Stiles’ incredulous look. Knowing his hearing, he’d overheard everything Stiles’ had said anyway. “Duke, nice to see you,” he greeted the Alpha.

“Alan,” Deucalion greeted him, looking curiously over at Stiles. “And Mr. Stilinski, correct? I thought Mr. McCall was your only protégé, Alan. It seems I underestimated you, Stiles.”

“Everyone does,” Stiles replied flatly, trying for a casual shrug.

“I didn’t know you were interested in veterinary science, Stiles,” Ms. Kelly said, offering him a toothy smile. “I learn something new about my students every day.”
“One of the joys of being a teacher, I imagine,” Deaton stood, offering her his chair. “We were just leaving, please, take our table.”

“Thank you, Alan,” Deucalion demurred as Stiles slid out of his chair and past Ms. Kelly. He frowned, catching only a slight scent of flowers, unlike the usual cloud of sea air he was used to. He couldn’t help looking back as they exited the shop, and thinking somewhat objectively, that for a psychopathic mass murdering alpha werewolf, Deucalion looked an awful lot like a guy who was actually into a girl.

“That’s trouble,” he said once they reached the end of the block and were out of werewolf hearing. “Is he… I mean, as much as crazy psychos can be I guess… but like, actually into her? Like really on a date, not plotting his next genocidal scheme or whatever?”

“It certainly does appear that way,” Deaton confirmed grimly. “Scott will likely see this as a good sign toward his reform,” he observed, and Stiles huffed impatiently.

“Seriously, you can’t still not be telling him that she’s not who she pretends to be,” he said. Deaton simply gazed back him impassively. “Okay, what about your sister, or Deucalion? Shouldn’t we warn them? She’s clearly deceiving Deucalion too.”

“Maybe,” Deaton replied, looking curiously at Stiles. “But what proof of that do you have?”

“Her perfume,” he explained. “I don’t know what it was, but she didn’t smell at all like the ocean at all. I’m pretty sure she’s playing at being human with him.”

“Interesting,” Deaton agreed. “Very well, I’ll let Marin know that she may want to let her Alpha know his date is not all she appears, though I would seriously think you’re underestimating Deucalion. And after your night off… you should continue reading the bestiary. Let me know if you figure out what she is.”

“Evil,” Stiles replied, flailing his hands widely. “Obviously. Also, aren’t his senses out of whack? Because he’s adjusting back to having his sight back?”

“It’d be helpful to know what kind of supernatural force we’re dealing with, but you may also be right about Deucalion being weaker than usual, but it’s a window of disorientation that I imagine would be very small,” Deaton pointed out unnecessarily, as Stiles was already aware he needed to figure it out. “And here’s something to consider. If she had lied to Scott when she said she was a
Selkie, wouldn’t he have heard it?”

“How,” Stiles mused, falling into thought, quiet as they walked the rest of the way back to the clinic. Deaton shook his shoulder when they arrived, giving him an odd look when Stiles abruptly became aware of his surroundings.

“It can wait till tomorrow,” he said sympathetically, pointing Stiles to his SUV. “Night off, remember?”

“Yeah,” Stiles shook off the fog, grinning at Deaton. “I’ll get on that.”

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Coming up with a pack quorum regarding a night out was like pulling teeth, Scott decided, like using his claws to tear them out a strand of gum tissue at a time, wanting to scowl at that lovely image in his mind’s eye. Manic Monday had all three of them firmly in its grasp, and Scott was fighting his urge to emulate Derek, declare himself the Alpha and do away with the democratic process.

Isaac and Allison were firmly set on the movies, Aiden and Lydia for bowling, and Ethan and Danny for open club night at the Jungle, a mixed gender event with a DJ they both liked spinning, though Scott suspected it probably skewed toward the gay male crowd anyway. Stiles came back in from the kitchen with a soda, and in a grasp at sanity announced, “Stiles, you pick.” He was leaning toward biting them all and seeing what happened. Deaton had to be out of his mind thinking this was a good idea.

“How?” Stiles swallowed, looking around at the group. Lydia folded her arms with a smug smile, while Danny rolled his eyes in defeat and Allison sighed. “Oh, I’m the deciding vote? Okay, then, let’s go to the Jungle.”

“What?” Lydia asked, blinking. Scott felt like echoing her, having expected Stiles to pick either of the other two. Danny fist pumped, then offered Stiles a high five.

“Thank, bro,” Ethan agreed, also high fiving Stiles. “Don’t underestimate the bi-votes, Lyds,” he crowed, and she frowned.

“Since when is Stiles bi?” Allison asked Scott, who shrugged, laughing.
“He’s not,” Scott said at the same time as Stiles said, “Um, always, obviously.”

“Wait, what?” Isaac asked, blinking in confusion between the two.

“You weren’t kidding,” Danny remarked, disappointment turning down the corners of his mouth. “No one believes you when you come out.” It had taken Danny most of the week since he and Stiles had talked about everything to come around to Ethan again, but despite how rocky it had been, they seemed fairly solid tonight to Scott.

“Dude, you have no idea,” Stiles sputtered, waving at Scott with flailing arms. “His mom laughed when I tried to tell her, and my dad totally told me I didn’t dress like it!”

“What?” Ethan said flatly, and Stiles nodded.

“To be fair, I was totally trying to cover up Jackson being the kanima and paralyzing half the club, including Danny, but still,” Stiles concluded, nodding at Scott, who knew he was staring at Stiles in disbelief.

“I thought that was a joke,” he managed, head reeling.

“Ha,” Lydia remarked, looking defensive when everyone turned to look at her. “Oh come on, I can’t be the only one who knows he always buries the lead in sarcasm. Not to mention, he totally checked Danny out that one time when he was on stage in his Speedo freshman year.”

“We’re not supposed to talk about that, ever!” Danny objected at the same time as Stiles said, “That’s not… yeah, that’s kinda true.” Stiles backed down from the objection when she glared at him. “So, yeah. Bisexual,” he concluded, flinging his arms out as if to say, ‘ta-da!’

Danny scoffed at the blank looks on Allison, Isaac, Scott, and Aiden’s faces. “It really is like you’re cursed,” he informed Stiles, who nodded his agreement.

“I told you,” he was nodding when Danny grabbed his shoulder and turned him into a sudden kiss.
Scott blinked as Stiles flailed for a moment, then relaxed, kissing Danny back. “Wow,” Stiles sighed as Danny pulled away, smiling pointedly at Scott.

“No straight guy stays that cool when I offer to pop their cherry,” Danny observed, cheerfully faux sweet, although there was something flinty and hard in his eyes as he reminded Scott.

Stiles seemed to remember where he was a moment later, flailing back from Danny quickly. “Whoa, please don’t kill me, dude,” he told Ethan, who just shook his head good naturedly.

“Nah, I’m just waiting to see if I need to kiss you as well,” Ethan said, looking around the group. “Everyone convinced, or am I joining the floor show?”

“Dudes, please be convinced,” Stiles sputtered, silently begging Scott with a pleading look. “He’s so not my type.”

“I know your type,” Lydia remarked, grinning as she nudged Aiden with her elbow, who looked decidedly uninterested.


To Scott’s amazement, Stiles suddenly went bright red. “Who’s Miguel?” he asked.

“No one!” Stiles shouted, waving his hands in a magic vanishing gesture. “Are we going now?”

“I think it’s very cool, Stiles,” Allison said, leaning over and kissing him on the cheek as she headed toward the door. “Isaac and I are riding over with you.”

“What she said,” Isaac replied, and then impishly leaned down and kissed Stiles’ cheek as well. “And you know… me too, but that’s been recent, since the bite. Derek said most wolves aren’t really choosy, and it usually filters over to the human side if the potential is there. So guess it was for me.”

Scott choked back a startled sound, turning it into a cough as his wolf rose up, suddenly all too interested in the proceedings. He ruthlessly suppressed it, forcing his control to stomp down it and
the way it wanted to chase after Isaac. Lydia and Aiden followed them out, Aiden still looking like he couldn’t really care less about any of it.

“Dude, whatever,” he said when Stiles looked at him, mouth open in shock. “You’re my brother, you know I’ve got your back no matter what.”

“There you go,” Danny slapped Stiles’ shoulder. “Consider that my thank you for helping fill me on all the woo-woo stuff around here. You’re on your own with your Dad.”

“Thanks!” Stiles called after Danny, rolling his eyes at the mock salute the other teen shot back.

“Come on,” Stiles nudged at Scott to get him moving. “That’s about all the feel good teen drama crap I can take and not start gloating about Danny kissing me.”

Scott forced a grin, shaking his head. “I can’t believe he kissed you,” he shot back, trying to swipe Stiles’ keys as they walked out toward the SUV. “Hey, you think Isaac’s right, about wolves?” he asked, trying to keep his voice casual.

“Yeah, it’s in the bestiary I’m reading,” Stiles said, shrugging it off. “Let’s just say the birds and the bees talk with born wolves sounds way more complicated than what we got from Coach Finstock.”

“What?” Scott stopped short. “Like, more than just the bisexual thing?”

“Nah, not really,” Stiles reassured him. “I just meant having to explain a bunch of types of sex. Sometimes when a daddy wolf and a daddy human love each other very much they decide to adopt baby cubs but a mommy human and a daddy wolf… yeah, I bet that goes well.”

“What about mating for life or stuff like real wolves?” Scott asked, and Stiles shook his head.

“Nah, Talia Hale was married before she married Laura and Derek’s dad, who was human, did you know that?” he asked incredulously. “I guess her first husband was a political, pack sort of thing. He died, apparently he was older, like a lot older, like not just could have been her father, but totally could have been her dad’s dad. It sounds pretty creepy.”
“I thought Derek had an older brother?” Scott strained to remember, but Stiles was nodding as he popped open the driver’s door.

“From the first marriage,” Stiles explained, nodding to Allison and Isaac in the back seat. “Hale Family,” he explained.

“Derek’s older brother?” Isaac filled in, nodding. “Yeah, he was human, even though his Dad was a wolf too. And then there was Derek and Laura and Cora whose Dad was human, but they were wolves. Weird, right?”

“What about the youngest one?” Stiles asked. “She was what, six when the fire happened?”

“Four, I think, pre-kindergarten, since she hadn’t started school. Too young to tell,” Isaac explained. “You can’t tell till like 10 or 11, Derek said. Apparently Cora had just barely shown when the fire happened. It’s why she’d been kept home from school, since she was having to learn control. And she’d lost control, run off earlier in the day, but no one outside the house knew that.”

“Huh,” Allison remarked, looking thoughtful. “Dad sort of gave me the impression if you have wolf parents, you’re automatically a wolf.”

“Yes,” Stiles replied, popping his p playfully. “Besides, if we’re talking about the Hales, human dad.” He glanced back in the rearview mirror, hesitant. “I mean, do you want the genetics lesson? I can go through it, but it’s sort of… I mean, I hate science class as much as the next guy but…”

“Allison,” Stiles cut his rambling off with a fond smile. “I want to know. And I bet Scott and Isaac wouldn’t mind either. Besides, not like we’d ever have gotten anything half as interesting from Harris.”

Stiles made a face, and looked sideways at Scott. He nodded encouragingly, actually curious. “So, the werewolfiness is pretty solidly connected to changes in the RNA, but it’s got to be activated by one of two genes – one’s a dominant trait version of the activator, and ones a recessive gene that can activate the trait. There’s actually a lot of humans who carry the recessive gene, something like 47% of the human population was the prediction she had in her bestiary. Talia Hale’s sister, Mira, was a geneticist at UC Berkley up until the fire. The Hales were recessive carriers, and it wasn't uncommon for them to have human offspring. Mira was trying to work out the how and why, but for bitten wolves, becoming an Alpha guarantees one of the genes at least will mutate to a dominant form of the gene, so they can then pass it along. But if they're still betas or omegas, they just have one or two recessives to pass along still.”
“So the bite exposes human DNA to the alpha dominant gene, one capable of triggering the recessive gene, and therefore triggering the mutation,” Allison followed the logic, looking amazed.

“Bingo,” Stiles snapped his fingers, his voice pitching up in excitement. “So it’s pretty likely that the whole ‘bite kills you or changes you’ is totally down to that recessive carrier gene. I’m betting you have to have the recessive gene already in order to stabilize the mutation. If you’re all human, the mutation probably shreds your DNA. I mean, there’s a whole bunch of other stuff with the RNA, but Mira never got around to really breaking down that side of it. Just the activator genes.”


“Super human,” Stiles replied. “Derek’s older brother definitely was human, couldn’t shift, but both parents were born wolves, so Mira tested his genes in her study. Two recessives, which explained why he was sort of a sports savant, like on every team Beacon Hills had and captain of half of them. The saddest part of this is that Mira’s research was never shared outside the Hale pack, I’m probably literally the first person to read it since the fire.”

“So, other werewolves, they have no clue how any of it works?” Allison asked, sounding amazed.

“Not surprising,” Stiles replied. “For all the good the data does, the catalyst isn’t science. DNA doesn’t just mutate. The bite triggers a change, but not kissing or sex, so there’s magical intent involved. Plus, children don’t spontaneously become blonde because a blonde parent dies. So Mira was kind of… well, I wouldn’t say scorned, but people thought she was wasting her time trying to scientifically break down a magical process.”

“But Talia was interested,” Scott pointed out, turning over his own DNA in his head. He’d had a single recessive gene, but no way he had two given his asthma and lack of anything resembling athletic skills. “Okay, wait. So I had one recessive gene. Then Peter bit me, and that recessive became active, changed my mito-whatevers, right?”

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed, nodding.

“So the whole true Alpha thing,” Scott continued. “I just caused my own mutation from that recessive into a Dominant, instead of an outside force causing it. Instead of getting the magic from another Alpha. So now it’s a Dominant gene, right? And I still have a human one?”
“Huh, yeah, probably,” Stiles said. “Yeah, you’ve most likely still got a human gene. Maybe one with a bit of magic in it. Because it had to come from somewhere, you can’t just generate it from nothing.”

“Could he have picked it up from the Nemeton?” Allison asked, and the car was suddenly very quiet. “Look, Scott, Peter bit you, and you were practically on top of it. The roots definitely stretch that far. And the darkness… you said it was linked to your wolf.”

It felt as though the wolf under his skin stretched for a moment, basking in her scent. Smart, it insisted. Love. The darkness welled up in response, snarling and the wolf instead focused on Allison’s pale throat, bare and close to his seat. “Sit back,” he snarled, startling Allison back away from his seat. He took several long stabilizing breaths, then sighed. “Sorry,” he muttered, shaking his head. “You’re right, Allison. Dead on, I’m pretty sure. And I don’t think it liked being called out much.”

Allison was staring at her own reflection in the window, not replying. “Allison?” Isaac asked, touching her arm gentle, and Allison startled, tearing her eyes away from the window with a too bright smile.

“It’s fine,” she insisted, waving a dismissive hand up at Scott. “Scott, really, it’s fine. Just, you know, having a bit of a Manic Monday myself,” she admitted, and Isaac wrapped an arm around her automatically.

Scott carefully lowered his eyes to fiddling with the radio dials, pretending not to see or acknowledge the blood dripped fangs dancing in his subconscious.

-2-

The club was intensely loud, brilliant lights and colors and a swirl of sensations that simply swamped and overwhelmed Stiles’ focus. He said a silent thank you to Danny and Ethan for putting the idea on the table, enjoying his mind being random, flashing from full to empty and back again between heartbeats. The bartender tapped his shoulder, handing him a cup of something dark and definitely above what the age stamp on his hand indicated the bartender should be serving Stiles. “Guy on the far corner of the bar,” the man advised Stiles with a wink. “Dance with him if you want, but don’t go looking for anything beyond some teasing,” he continued. “He doesn’t ever take anyone home.”

“Sounds perfect,” Stiles murmured, sipping the whiskey laced cola as he checked out the man the
bartender had indicated. For one moment, in a sweep of deep red strobe light, he mistook the leather jacket and artfully spiked hair for someone familiar, causing a deep sweep of something trembling and hot in his belly. The light swept back to blue tones and the skin became paler, clean shaven jaw not as sharp, and the body, lean, angular, more lightly muscled like Isaac. The shuddery lust subsided, but didn’t vanish entirely, which was good enough for Stiles, whose libido had seemed all but dead in the two weeks since he had emerged from the ice bath.

He slipped down from his stool at the bar, letting Devine, one of the drag queens he’d gotten to know pretty well over the past year, especially last summer, kiss his cheek as he passed her, nodding to the man he was approaching for her seal of approval. “Have fun, kiddo,” she reassured him. “He seems pretty harmless, but you know the girls and I have your back if you signal.”

“That’s why I love you,” Stiles replied, blowing her a kiss as he backed away. He swallowed a bit of nerves as he slid in next to the man, nodding a greeting as he took a long swallow of the drink. He knew if he opened his mouth he’d probably babble or make a mess of things, so he stayed quiet, and the other man rose from his seat, smiling gently.

“Wanna dance?” he shouted in Stiles’ ear, and Stiles grabbed the proffered arm.

“Lead the way,” he shouted back, letting himself get lost in the base line and the way the stranger was slowly grinding his hips so they brushed teasingly against Stiles’.

-2-

Stiles slipped past them with a Derek look-alike, and Allison came to a dead stop where she’d been bopping along with the beat in Isaac’s embrace, eyes wide. “That’s Stiles’ type of guy?” she demanded, hitting Isaac’s arm. “Seriously?”

“Yeah,” Isaac replied, shaking his head. “I think Derek knew, but I didn’t think Stiles was aware enough to be picking up look-alikes, you know?”

“I’d say that’s pretty damn aware,” Allison remarked, raising an eyebrow at the way Stiles was letting the guy grind against him, giving nearly as good as he got. “Does Scott know?”

“I should probably give him a heads up, huh?” Isaac read between the lines, sighing as he looked over as Lydia nearly lost it at Scott’s flailing.
“Maybe rescue him from Lydia while you’re at it?” Allison suggested, fighting her own grin and hooking a thumb toward the hall behind the bar. “I’m going to the restroom anyway.”

“Okay,” he replied, pulling her in for a kiss, lingering a moment in it.

“Go,” she shoved him lightly. “Dance with Scott, clue him in, I’ll come find you.” Shaking her head, she slipped away from him ducking between dancers, feeling his eyes on her as she ducked around the bar and into the washroom. She tugged some paper cloths out of the dispenser, wetting them down and patting her too hot forehead. Looking in the mirror, she sighed at how dark the circles were under her eyes before digging in her purse for the concealer Lydia had foisted on her. She dabbed at the circles, blending in and trying to cover her lack of sleep.

“Go dance with Scott,” Kate’s voice mocked her, and when she looked up in the mirror, her aunt’s face mocked her from the mirror, just like it had earlier in the car. “God, Allison, not just one monster, but two? Even I only strung the one along… and well, look at how good that turned out. You gotta use them, kiddo, plan it out, and if you’re as good as me, wipe out the pack in one fell swoop.”

“You missed a few,” Allison muttered, in spite of her promise to herself not to speak to the hallucinations of her mom and Kate.

“Yeah, and where are they now?” Kate mocked her, laughing when Allison dashed the running water up at the surface of the mirror. “Is it true, Derek’s an all but toothless beta again? Man, wish I were alive, I’d love to get my claws into him.”

“Shut up!” Allison burst out, and the image in the mirror faded as someone cleared their throat behind her. “Sorry, not you,” she said, turning to see one of the drag queens Stiles had befriended, Devine. “I just…I…”

“Have some bad voodoo going on?” Devine asked, and Allison turned back.

“Haven’t been sleeping well,” she lied, and Devine made a disbelieving noise.

“You’re seeing something you think isn’t there,” she put in, stepping up and sliding her hand across the surface of the mirror. “But you’re not crazy.”
“I’m not?” Allison huffed disbelievingly.

“Maybe what you think you’re seeing isn’t there, but there is something there.” The drag queen’s long sparkling eyelashes were mesmerizing, and Allison lost her momentum for a moment. “Yeah, I thought so,” Devine continued, resting a hand on Allison’s chin, tilting her head a little and examining her eyes. “Had a bad brush with the other world, didn’t you?”

“How’d you know?” Allison asked, feeling a little of her shuddering from the encounter with the hallucination of Kate subside.

“You know, Stiles is the only one whose ever believed me, but about four or five years ago, I had a boyfriend who was a little off, a little too pretty, never changed, showed up out of nowhere just when you were thinking about him, not enough that you really notice, until a little bit of it starts rubbing off on you.” Devine fussed with her makeup a little. “Anyway, turned out he had a bit of faery magic in him. And like I said, it rubbed off on me.”

“So… you could see something in the mirror,” Allison asked, and Devine smiled.

“Something pretty awful looking, honey,” she said sympathetically. She gave Allison a sideways glance, and then reached into her purse. “Trust me?”

“No,” Allison replied, choking on a laugh. “But what have I got to lose?”

“I think you earned a night off, don’t you?” the drag queen asked, and pulled out a small vial of something dark and green. “Relax, it’s not drugs, not really, it part of what rubbed off on me,” she explained. “Makes it all go away for a little bit. Makes you a little high too, but as long as you’re not driving and don’t tell Stiles…”

Allison took the thimble sized vial, considering the even smaller dropper. “How does it work?” she asked, and Devine smiled.

“One drop under the tongue shuts down your psychic receptors,” she explained. “You use it too much, you’ll blow them wide open permanently, but it’s okay to use once or twice a year.”

“Once or twice a year?” Allison repeated, looking skeptical. “What’s that good for?”
“A night off,” Devine reminded her, pressing the vial into Allison’s hand before slipping back out the door.

Allison considered it for a moment, turning the vial over between her fingertips. “What the hell,” she said, catching sight of Kate out of the corner of her eye. “Worst case I just get high, right?”

She dropped a tiny drop under her tongue, stoppered the vial and tucked it deep in her purse. She looked back in the mirror, to the reflection of an empty bathroom. “Huh,” she said, rolling her shoulders as her muscles slowly eased, tension she had no idea she was carrying melting in a rush of tingling warmth.

“I could get used to this,” Allison laughed, quickly finishing what she’d started with the concealor.

-2-

Scott was laughing at his and Lydia’s flailing, failed attempts to dance together, Lydia giggling just as hard and Aiden rolling his eyes, a hint of a smile as he watched them from his firm, ‘I don’t dance’ perch at the group’s table. “Why aren’t you supernaturally graceful?” Lydia gasped, clutching Scott’s shoulder as she tried to show him the dance move again. “Shouldn’t you be naturally awesome at this?” she asked between giggles.

“Ice skating,” he shot back, setting her laughing off even harder. He grinned as Lydia let herself get pulled sideways slightly, a blonde, tall Viking warrior type woman tugging her into what should have been awkward given Lydia being so much shorter, but Scott mused to himself, like Lydia Martin would ever be awkward. Unsurprisingly, Lydia was like catnip to the lesbian population of the Jungle. Lesbian-nip? Scott decided to stop that brain thought before it went somewhere disturbing.

He was about to slip off the floor and join Aiden when a pair of hands slid lightly to his hips from behind him and his wolf had him relaxing back into Isaac’s touch before he had fully processed what was happening. “Stop trying so hard,” Isaac said in his ear, lowering his voice, knowing Scott could hear him. “You’d probably be better at this if you just relaxed.”

“Kind of hard to do when you’re dancing with Lydia,” he remarked, and felt more than heard Isaac’s soft chuff of laughter, letting Isaac guide his hips gently, making his sway in manner that caught the pounding bass line. “Stiles might catch me.”
“Pretty sure Stiles is busy with other things,” Isaac muttered. Scott was about to ask, but Isaac’s fingers slid tighter, wrapping gently along the edge of his hip bones.

He bit his lip hard at the urge to turn his head, nuzzle back into Isaac’s neck. “Um… so what’s up with Stiles?” Scott managed to ask finally, drawing blood as his fangs pierced his lip when Isaac draped himself even closer, tucking his chin into Scott’s shoulder in response.

“Casually,” Isaac explained in his ear. “As I move us to your left, look near the far corner of the bar.”

Scott turned his head a little as they moved, easily spotting Stiles dancing, much better than he was managing, with an older man. He blinked, tilting his head slightly and ignoring the way the movement pressed his cheek closer to Isaac’s. “Huh,” he muttered. “Is it just me, or does that guy look a lot like Derek?”

“Uh huh,” Isaac replied, turning Scott away from Stiles and in to face him, giving him a rough smile. “Now you know Stiles’ type. Just didn’t want you to be surprised if he ever comes back.”

“I thought they hated each other,” Scott tried to turn around and look again, but Isaac held his hips firmly, keeping him in place.

“No offense, Scott, but you can be a little blind sometimes,” Isaac remarked, and Scott jumped when Allison slid her arms around Isaac’s waist, peeking her head out at Scott and giving him a tilted half smile, one of her suggestive ones he was no longer used to seeing directed at him.

“Way hotter watching you dance with Isaac than Lydia trying to teach you,” she teased him, giggling as both of them flushed. “We’ll have to talk about this later,” she added, tugging on Scott’s wrist when he started to pull away, helping Isaac hold him fast. “But you should dance with us right now, Scott. We’re all taking a night off, remember?”

“I didn’t know we were taking it that far off,” Scott managed, realizing he was just as fascinated by the way that made Isaac laugh as his wolf was.

“Apparently,” Isaac seemed surprised as well, which only seemed to make Allison laugh harder. She was pale, a dim sparkle on her cheeks, biting her lip as she tugged again, trying to pull both of them closer.
“Come on, come on, come on,” she whined, and Scott lifted an eyebrow at Isaac.

“Allie, did you take something?” Isaac asked, sniffing slightly, which set her giggling off again, and she burrowed her head into his shoulder.

“She doesn’t smell like pot,” Scott said, tugging her arm.

“She smells like that weird stuff Stiles asked Derek about last summer,” Isaac replied, making a face. “Apparently he has a friend who does voodoo type magic, and she brews a potion that poisons the parts of the brain that process psychic input.”

“Poisons?” Scott demanded, and Allison laughed harder.

“Just a little,” she said, showing him her fingers a pinch apart. “They get better. Don’t tell Stiles.”

“Yeah, I think that ship has sailed,” Isaac informed her.

“Come on, it’s a night off,” Allison pleaded, pouting at them.

Scott felt his resolve crumbling, and looked to Isaac for support. “Let’s check with Stiles,” Isaac repeated. “If he says it’s okay, we’ll come dance with you then take you home to sleep it off.”

“I can go home with both of you?” Allison chirped up, looking thrilled, and Scott choked on his disbelief.

“Yeah, well, we can’t exactly let her go home to Chris like this,” Isaac muttered.

“I don’t think tonight’s ending the way she thinks,” Scott put in, and Isaac shot him a sideways glance.

“Maybe it’s something to table for now,” he agreed mildly. “But not forever, Scott.”
“Come on,” he groaned, heading toward where Stiles was looking very friendly with the man who really did look an awful lot like Derek. “Hey,” he clapped Stiles’ shoulder, giving him puppy dog eyes. “Sorry, man, I need you for a moment.”

Stiles turned, looking over at Isaac and Allison. Allison waved brightly, grinning widely. Stiles groaned, managing to turn fully to face her without dislodging the other man’s grasp. “Hey, Allison,” he greeted her.

“Hi, Stiles,” she yelled back. “I think Scott should have a threesome with Isaac and me.”

Stiles, to Scott’s dismay, cracked up. “I absolutely agree with you,” he shouted back, hooting with laughter. “You’re really sparkly, Allison,” he informed her, lifting a hand to her cheek. “Did you run into Devine?”

“Um… no?” Allison tried, biting her thumb and trying really obviously to look innocent.

“Uh huh,” Stiles nodded, shoulders still shaking with barely contained laughter. Scott tried not to pay attention to the way Stiles’ dance partner’s hands were curled sensuously around Stiles’ hips, the same way Isaac had done to him earlier, but he couldn’t keep his eyes from drifting to that spot again. “How much of the pretty faery dust did you take, and was it the purple or green kind?”

“Green,” she replied instantly, then scowled. “I don’t think I’m supposed to tell you that.”

“You’re definitely supposed to,” Stiles replied. “How much did you take?”

“Tiny drop, and it was liquid, not dust,” she insisted, holding her fingers up in the pinch gesture again. “Not even a whole drop.”

“She’ll be fine,” Stiles shouted over to Scott. “High as a kite for a while, but she deserves a night off, right?”

“What’d she take?” Scott asked, still uncertain. Stiles pulled him closer, talking low, but Scott could hear him clearly over the club noise.
“You know how wolfsbane weakens you, dampens your abilities?” he asked, and Scott nodded. “It’s basically distilled and enchanted wormwood. It does to psychics and witches and emissaries what wolfsbane does to you. Shuts it all down for a while in small doses. But prolonged use or large doses are toxic.”

“But Allison’s not psychic,” Scott protested.

“But the nemeton’s effects are,” Stiles reminded him. “It probably shuts out whatever she’s struggling with. Just let her enjoy it and then when she sobers up, remind her never to do it again without talking to me or Deaton first and to stop taking candy from strangers, okay? I’ll get her something for the hangover.”

“Yeah, okay,” Scott started to pull away, and Stiles tugged him back in by his collar, a little roughly.

“And when she’s sober, talk to her and Isaac,” Stiles continued. “And don’t be all noble suffering or prudish or whatever else you’re thinking about. Life sucks enough, just grab the good stuff when it comes by. You’re a werewolf, are you really gonna get weird about maybe being a bit bisexual?”

“Okay,” Scott agreed, holding up his hands in surrender. Allison was tugging at his waist, so he gave up, following her and Isaac back toward the others.

“Crisis averted?” he heard the man Stiles was dancing with ask with a hint of an Eastern European accent. He trained his ears back on them, suddenly suspicious that a foreigner just happening to look like Derek would wander into Beacon Hills and hit on Stiles.

“They’d be lost without me,” Stiles replied dryly.

“Sure I can’t take you somewhere else?” the stranger offered, and Stiles laughed dismissively.

“Sorry, man, I have other plans,” Stiles replied, and Scott, not hearing a lie in the words, turned back to dance with Allison and Isaac.
Stiles stepped under the hot shower spray, groaning in relief as the sweat and smoke from the Jungle slipped down the drain. Lydia had obligingly texted Allison’s dad from Allison’s phone and told him Allison was staying with her. Then he’d helped Scott and Isaac pour Allison into Isaac’s bed, then gotten out quickly when Scott and Isaac had started to awkwardly bicker about who was taking Scott’s bed and who was taking the floor. Thankfully Allison was well and truly out, or he had no doubt she’d have talked them both into Isaac’s bed. He decided he’d get Allison the hangover cure when she showed up at school Monday, let her get a hint of the consequences to make sure she didn’t go back to Devine any time soon.

He experimentally chased the arousal from the club, thinking about Colin, the Ukrainian man he’d danced with, who had tried several times to convince Stiles to go home with him. Stiles was flattered, especially since he was sure the other man usually didn’t take people home, but that wasn’t nearly enough to peak his interest it seemed. Which was frustrating as hell given that a glimpse of Lydia’s hair before she turned a corner away from him used to be more than enough to drop his mind straight into the gutter. He closed his eyes and stroked his dick experimentally, thinking about Colin grinding his hips against Stiles’ ass, breath hot on his throat as they danced. He got a slight twitch, but nothing more, sighing in disappointment.

His mind turned over to seeing Colin at the bar initially, the red lights and moment he’d thought he’d seen Derek, and his cock perked up a little, surprising Stiles. Derek then, he decided, imagining it had been the werewolf at the bar instead.

Derek would have growled, low in his ear when he’d teased his ass back into the older man’s groin, and unlike Colin, his hands would have gripped Stiles’ hips tight, rough, maybe possessively. He was definitely interested, Stiles realized, stroking a little quicker when he realized he was actually fully hard.

If he’d teased Derek the way he’d been teasing Colin tonight, Stiles mused, Derek could have backed him up along one of the dark walls, cornering him and trapping him easily with one arm while his free hand would slide down over Stiles’ t-shirt, finding the edge before trailing his fingers back up Stiles’ abs underneath the well worn material. Stiles would gasp, let his head fall back and show his throat to the werewolf, eager to feel blunt, human teeth and rough stubble on his neck when Derek took the invitation.

He’d be scraping his teeth just over Stiles’ pulse when he slid his hand back down Stiles’ stomach, letting his hand find the button at the top of the jeans and undoing it deftly. Derek would ease his hand deep into Stiles’ boxer briefs, rolling his fingertips down to tease at Stiles’ balls before sliding the heel of his hand roughly back up the length of Stiles’ cock. In the shower, Stiles’ cock spurted a bit of precome, making him tighten his grip even as he reached out with the other hand to brace himself on the wall.
Derek could spin him around, pin him face first against the wall, then, using his body to shield Stiles from the rest of the club even as he brought his hand down the back of Stiles’ jeans now, grip almost bruisingly tight as he squeezed one of Stiles’ cheeks, huffing in that almost laugh he did, self satisfied and amused, when Stiles pushed back into it, desperate for more.

“You’d let me fuck you right here, wouldn’t you, Stiles?” imaginary Derek whispered in his ear, and as he pretended he could feel Derek’s fingers finding their way between his cheeks, he let his chest fall against the shower wall and brought his own newly freed hand back to mimic his mind’s eye, rubbing and teasing at his hole. “Open you up and bend you over and claim you right here, not caring who could see that you’re mine,” Derek would growl in his ear, and with that thought, Stiles came with a shuddering choked back cry.

He stood under the hot spray of water, letting it wash away the new layer of sweat and semen, pulling in long, shaky breaths, before he slumped against the cool bathroom tile. He’d just gotten off for the first time in over two weeks to the thought of Derek Hale feeling him up in public, and the older man wasn’t just long gone, but as far as Stiles knew, was straight as a ruler. Even if Isaac was right, and maybe the werewolf would be bisexual, what would he want with a skinny teenager like Stiles?

“Fuck my life,” Stiles muttered, turning his face up into the spray of water. He wanted to lose his virginity to a guy like Colin, or be jumped in a basement like should have happened with Heather or just enjoy himself, not be centered on someone so unbelievably unattainable as Derek. But the darkness in him was swirled tightly around that obsessive focus, apparently transferred from Lydia to Derek completely now, and it was knotted tight, probably never going to let go.

He quickly shrugged into his pajamas and sprawled on his stomach on his bed, the drowsy buzz from the club, alcohol and his orgasm all fading in comparison to the gnawing worried feeling his realization had created. He knew he had a habit of reaching for unattainable people, but this might be a new height of stupidity for him. In the mood to wallow, he reached for Talia Hale’s bestiary instead of his Apprentice’s Journal, already over two-thirds of the way through the bestiary.

“My younger brother has joined us, fresh home from college, and already I’m writing entries into the bestiary based on the re-education I’m having to do with Derek and Cora. They delight in listening to his wild stories, and Peter delights in making my life difficult. He spun them a story about a siren he met during his gap semester, who had the power to take on thousands of faces and could seduce anyone, man, woman or werewolf with her songs. Cora in particular was ready to take off to play with the sirens, but she’s all of nine years old. Derek, at 14, almost 15 now, probably should have known better, but after looking through this record, I’ve found I failed to mention Sirens when I taught him and Laura about Selkies.

A Siren does indeed have the power to change into the shape of another individual, and if they are powerful enough, they can lure others in with their songs. The secret is in how they attained their
power. A Siren is a Selkie who has killed another Selkie and taken their pelt. The ability to change shape comes from the stolen pelt, which can take on the shape of someone who has handled the pelt. A pelt usually only can hold one form, perhaps two if the Siren is extremely powerful. The seductive song, though, is part of the natural power of Selkies, which may explain a number of legends of men stealing the pelts to force them to stay on land.

The best way to detect a Siren is the same as a Selkie, by scent. They generally carry a scent of brine strong enough even for some humans to detect. The genetic lineage tends toward Irish coloring, pale skin, brown or red hair, and often light blue and green eyes. It is unclear if they can use their own pelts to return to the water, but most rumors say they can. If stripped of a pelt, a Selkie will often go mad.

Derek and Cora are significantly less enchanted by the idea of a siren with a thousand forms now that they are also picturing thousands of seal pelts on racks in a creepy beachfront shack. I admit, my irritation with Peter may have made me paint a rather grim picture for them, but at least they’ll remember it. When I asked Peter about it, he pouted at me and insisted I ruin all his fun. I’m certain he made the whole story up, but I am worried about his influence on Derek in particular. I’ve always wanted him to open up more, but following in Peter’s footsteps, joining the basketball team and edging his way into a more popular crowd at school actually seems to be pushing him away from the pack. I’d almost love to find him in his father’s study, hiding out with a book, but I suspect he’ll be out running with Peter again tonight.”

Stiles read the entry three times before shooting an excited text to Deaton, ignoring the fact that the bedside clock read 3:24 a.m. He bit his lip, scrolling down two names further, and highlighting Derek, fingers hovering indecisively.

He finally clicked the name, typing out a message carefully and reading it several times before closing his eyes and hitting send. “Hey Derek, I know, out of left field and random, but did Peter ever tell you the name of the Siren he was supposedly friends with? Also, hi. We miss you.” He had deleted the part about missing Derek, then retyped it, then deleted it, then switched it to ‘I miss you’, then gone back to ‘we’ finally. God, he really was gone on Derek.

He set his phone on the bedside table, settling in for the night, not expecting either man to get back to him, but his phone beeped a moment later. He sat up, scrambling for it far more awkwardly than he would ever admit, and pulled up the message.

“User is outside the coverage area or account has been disconnected. Please check the number or try your message again later. Error code 808.”

"Derek," he sighed worriedly, scrolling down and hitting send on the number. This time, the same message was delivered by a rather snooty sounding female machine voice. “Dammit,” he said,
“Come in,” Siobhan said, ushering Deucalion in to her apartment with a broad smile. “I really appreciate this, I love to cook, but cooking for one is so depressing.”

“I should be thanking you,” he replied, holding out a bottle of white wine. “Hopefully it will pair well with whatever you have planned?”

“Should be perfect, I’ll pour us some,” she called back to him as she left him inspecting the grading she’d left strewn out on the coffee table. “Ignore the mess, a teacher’s work doesn’t stop for weekends, I’m afraid.”

“It’s no trouble,” Deucalion called back, perching hesitantly on the corner of her couch, not entirely certain what to do with himself. Siobhan walked back in, offering him a soft smile when she saw him. She handed him a glass of wine.

“Been a while for you too, huh?” she asked, before taking a seat in the chair kitty-corner to the couch, sipping her wine. “This is lovely, by the way.”

“I haven’t had time for dinner with a friend, coffee outings… well, I haven’t had interest in that for a long time,” he admitted, sipping the wine, which was a little drier and more oaky than he would have expected.

“I know the feeling,” Siobhan agreed, twirling the goblet between her fingertips idly. “After my divorce, I sort of lost interest in… well, anything, really. I just got into this blind rage mode, where all I cared about was revenge and figuring out everything about the other woman. Wow, I sound like a total psychopath, sorry about that,” she flushed and took a long drink of her wine.

“No, I understand perfectly,” he reassured her, drinking his wine as well. “Believe me, I understand blind rage more than you might think. Your ex is an idiot, of course,” he added, and she smiled, ducking her head slightly.

“You’re sweet,” she said, standing and heading back into the kitchen. He sat back a little, taking another drink of the wine, his head suddenly feeling a little heavy. “The worst part was that, after all
that digging and prodding, I didn’t find anything.”

“Hmm,” he managed, frowning at the wine, fumbling as he tried to set it down, his vision blurring slightly as Siobhan stepped back into the living room. He tried to focus, and what he’d thought was a long spoon in her hand resolved into a rather sharp butcher’s knife. “What…” he tried to sit forward, his throat closing a little and making gray spots dance in front of his eyes.

“She was completely human,” Siobhan continued, and the knife was definitely tapping against her palm now. “He steals my pelt, forces me to live with him, then runs around with a human. I end up crying my eyes out on the shoulder of this werewolf who’s passing through in a bar after I’ve killed them both, explaining that I maybe acted rashly, that I can’t find my pelt anywhere. He tried to help me sniff it out, and when even he couldn’t find it, he taught me how to become something more. Better.”

“Why are you doing this?” he managed to gasp, pulling himself forward enough to find his feet for a moment, swaying briefly before his knees gave out beneath him.

“I owed the werewolf a favor,” her voice seemed to come from a great distance now. “Sorry, lover, but dropping some aconite in the wine is a really easy way to balance the books.”

He was dimly aware of the front door opening before a pair of scuffed brown work boots stepped into his field of vision. The right one came up to his shoulder and tipped him back all too easily. Deucalion reached for his wolf, snarling ineffectively as Peter Hale bent down to grab the lapels of his jacket and tug him up slightly, forcing his gaze to meet a muddied, purplish wolf eyes.

“You killed the Darach,” Deucalion realized, trying to snarl and shake off the effects of the wine.

“And interestingly, it did boost my power, just like I planned,” Peter said, self satisfied. “Didn’t quite give me the boost back to my Alpha status like I anticipated, I’m afraid, so I had to call in plan B.”

He adjusted his grip, only one hand pinning Deucalion in place now, claws extending on the other one. “It’s nothing personal,” Peter informed him coolly. “Half way there just isn’t good enough. I need to be an Alpha if I’m going to take on the true Alpha. And once I have his powers as well, I plan to raze this town.”

With a snarl, the claws descended, tearing into his throat. Deucalion felt the blood slipping down his
body, the alpha powers draining just as quickly, slipping away. Peter let him slump backwards and the last thing he saw was Siobhan, watching him through narrowed eyes.

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Chapter End Notes

Danny kisses Stiles to prove a point. Minor character death is Deucalion.
Allison’s head was on fire and had been since Friday night. Monday she was able to convince her father she had a migraine and stayed in bed, but the hallucinations and nightmares were so screamingly painful that by Tuesday, she was ready for the distraction of school. She quieted the hangover from the magic potion with double the recommended dose of Tylenol and two Red Bulls before she made it to first period.

“Feeling better, no worries,” she said quickly when Scott approached her, sitting down in the desk next to hers.

“We should maybe talk about Friday night,” he said, and she flashed him a too broad smile.

“You know, I was really wasted, don’t remember a thing,” she lied, and she could see in the way he focused, narrowed eyes, slightly flared nostrils, that he could hear the lie. “Maybe after school you can fill me in.” She was gambling that he was going to find it too awkward to broach the subject, and from the way his eyes kept sliding away, she was betting she was right.

“At lunch,” Scott said suddenly, shaking his head. “You’ll have lunch with Isaac and I, outside.”

“I think Lydia—”

“Lydia is having lunch with Aiden and Ethan and Danny and Stiles in the cafeteria,” Scott said firmly. “So we’ll talk then.”

“Fine,” Allison replied tightly, drumming her pen on her open notebook and spending homeroom tuning out the teacher and thinking of ways she could get out of lunch. She tossed Scott a quick smile before ducking into the hallway before ducking to the left to loop around to her locker instead of to the right, where she knew Isaac would be waiting.

To her dismay, Stiles was waiting at her locker, a slight smirk on his face at whatever face she must have made when she saw him. “Relax, you’ll thank me later,” he informed her, reaching into his bag and pulling out a thermos. “It cures the hangover,” he assured her as he handed it over. “Which is a bitch, took me nearly a week to figure out this cure, so be grateful I didn’t leave you that long as a
lesson about taking drugs from strangers in a club bathroom.”

“She was your friend, not a stranger,” Allison muttered rebelliously.

“Which is why I know I have to ask,” Stiles said, rocking back his heels awkwardly. “Did she give you any more of it?”

“No, just let me have the one drop,” Allison lied, hoping Stiles couldn’t read her as easily as Scott had done.

“Look, it’s a toxin,” Stiles told her, sighing. “I know it seems like it helps, but if you ever took too much, it could cause permanent psychic damage.”

“I took like half a drop, I got the damage pretty loud and clear,” Allison informed him, only resisting the urge to slam her locker by remembering her pounding headache. “What’s in this?” she asked, looking a little skeptically at the wheat grass green concoction.

“You know the coffee place on 3rd?” Stiles told her, and she nodded, unscrewing the cap and sniffing experimentally. “It’s their basic benefit blend smoothie with added agave. The agave is the key part, but you can order it straight from them if you need a second one later today. Deaton made me make my own before he told me that,” he admitted, rolling his eyes. “Blenders and hangovers, but I suppose I was lucky he helped me at all last summer.”

“Thanks,” Allison told him, tipping up the bottle, finding the drink wasn’t even half as bad as she’d been thinking. “This… actually isn’t bad,” she admitted, and Stiles grinned.

“Better living through herbs,” he said, as the warning bell rang. “Speaking of, your guest chemistry professor today is from the wildlife preserve. We’re starting to scrape the bottom of the barrel.”

“Danny says they finally got a permanent sub for the music classes,” Allison offered, but Stiles wasn’t paying attention, the overhead announcement overhead crackling out his name. “-Stilinski to Ms. Morell’s office.”

“That sucks,” Allison winced sympathetically. “Should… should maybe Scott or one of the pack go with you?”
Stiles shrugged his backpack on, shaking his head. “Nah, pretty sure I know what it’s about,” he reassured her. “See you around, Allison.”

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Stiles rounded the corner into the guidance office, surprised to see Deaton and Morrell both waiting for him, Morrell’s keys in hand. “Let’s go,” she said, gesturing him back toward the door.

“Uh, where?” Stiles asked, halting in the doorway and looking to Deaton for confirmation.

“Deucalion isn’t answering his phone,” Deaton explained, tossing Stiles a pair of light leather gloves. “Marin requested we accompany her to check on him.”

Stiles lifted an eyebrow at Morrell, who was tugging on her own gloves. “This isn’t one of those times I get to say her Alpha, her problem, is it?” he asked, wrinkling his nose at the gloves in his hand. “And why do I need these?”

“You’re smarter than that, Stiles,” Morrell replied, her tone a little arch, and in what someone who wasn’t his teacher, Stiles might have called mocking. “And it’s your Selkie problem, isn’t it?”

“Fair,” he replied, tugging on the gloves. “Is this a crime scene thing then?”

“Hopefully not, but we prepare for the worst,” Deaton explained. “Some emissaries are part of the pack, but emissaries like Marin and I have always found the best way to exist is to exist as little as possible.”

“Which is why Derek didn’t even know who you were,” Stiles muttered, ignoring the lifted eyebrow that caused. “Did you sign me out of school?” he changed the subject as they exited the school into the faculty lot, the lights on a black four door car flashing as they approached.

“You’re in my office as far as the school is concerned, discussing your college options,” Morrell replied, smirking slightly at Deaton. “I imagine my brother has already tried to talk you into his alma mater.”
“I’m not interested in being a vet, no offense,” Stiles replied as he slid into the backseat, fussing at the uncomfortable gloves.

“Not post grad,” Morrell replied, smiling a sly sort of smile. “Undergrad. There are schools you can attend and get a BA with an… innocuous sort of field of study, but spend four years studying metaphysics. You can also double major, like I did, so that I could get my counseling degrees.”

“It’s not a path for everyone,” Deaton started, but Morrell cut him off easily.

“Stiles is third in his class, and only by a hundredth of a point,” she observed. “He’s going to college, Alan, so he should go somewhere that helps him become an emissary and whatever else he wants. Stiles, if you ask, I’ll write you a letter of recommendation for my alma mater.”

“Didn’t you go to school in London?” Stiles asked, wrinkling his forehead. “Is Cambridge actually Hogwarts?”

“Not quite,” Deaton said, shaking his head. “I suggest if you want to try and push Stiles down your path, Marin, you actually make an appointment during your office hours.”

“Stiles should be aware he has options,” she replied. “If he stays here, you know there will pressure on him to step in to your old shoes.”

“I’m not really suited to be Scott’s emissary, I already know that,” Stiles broke in, and Morrell gave him a long considering look in the rearview mirror before turning her eyes back to the road, turning down the street to Allison’s apartment complex.

“It’s a discussion for later,” Deaton finally said, and Morrell nodded tightly.

“We should use the side entrance, away from the main desk,” Morrell observed, leading them to the side entrance. Stiles watched curiously, wondering how she would get into the building, and mildly disappointed when she pulled out a set of keys. “Always have access to your Alpha,” she said to Stiles as she held the door open. “Hopefully you’ll never need it,” she added, but Stiles was filing it away, wondering if Deaton had copied Scott’s keys at some point, but also becoming more aware that they were very different types of emissary, in spite of their similar philosophies.
The elevator ride up to the penthouse was quiet, and Stiles barely resisted the urge to fidget, the silence tense. When the elevator doors opened, he took a deep breath in relief and immediately regretted it, the too familiar tang of blood and decay in the air.

“Gloves stay on, try not to disturb anything,” Morrell snapped at him, pushing in quickly. The kitchen and dining room were empty, and they stepped down three steps into the immaculately clean living room. Deaton nodded as he went to the bedroom on the right hand side, while Stiles followed Morrell across the living room to the left hand room, his instincts pointing him that way.

Morrell pushed open the door, mouth opening in an almost inaudible gasp as she took in the sight. Deucalion was laid out on the bed, eyes open and as foggy in death as they had been when he was blind. His throat had been ripped out, jagged, Stiles noted distantly, so claws, not blades. His torso was bare, a long thin triangular knot had been traced into his skin, likely also by a claw.

“Peter,” he said faintly, and Morrell gave him a quick look, prompting him to continue, “He marked the deer when he came back with the spiral, for revenge. This is the symbol for a declaration of war, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Deaton agreed, from where he’d joined them in the doorway. “Peter is coming for Scott, I think, and now has all the powers of Deucalion at his disposal. The Alpha of the alpha pack, that sounds like enough power to take care of Scott.”

Stiles pulled out his cell phone, and Deaton frowned at him. “Calling my dad in,” he said as though it were obvious. “He can decide if they want to play off the homicide or what. You should call Scott in, so he knows Peter’s powered up. And Ms. Morrell…”

“I’m going to go get very drunk,” she declared, shaking her head. “Spend a whole lot of time toasting goodbye to Beacon Hills and quoting Dr. King.”

Stiles gave her a puzzled look as she tossed Deaton her keys. “Free at last, free at last,” she said solemnly. “Almost eight years holding the leash on Deucalion and the Alpha pack, and now they’re all betas or dead. I’m free to do whatever the hell I want to.”

“Which means getting drunk and leaving?” Stiles asked, and she gave him a salute.

“And swearing off werewolves for the rest of my life,” she added. “Just might offer my services to an old school coven, or maybe chase down the Morrigan. Keep your options open as long as you
can, Stiles, or you may end up waiting for the day you can get drunk and celebrate the death of your alpha. Unlike my brother, you and I have an overly developed sense of loyalty.”

With that, she blew a kiss toward the corpse and sauntered out the door. “My sister’s always had a flair for the dramatic,” Deaton sighed, tugging out his own cell phone. “And I suppose you’re right. Let’s call in your father and Scott.”

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Allison really hadn’t intended to start a small fire in the chemistry lab, she’d just been fighting the last vestiges of her hangover and missed the mark on the beaker. She sighed, tucking her chin into her knuckles as she slouched into a lab stool for lunchtime detention, trying not to smile at the fact that she’d managed to get out of talking with Scott and Isaac for a little longer.

“Oh, kiddo, stop kidding yourself,” Kate taunted her from the reflection of the glass chemical cupboards. “You’ll have to face up to the slut show from Friday night sooner or later. Come on, Allison, just let go and have some fun with the boys. Eventually you’ll have to put some wolfsbane bullets through their hearts anyway, might as well let them enjoy the ride before you do.”

Allison sat up as the chemistry teacher came in, giving her a skeptical look. “All right, Ms. Argent, you think you can keep your clumsiness in check to help me organize the mess of a supply cabinet that’s been left behind by your string of substitute teachers?”

She nodded, following him to the back of the room where the uncommonly used equipment was stored. “I think people have just been ransacking the cupboard for ideas,” he admitted, shoving some copper tubing back when it nearly fell out. “There are labels and containers, but hardly anything is where it ought to be.”

Allison worked quietly, tucking items away and slowly clearing the copper tubing, which seemed to have gotten everywhere. She had just shoved a box of magnesium sheets up to the top when she spotted a tub marked ‘microdots’. She pulled it forward, surprised to see what looked like syringes and perforated paper, segmented into dozens of half inch squares. “What’s a microdot?” she asked, and the substitute looked up his grading, frowning at the box.

“Oh, for extremely small amounts of liquid,” he explained, looking over what she’d found. “Micrograms, useful for delicate chemical work, able to dose out the tiniest droplets of a chemical. The paper there is a non-reactive base element, dissolves in most solutions without affecting the reaction. We use them out at the wildlife preserve sometimes to give infant animals low doses of strong medicines. I imagine it’s for the AP classes.”
“Didn’t seem like it belonged on the freshman shelf where I found it,” Allison covered, and the chemistry teacher nodded perfunctorily before returning to the grading. She carefully shelved another box, making sure he was absorbed in the work, before carefully palming several sheets and one of the syringes into her book bag. She then slid the box back up onto the shelf, closing the door easily and offering the teacher a smile. “All done. Can I hit the library for the rest of lunch?”

“Oh… sure,” he agreed, waving her off. Allison smiled triumphantly when she hit the hall.

“Never would have worked on Harris,” she murmured, heading for her locker. She slipped the stolen chemistry tools into her purse, tempted to try them out, but common sense telling her to wait. She’d check with Stiles if she saw him first.

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Stiles settled onto his bed, sighing half in relief, half in frustration as the clock crept past when his dad would have been home if he hadn’t had to pull a double, though with luck he’d be home for a late dinner. Pulling a double meant he and Deaton were really going to try and disappear Deucalion’s body, and while Stiles knew in the back of his mind it was for the best, he hated that his father would have to do it. He skimmed the top of a page in the bestiary, unable to even really focus on Talia’s writing for once.

He scrubbed his fingers through his hair roughly, letting out a groan of pure frustration, then turned his focus back to the bestiary, flipping pages at random. “Eenie, Meenie, Miney, and no Mo’,” he sang to himself. “Derek’s mama said to pick the very best one and you are…” he trailed off, eyes going wide when he saw his own name about midway down the page of the last entry in the journal.

*It’s times like these that I miss Gennadiy.*

He blinked hard, rubbing his eyes and checking the fine cursive once more, but sure enough, his name was scrawled mid page. He went back to the start of the entry, mind whirling chaotically.

*On A Werewolf’s Eye Color*

*It’s easy to note that the Alpha werewolf has red eyes. Being a universal trait, it is perhaps the only one that Hunters know well. The most common colors following that are gold and blue. I once heard a senior hunter explain to a junior one that golden eyes mark a beta while blue eyes mark an*
omega. Which isn’t true, but we guard the meaning behind blue eyes fiercely, as many, probably rightly, believe hunters would begin to slaughter blue eyed wolves wholesale.

Golden eyes mark an average wolf. No special abilities or heritage. Blue eyes mark the wolf that carries the weight of having taken the life of another. Here is where our myths and disinformation start to trip us up. It’s not necessarily an innocent life, or even with the intent to kill, but the feeling of blood on the hands will turn a wolf’s eyes blue. I’ve seen someone so riddled with guilt over an accident that the eyes of an innocent wolf turn blue. I once saw a beta who had been beaten by her husband every night raise a hand in her own self defense, accidentally killing her abuser, and her eyes turned blue, and I’ve seen a sociopath with little remorse retain golden eyes. It’s a feeling in the wolf, a deep remorse that affects him down to the soul.

So Peter had been lying, or concealing the parts of the story that didn’t help to paint Derek in a negative light, Stiles thought, thumbing over to the next page.

My son Derek ended the suffering of a young woman and now has blue eyes. I’ve caught him occasionally gazing at them in the mirror over the past year in anger, sadness, and all manner of guilt. I worry as he seems to be pulling further and further away from the pack, ducking out with boys and girls from school but never sticking with one long since Paige. I asked the emissary to help him, but like many, our current emissary has prejudices against the blue eyes, believes my son should bear whatever guilt he feels, whatever consequences the color of his eyes may bring.

It’s times like these that I miss Gennadiy, and his all too different type of work as our emissary. He was pack, and he was family. Perhaps I am remembering through rose colored lenses and he too would have pulled away from Derek. He crossed over when Derek was only six.

“Just before I was born,” Stiles said aloud, tracing his finger over the name again. “Grandpa.” Crossed over seemed a rather kind way of describing what had happened to his grandfather, his mom had only told him a little about the car crash, never really wanting to talk about it when he was young.

It is also possible I am wallowing in melancholy memories because I have to visit his daughter next week in the hospital. I intend to offer her the bite, even though she is older than those we normally would approach and entangled with local law enforcement. But the scent of her cancer is growing heavier, not weakening, and I feel I must offer.

Stiles was struggling to breathe, thumbing back to the date printed neatly at the top of Talia’s final entry. Two days before the fire, he calculated, books shaking harder in his hands. A little less than a month before Mom…
He took a deep gasping breath, then suddenly remembering Lydia, held his breath, letting himself feel dizzy before exhaling again, relieved when the edge of the panic had receded. He knew he shouldn’t, but he tugged the book back into his lap, opening to where he’d left off.

*I saw her with her son the other day, and his magic sparkles almost as brightly as his grandfather. I found myself wondering if our current emissary will take him in for training when the time comes or if his mother will send him to others of their family still in Russia. He seems far too entrenched in the modern world to send him back to the old world packs. I found myself hoping she accepts the bite, and it takes, so that her son will become pack. More melancholy, perhaps, but his bright spirit seems like the sort of thing that might draw Derek out of his darkness.*

*My sister, Mira, who was adopted into our pack and family after she was bitten by a rogue werewolf, has brilliant green eyes. These are fairly rare, from when a magic user (such as an emissary) survives the bite. It’s rare, as most magic from birthrights, does not interact well with the magic of the bite. I have heard rumors (via Peter, so I take them with a grain of salt) that certain types of Welsh and Irish faery birthrights even produce immunity to the bite.*

“Banshees,” Stiles muttered to himself, his lips curling up into a smile. Talia hadn’t had an entry on them that he’d come across yet, but Peter must have known something, maybe even have known something about Lydia’s family, much more deliberately chosen to bite her as a plan B. He didn’t think it had been possible to hate Peter much more, but having proof he’d picked Lydia, terrorized Lydia deliberately, he found he really did.

*I have never personally seen a werewolf who gets stuck between beta and alpha, however if it happens, for some reason a beta cannot finish the transition to Alpha despite having the power of an Alpha, they may turn a purple or orange shade, reflecting the dangerous nature of the in between state. I will write more about that later-- Cora has tangled gum in her hair, and Laura is chasing her with scissors. I’m not sure which part of that is scaring me more.*

Stiles thumbed through the last few blank pages of the book, as though that would make more writing appear. He sighed, flopping back onto his pillows with a sigh. He didn’t know what to make of the new knowledge about his family, so he focused instead on Deaton, somewhat surprised to find a white hot anger at the druid there.

Why hadn’t he helped Laura and Derek, stopped them from fleeing Beacon Hills and gotten them to safety with another pack, instead of hiding in New York, always jumping at shadows of hunters, holding down too many jobs and never being children after the fire? Stiles knew just enough from what he’d browbeat or annoyed out of Derek to have a fairly vivid picture of what life in New York had been like.

And when Derek had come back, why hadn’t Deaton helped him? Even after Derek was the Alpha,
Deaton had helped Scott, encouraged Scott toward the path of a True Alpha, leaving Derek without an emissary at his right hand. Stiles turned the possibility of Deaton offering to help Derek in his mind, but found he had doubts that it had happened. Derek was stubborn, but he would have accepted help, perhaps instead of coming to Stiles for his research, if for no other reason than to help keep Stiles out of the path of danger. He always got a pained look when he had to turn to Stiles for help, especially last summer when Scott was completely out of the loop, focusing on summer school. Derek had tried to keep Stiles as in the dark as he could manage, but he’d been hard pressed not to pump a fist in celebration of being right when Derek had admitted to Scott about the alpha pack being in town. Well, he’d been leaning toward über-Alpha or multiple packs, but he’d clearly been on the right track.

Restless, he started chewing on a hangnail and looked speculatively at the ceiling in the hallway just outside his door. He knew there was a ladder up into the attic space where a lot of his mother’s belongings were stored, but he had no idea what sort of shape they were in, it had been a few years since anyone had ventured up there. But there were boxes from his grandfather’s house too.

Hoping he wasn’t about to break his neck, he hopped off his bed and headed into the hall, tugging on the rope to the attic door, the ladder unfolding with an ominous creaking noise as it came to rest on the floor. He scrambled up one careful step after another, trying not to move too quickly, but also not keen on keeping his weight on any rung longer than he had to. One wooden slat creaked worryingly, but he climbed over it and pulled himself up onto the attic floor quickly, more trusting of the floor above than the somewhat flimsy ladder.

It took him a while to locate the cord for the bare light bulb in the middle of the room, and he cursed his lack of foresight in not grabbing a flashlight. He knocked over something small and clanging, startling himself, then his upraised arm tangled with the cord of the light, his flailing tugging the cord and flooding the room with light.

Boxes were piled around the edges of the attic, while furniture and large knick knacks were scattered through the middle open space. He ran a finger through the coating of dust on his mom’s antique writing desk, spotting a large blot of red paint that had never quite come up from one of his art projects as a kid. He moved to the outside of the room, carefully evaluating the handwriting and age on the boxes, moving from newer boxes with his handwriting on them from the last time he’d done a large spring clean of the house (and his dad hadn’t taken some boxes to Goodwill as they were marked for, he noticed) to slightly older with his Dad’s shaking handwriting, the letters made loose and shaky by grief and whiskey, to where his mom’s handwriting took over on the boxes. He passed up his baby items and settled on the slightly older boxes marked ‘Dad’. He carefully extracted them from the stacks along the wall, pulling his pocket knife out to work open the ancient looking tape. In some places it flaked easily away from his fingers, while in others it seemed to have chemically bonded with the cardboard and had to be cut away in order to open the box.

The first box contained photo albums, and finding the most recent, full of shots of his parents’ wedding, new home, his mom pregnant, Stiles set it aside, starting a pile to come back downstairs with him. His dad probably wouldn’t want to see, but Stiles wanted to go through it more closely.
The second box contained fabrics and blankets, and one soft, obviously handcrafted quilt appealed to him enough that Stiles added it to his stack. The soft inky blacks, grays and blues were stitched together in what he recognized as a rough approximation of the star swirls of Van Gogh’s ‘Starry Night’. Interestingly, the border of the quilt, on closer inspection was a lighter, silvery gray pattern of circles and crescents on black that turned out to be a repeating pattern of the cycle of the moon once Stiles had studied it closely. Crescents grew into full pale circles then waned away into full black circles, adding to his suspicions that his grandfather at least had known about werewolves, if he had not actually been the Hales’ emissary.

He tucked the remaining blankets back into the box, then set it back against the wall and turned to the third box. It was by far the heaviest, and when he cracked it open, it was clear why. The box was crammed full of journals, books and loose papers, most of which were clearly magical in nature, though most of the writing was Cyrillic, Russian most likely, as it was his grandfather’s first language. Stiles spoke very little and read none at all unfortunately, sighing in disappointment as he ran a finger over a complicated runic knot on a page with an image that depicted a caged wolf.

At the bottom of the box, Stile uncovered a dark stained wooden jewelry box. He smiled as he traced his finger over a very familiar looking triskele. He opened it carefully, the top pendant, on a woven leather cord, also looked very familiar, and after a moment, he placed it from stone work he’d seen in the tunnels under Hale house – the Hale family crest. The wolf and the eagle wings, almost able to be mistaken for a gryffin, in tangled repeating triskele knot work, with the same moon cycle pattern on the edge of the crest. For a moment, Stiles allowed himself to imagine a life if his grandfather hadn’t been killed before he was born. Maybe he’d have trained with his grandfather, would have known the Hales. Maybe someone would have been there for Derek and he wouldn’t have felt the need to run around with Kate Argent. Maybe he’d have had grasp of magic that made him cool enough that Derek would look at him with something more than reluctant fondness.

Sighing, he added the crest to his pile. If Derek ever returned, he’d give it back to him. Next in the box, he found a complicated runic knot on a similar braided cord, small chips of peridot woven into the metal. He set it with the other, to decipher later when he got his hands on Deaton’s rune guides. Several chains of silver and copper went into a pile to return to the box, along with a creepy two headed pendant, and then a final pendant Stiles stared at for a long time. It was a simple flat circle of bronze he was certain would shine once he’d polished it, with a triskele carved into it and burned in, standing out in sharp black lines. Unlike Derek’s tattoo, this triskele was a triangular center and the branches off it each resembled a growing vine, each further along in growth than the previous, so the third had both a tendril and a full leaf. “Emissary,” he said instinctively. He rummaged through the pile of chains, finding a matching bronze chain, setting both in his pile to shine later.

The final box had an odd assortment of crystals, which went straight into his pile, and a large assortment of what Danny would refer to as ‘woo-woo’ stuff. A number of coins, etched on one side with a firebird and the other with a Norse rune, fortune telling coins, he suspected, called to him particularly, as did a few of the intricate magic knots of well worn leather and crystal. He figured those were probably his grandfather’s, or maybe even his mother’s, given how they felt different from the rest of the items in the box.
Large glass jars of carefully labeled herbs had been cotton wrapped and were in surprisingly good shape. He smiled at a collection of wax sealed tin containers, each marked with a different type of wolfsbane, and the careful printed directions for healing a wolfsbane induced injury, fortunately in English, 16 in all. From his own research, he’d only encountered 22, and at a glance, could place 2 of the missing as being in his own collection in his trunk of supernatural odds and ends he’d been collecting since Scott was bitten.

To his surprise, there was a now useless vial that had once contained something very similar to Devine’s green wormwood concoction. It was now dried out and stained, but it meant there might be a safer recipe somewhere in the books. He tucked it in his pile, thinking if he rehydrated it and tried to break it down, he might find a way to replicate it. He had unwrapped a number of vials of herbs – wormwood, lavender, cardamom, coltsfoot, feverfew, dittany, juniper, star anise, mistletoe, mugwort, yarrow, sage and ylang ylang – and started to notice a pattern forming. What wasn’t for magic enhancement or control was traditionally used in love magic. Interesting combination, Stiles thought, wondering what his grandfather’s day job had been. The last thing he unwrapped from the box was a small mirror, marked with runes, and he tucked it in his pocket alongside his phone, curious to translate the runes but aware of the fragile glass, which seemed to be barely holding into the setting.

He was tucking the few items he wasn’t taking down to his room back into boxes along the wall when a shoe box fell from the top of the next stack of boxes. He reached out, but it slammed into the floor, lid falling ajar. He picked it up, the newspaper clippings inside catching his attention. At first, he thought his dad must have collected them from last year, but quickly realized the clipping about an animal attack were older, from before he was born. Several animals, pets and notably a lion from the zoo had been torn apart by what police in the next town over had speculated was a cougar that had gone rabid. A teenage girl was attacked after that and had escaped, only to die later of sepsis, Stiles uncovered as he dug deeper into the stack, easily reading through the lines on that. Rabid Alpha, and the bite didn’t take.

The last article was about Gennadiy Volkov, and Stiles’ fingers trembled as he held onto it, blinking back tears as he read. Succumbed to his wounds, he read, fingers going slack and letting the article drop back into the box.

He pulled the boxes and items out of the attic slowly, tucking herbs away on his shelves and easing the quilt over his bed. He had just finished polishing the bronze medallion with the triskele to a shine when his dad came in. He fastened the necklace around his neck and tucked it under his shirt while he waited for his dad to put up his gun and change, coming down with a grin.

“So I’m thinking pizza for dinner,” his dad started, stopping when he saw Stiles. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m having a really bad day, and the dead body barely tips the scales,” Stiles informed him, shoving his hands deep in his pockets. “How did Grandpa Volkov die?”
“Stiles, your mom figured it’d be better to tell you it was a car crash,” his dad replied carefully, but Stiles could see the wheels turning in his head. “But you must have found out it was an animal attack. And after the past few weeks, I’m starting to think those don’t really happen in Beacon Hills, do they?”

“I think… I’m pretty sure… Grandpa was the emissary to the Hale pack before Deaton,” Stiles told his dad, watching his reaction closely. “I took a bunch of his stuff out of storage in the attic, Dad. Magic stuff.”

“I always just thought it was because he was still so firmly rooted in the folk traditions, he was very old world Russian, Stiles. I barely knew him, he didn’t want me around. But he loved your Mom, and he was excited when he found out about you.”

“Magic skips generations,” Stiles remarked, folding his arms over his chest. “He probably was planning to apprentice me, and then… Fuck, Dad, it’s all messed up in my head. Deaton never wanted to be Derek’s emissary so he backed Scott, pushed for him to become a true Alpha. So that means Derek never stood a chance, and since grandpa was responsible for his family, I’m feeling responsible, and Jesus, that’s messed up if you think about it. But I don’t trust Deaton now, how could he just abandon the last of the family he swore to protect? And then there’s Morell, and she’s so loyal that she just kept on helping Deucalion even when he’d gone completely nuts and was killing her students. I want to study this, but I can’t trust the teachers, and I don’t know what to do,” he finished in a rush, and his dad came over, setting a hesitant hand on Stiles’ arm.

“What do you want to do?” John asked, and Stiles sighed, fingering the keys in his pocket.

“Would it be okay… I wanna vanish for a few days,” he told his dad. “Only you know where I am, spend time studying Talia’s journal and Grandpa’s and figure out what I’m going to do. I want to leave my phone here and have only you know where to find me. Not Scott, not Lydia, or Deaton… no one.”

“I can get you a hotel room,” his dad started to suggest, but Stiles shook his head.

“I have the keys to Derek’s loft,” he saw his dad hesitate, and added, “I’ll take my phone, but I’m only picking up for you.”

His dad’s shoulders slumped, looking lost, and Stiles pulled him into a hug. “Dad, I’ll be fine, I just need to find the truth, figure out who I am and who I’m going to be from here,” Stiles told him. “You
“Yeah,” his dad agreed, patting Stiles’ shoulder. “If you need to…” he hesitated, then pressed forward. “Look, your mom once said… something weird happened at school, you talked with her about it but she never really explained it to me. She seemed upset, and then she mentioned that maybe you should spend a summer or maybe even a year with the family in Russia. I think she was thinking that maybe they could… they could probably teach you.”

“Something tells me that’s not a solution,” Stiles said. “Mom also used to say that Grandpa had really good reasons for leaving, and she’d tell me when I was older.”

“Okay,” his dad said, pulling Stiles over to the table to sit down. “Let’s plan this carefully, so no one panics, and give you some time.”

“You’re taking this really well,” Stiles said suspiciously, and his dad shrugged.

“After everything that happened…I wanted to take you away, for a week or two, just let you recuperate, to have a moment to think before you jumped back into this craziness,” John admitted. “Deaton talked me out of it, and I’m thinking I shouldn’t have let him.”

“I get the feeling Deaton’s primary concern is Scott, and the pack, which is a change for him,” Stiles remarked, wincing at how caustic he sounded. “Dad… my focus… I’m worried.” He chewed on a hangnail for a moment, trying to find the words. “Today… it felt like it could tip into rage, to just focused anger. The things I could imagine, could almost believe I could do… it could become something bad.”

“It won’t,” his dad said, easy confidence making Stiles gape. “You won’t.”

“You don’t know—”

“I know you,” Dad said, gripping the back of Stiles’ neck firmly and making him meet his gaze. “You won’t let yourself become that, I know you won’t.”

“I could,” Stiles admitted, sighing. “I can feel it in me, I could be just like Jennifer.”
“Well,” his dad said finally. “You start deciding sacrificing virgins is the way to go, you let me know. I’ll keep you anchored in what you should do.”

“Huh,” Stiles mused, the thought not having occurred to him. “Maybe an anchor is exactly what I need. Thanks, Dad.”

“Come on, let’s get our stuff packed and I’ll drop you off at the loft. Don’t want anyone following the SUV, right?”

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Stiles wasn’t in school again on Thursday, and Allison knew she couldn’t wait much longer to ask him about the microdots. They’d been incredibly easy to make, sitting temptingly in her purse, just waiting. Scott and Isaac were ready to corner her in public if she let it go on any longer, and her visions were getting worse, Kate and her mom in the mirror while she’d done her makeup that morning.

“You okay?” Lydia asked, frowning as she handed Allison her blush. “Use it, hon, looks like you didn’t even remember yours this morning.”

“I didn’t sleep well,” she deflected, and Lydia huffed disbelievingly.

“You haven’t slept well in ages, and you’re avoiding Scott and Isaac,” she said, snatching back the blush. “Enough, let’s go,” she said, tugging her purse and keys out of her locker.

“Go where?” Allison asked.

“We’re blowing off chemistry, not like we have a teacher yet,” Lydia replied. “We’re going to that new makeup place down on 3rd, having them do your face up perfectly, grab lattes over at the coffee place you like so much, then come back for lunch, and you can face the music like a woman, Allison. A decently made up, well caffeinated woman who has fully discussed her decision with her best friend.”

Allison tucked her textbooks back in her locker, looking over at Lydia, whose face may have been set in her usual indifferent resolve, but her eyes were soft with sympathy. “Thanks,” she said, linking arms with Lydia.
“Play your cards right, we’ll probably have time for me to updo your hair before we come back,” Lydia added, breezing out of the school, waving off Danny and Ethan with a quick glare. Allison rolled her eyes, knowing they’d be headed straight to Scott to tell him the girls were blowing off school.

“So,” Lydia said as soon as they were in her car and sliding out of the parking lot. “What’s your big problem?”

“Come on, dating two werewolves, who are clearly just as interested in dating each other?” Allison burst out, pressing her fingers to her forehead. “God, Lydia, doesn’t that seem weird, even for us?”

“You’re looking at it all wrong,” Lydia replied, breezily confident. “Stop looking at it as three weird relationships, and treat it like one, strength in numbers, relationship of equals.”

“Polyandrous relationship,” Allison filled in, and when Lydia arched a single eyebrow at her, she added, “Let’s just say I’m really glad Danny taught me how to wipe the internet history on my computer.”

“Well, then you should know it’s do-able, because they want to be together, same as you want to be with them. But you’re treating it like it’s going to be three completely separate relationships, which is understandable, that’s your frame of reference. But Allison, it’s not like that. It’s also three people on a date, three people in the same bed,” Lydia said, pulling into a parking spot and putting it into park and giving her a faux glare. “I think I’m actually jealous.”

“Right,” Allison laughed. “You wouldn’t be worried about your reputation?”

“Please, half the school thinks the whole pack is basically having orgies every Friday night,” Lydia said, guiding Allison to the makeup store. “Last week I overheard some freshman girl spreading a rumor that Danny and I regularly swap twins whenever we feel like it.”

“Really?” Allison snorted. “One is gay and one is straight, how does that work?”

“Interestingly, I think that has something to do with what Isaac said, about wolves being naturally unconcerned about gender,” Lydia remarked. “Now that they’re no longer joined… at the hip, so to speak, the traits they shared went one way or another. Before Beacon Hills, I don’t think they were so specifically inclined.”
“One straight, one gay,” Allison concluded, understanding Lydia was talking about how the twins could no longer do their merge together trick.

“Precisely,” Lydia held a smoky eye palette up to Allison speculatively, nodding when one of the saleswomen came over. “She’s not sleeping, and she’s got to look good for this afternoon,” she informed the woman. “Really, really good. Like, rivaling me.”

Allison found herself in a tall chair, with a dizzying array of Lydia and the saleswoman working on her, talking colors and skin types and concealer over her head. She relaxed, closing her eyes and letting go when Lydia started looping braids into her hair and the saleswoman eased eye shadow across her lids.

Half an hour later, barely able to recognize herself and the smoky eyes in the mirror (though Kate had plenty to say about it), she was still protesting that Lydia had purchased one of everything the saleswoman had used on her. “I won’t be able to do this myself,” she said, and Lydia narrowed her eyes at her as she held the coffee shop door open for Allison.

“You’ll just have to practice till it’s perfect,” Lydia replied. “Besides, its main job is to get you through the conversation at lunch, right?”

“Right,” Allison agreed, feeling the bottom of her stomach drop out. In the corner of her eye, in the large, bright windows at the front of the coffee shop, her mom looked on, arms crossed and lips pursed in disapproval. “Hey,” she dug a five dollar bill out of her pocket and handed it to Lydia. “Get me a Basic Benefits Smoothie with extra agave,” she said. “I shouldn’t have the caffeine if I plan to sleep tonight, right?”

“Oh okay,” Lydia replied, looking puzzled.

“Bathroom,” Allison excused herself, making sure Lydia shrugged it off with her usual aplomb, before she headed for the bathroom. She locked the door behind her, opening her purse to find the strip of microdots of wormwood she’d secured in a small side pocket.

“Drugs, Allison?” her mom snarled from the mirror, and Allison looked up. “Werewolves, banshees, drugs… I don’t even know who you are.”

“You’re not my mother,” Allison muttered, tearing free a microdot and setting it under her tongue to
dissolve. “And I’m done listening to you.”

She straightened a loose hair, watched the image in the mirror fade, and let herself smile. “Right, let’s go to school,” she said, marching out to rejoin Lydia.

-Jack, in true Jackson form, had greeted Derek Thursday evening at the small London café they’d agreed to meet at by sitting down, sniffing, and grimacing. “What the hell happened to you?” he asked, stretching out his legs and grinning at a waitress who pointedly ignored him. “You’re a beta again?”

“It was a thing,” Derek replied vaguely. “Saved my sister’s life.” He and Cora had first gone to Granada, then Barcelona, then into Paris, before they made their way to London via the bullet train once they’d had their fill of art museums. Cora was sketching again, like she had when she was much younger, and she’d pressed a pencil and drawing pad into Derek’s hands a few times, and he’d humored her, his skills rusty but slowly coming back. He’d done some rough blueprints of what he’d seen at Notre Dame, unable to resist the beautiful architecture.

“Huh,” Jackson shrugged, his loose limbed sprawl widening when the waitress passed again. “Talked to Lydia a while back. She said something about another of your psycho girlfriends taking you out. You should have Danny run background checks before you date anyone else.”

Derek didn’t bother replying, letting his scowl do his talking, and Jackson sat up a little straighter in response to the displeased look. “You gonna be in London for a while?”

“A week, maybe less,” Derek replied, narrowing his eyes. “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t pass that on to Lydia until after I’d left.”

“We don’t talk that much,” Jackson replied easily. “I love her, she’s helped me find my anchor… but neither of us is capable of maintaining a connection across continents.”

“She’s dating a werewolf,” Derek supplied, and Jackson flashed a grin that was more teeth than smile.

“I think I preferred it when she was just fucking blonde look alikes,” Jackson replied. “But as long
as it’s not Stiles, I don’t have anything to worry about.”

That had Derek raising an eyebrow. “Lydia ever figures out that together they could remake the world, and I’m out. As long as she doesn’t see it though… They could burn the whole planet with their minds, you know,” Jackson said. “Then again, she says Stiles seems to have moved on. You have anything to do with that?”

Derek sneered at Jackson, who chuckled. “Yeah, I thought that was still the way of it.”

Jackson finally managed to wrangle a cup of tea out of the waitress while they talked, which would have been impressive if he hadn’t actually ordered coffee. Derek learned that Jackson was acquainted with a number of werewolves in London, but hadn’t joined any pack. He was content in the large city to drift through groups, and London was so large and home to so many packs that the permissive, lax system was the only way the city survived.

They were finishing up when Jackson blurted out, “I’m applying to Berkeley. Among others, obviously. I guess I thought… I assumed you’d still be my Alpha if I came back.”

Derek made Jackson wait a long moment, and then smirked. “McCall will have you in his pack,” he reassured his beta. “You may have to ask nicely though.”

“Nicely,” Jackson scoffed, but whatever he had planned on following up with was cut off but the shrill beep of an incoming message on Derek’s mobile. It was a disposable phone he’d picked up when he and Cora had landed at Heathrow, only Cora and Jackson having the number, so he glanced at the message.

It took him a moment to recognize Stiles’s number, and he clicked on the multimedia message once he did. Warren Zeevon’s “Werewolves of London” was barely recognizable through the tinny speaker. “Funny,” Derek quipped. “Guess you already told Lydia I was here and she passed the number on to Stiles?”

“Seriously, last time I Skyped her was two weeks ago,” Jackson replied as Derek typed a reply of, ‘ha ha very funny’ to Stiles. “Stilinski probably got the number from your sister.”

“Maybe,” Derek replied, but since Cora hadn’t even brought up Beacon Hills in the three weeks since they left, he doubted it.
Stiles didn’t respond to him.
In Germany’s Black Forest, Stiles’ sent him the worst cover of Sam the Sham and the Pharoh’s “Little Red Riding Hood” that Derek had ever heard. Even Cora winced at it. Neither of them could even bring themselves to blame it on the poor sound quality of the little refurbished piece of junk phone Derek had bought at their hostel.

But Stiles still didn’t respond to his return texts.

In Egypt, a full week after the first message, with a third phone and phone number, Derek confronted Cora. “No,” she replied, looking over at his phone. “What’d he send you?”

Derek clicked open the message, which took even longer to load on the very low tech burner phone he’d bought in Cairo than the German phone, and the unmistakable melody of “Walk like an Egyptian” started playing.

Cora fell off the bed laughing, the lighthearted display and free laughter surprising Derek into forgetting the oddity of Stiles managing to track him down once again. “At least he’s stalking you in awesome Stilinski fashion,” she sighed happily.

Derek forced a smile for her, hoping that’s all it was, as Stiles still hadn’t responded to any of his return texts.
In Casablanca, it was “As Time Goes By.”

Stiles still hadn’t responded to a single one of Derek’s text messages back.

After the message arrived, Derek had sent half a dozen replies, asking point blank at the end of the barrage if everything was ok.

Stiles didn’t respond.
They ended up back in London on a Monday, five weeks after the lunar eclipse, after spending the full moon in the forests of Romania. Derek felt drawn back to London, liking the large city, and surprisingly, Cora had agreed. He knew it was partly to do with reconnecting with his one remaining wolf, now that Isaac had joined Scott’s pack.

Cora was sprawled on a couch in Jackson’s room in his parent’s flat, her legs dangling over Jackson’s lap and Jackson not even blinking at the encroachment of his space. “…parents end up being back in New York during the break, so I have the flat to myself and then as soon as they’re back, I head back to boarding school in Lancaster,” he was explaining to her.

“You say boarding school, and I think bunk beds and matrons with rulers stalking the halls, like some BBC period drama,” Cora admitted, and Jackson smirked.

“Hardly,” he replied. “I have my own apartment, commute in to classes. It’s more like I’ve gone to college a couple years early.”

“Driving on the wrong side of the road?” Cora teased him, and they fell into bickering good naturally while Derek listened with one ear. He frowned and pulled out his phone when he felt it vibrate against his hip a moment later. “Ooh, tell me it’s one of Stilinski’s stalker messages,” Cora bounded over, grinning widely. “God, I’d love to know how he’s doing it.”

Derek raised an eyebrow at her pointedly, and she raised her hands in protest. “Swear to God, Derek, I’m not giving him your numbers or telling him where we are.”

“Sure,” Derek replied dryly, clicking the link to start loading the message. “Next phone I get, I’m not giving you the number. Then we’ll see.”

“Where are you two headed next?” Jackson asked, and Cora shrugged.

“We’re debating Athens, or maybe Venice,” she told him. “If we go to Venice, though, I want to go up to Vatican City, see if lightning strikes me down.”
“Maybe I’ll tag along,” Jackson stretched idly. “I have three weeks before classes start again.”

“God, three weeks with you?” Cora snorted, shoving at Jackson’s shoulder playfully. “I’d sooner —”

“Help! I need somebody! Help! Not just anybody. Help!” Derek’s phone rang out before he managed to fumble to hit the pause button.

“Maybe it’s just his idea of a joke?” Cora said weakly, sitting back on the cushions heavily. “Abbey Road’s not far from here?”

“It’s the other side of London,” Jackson replied quietly.

Derek flipped through the phone’s functions, and dialed back Stiles’s number, noticing that the other two werewolves didn’t even pretend that they weren’t eavesdropping. “The number you have reached has been disconnected or is no longer in service. If you feel you have reached this recording in error…”

Derek disconnected the line, and Jackson grabbed his house phone. “Your calling plan is probably crap,” he said, taking Derek’s phone from his hand to see the number and dial it himself. Derek stood, crossing the apartment to look out the large French windows at the Thames, the British flag flying in the distance above the palace.

“The number you have reached has been disconnected or is no longer in service. If you feel you have reached this recording in error, please hang up and try your call again.”

He closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against the glass for a moment, mind racing. “He smelled odd, before we left,” Cora recalled quietly. “And I don’t care how pissed he is at you for leaving, he would’ve texted you back when you asked if he was okay.”

“Call Scott,” he said finally, turning to Jackson, hesitating before adding, “Don’t let on that anything is wrong.” He kept his eyes on the Union Jack, gently flipping in the breeze, until he heard the call connect through Jackson’s phone.
“Hello?”

“Hey Scott, it’s Jackson,” Jackson greeted the Alpha cheerfully, too cheerfully. Derek tried not to scowl, hoping Jackson didn't spill the whole thing too quickly.

“Jackson?” There was a long pause, and then in a rush, Scott continued, “Are you okay? Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, sorry, I just figured… I should check in,” Jackson replied, rolling his eyes at Derek’s glare. “Uh, I mean, I'm planning on applying to UC Berkley, I guess I wanted to…”

“No worries, man, you’re welcome back anytime, though we’re a beacon for all sorts of supernatural crap lately,” Scott said easily, almost too lightly. “You should call though, if you’re going to come down to Beacon Hills, if you visit, and we'll get you set up with one of the pack to stay with. Stiles, aren’t you applying to Berkley too?”

Even through two phone lines, Derek could catch the affirmative answer in Stiles’ easy, familiar voice.

“Hey, yeah, I tried to reach him earlier about application essays and his phone was disconnected,” Jackson pounced on the opportunity to Derek’s relief. “Berkley totally sent me the wrong ones, for International students, but I need the citizen version. Was hoping he could email it faster than they’ll mail it.”

“Yeah, I crashed my Jeep about a month back, and the phone was a lost cause, but didn’t disconnect from the grid or something, so they couldn’t save my number.” Stiles’ discontented grumble was clearer through the phone now; Scott must have put the call on speakerphone. “I’ll email you my new number with the essay stuff.”

“Thanks,” Jackson replied, unable to keep the surprise from his voice.

“Whatever, I know you’re smart, and I could probably use the essay help if you’re up for trading,” Stiles shot back. They bantered for a moment, everything almost too easy, too normal. Cora was frowning slightly at the phone as well.

“Hey, have you heard from Derek since he left?” Jackson asked, and Derek lifted an eyebrow
curiously. Jackson waved him off easily.

“Nah, he hasn’t checked in. His phone’s been disconnected, so I’ve got no idea where he’s wandered off to,” Stiles replied. Jackson traded a look with Derek, who shook his head minutely. He turned it over in his head slowly. He and Stiles weren’t what he could easily describe as friends, even if he perhaps idly hoped for more at times, but he’d expected something slightly more in reaction to Jackson bringing him up, especially if he’d been sending messages.

“I was trying to reach him?” Jackson prompted.

“Maybe try email, I’ve got nothing,” Stiles replied.

“Hey, listen, someone’s at the door, so I’ve gotta run,” Jackson said quickly. “Send me your number, let’s talk soon.”

He wrapped the call up as Derek turned back out to watch the flag again, thinking. “Derek,” Cora said softly, and he looked down at her, hating the pinched misery in her eyes. “I don’t know if I can handle going back,” she admitted, looking sick as she said it.

“I know,” he said, tilting his head against the glass again. “I know. But… Stiles.”

“Yeah,” she whispered. “Something feels really wrong about this. And I know… I mean, you have to go back. I know how you…”

“So Cora stays with me,” Jackson said. Derek turned a glare on Jackson, suddenly suspicious.

“Stays with you, at school?” he growled, and Jackson nodded.

“I have a two bedroom place, and I’ll tell him to keep it quiet, but Danny can hack her records, leave good enough grades for her to enroll in Lancaster Girls Grammar, just down the road from me at Royal Grammar. She stays safe, with pack, and you come back once you find out what’s going on.”

“Pack,” Cora repeated faintly, and Jackson shrugged.
“Derek may not be an alpha, but he’s the one that made me,” Jackson justified it casually, before putting up his usual tough front. “Besides, if you think I’m taking Scott McCall as my Alpha, you must be joking.”

“What do you want?” Derek asked Cora, torn.

“I want you to go help Stiles, because I think he needs it,” she replied, folding her arms over her chest. “Find out what’s going on, because dead phones don’t send out distress calls. But Stiles wasn’t lying when he said he didn’t know where you are. I could hear his heartbeat through the line.” Derek nodded his agreement; there hadn’t been any lies he could detect either.

“Maybe it’s not Stiles,” Jackson suggested. “If the phone was lost, at the nemeton that night, maybe someone else found it?”

“The Darach maybe?” Cora said. “They never found Jennifer’s body.”

“Or maybe it’s something else,” Derek replied, shrugging. “But I think I have to at least check into it. The only question is if I’m going with you or on my own.”

Cora looked torn, biting her lip. “Call Danny,” Derek said decisively for her. “No mention of me, no mention I’m coming back to Beacon Hills. It’ll be easier to stay off the radar without you along anyway,” he told his sister gruffly. “If we’re worried for nothing, they’ll never know I was there and we’ll meet in Venice.”

“If you need us, you call and we’ll come,” Cora said, looking to Jackson, who nodded in agreement. “No Lone Ranger bullshit, hear me?”

“Maybe I’ll look for a place in London or Lancaster when I get back,” Derek told her, forcing a faint smile to his face. “I think it’d be nice to stay here till you’re both ready to go to college.” It was apparently the right thing to say; Cora threw her arms around him and some tension he hadn’t realized Jackson had been carrying eased away.

Jackson settled in on the phone and computer with Danny while Derek and Cora went back to the hotel to grab their belongings. “Does this make you an alpha again,” she teased him, and he let his eyes flare briefly. “Guess not,” she sighed, and he reached out, touching her arm.
“Having you and Jackson at my back, like a pack, I can feel it,” he admitted, rolling his shoulders uncomfortably forward. “It’s not like being an alpha, but something more than beta too. I don’t…”

“I know what Peter said, that you gave up the power for me,” Cora told him, shaking her head. “But does it really work like that? Even if we burn out everything healing ourselves, have to sleep for days and heal over weeks, eventually our power comes back, Derek. Maybe it’s just going to take time?"

“Maybe,” Derek replied, shrugging. “Not sure I want to be the Alpha again. Not sure how Mom and Laura managed it.”

“Mom and Laura weren’t introverts who wanted a quiet life at home,” Cora reminded him. “You were always happiest curled up in Dad’s library when they hosted pack gatherings. You and him, pretending you were just stepping out to go to the bathroom. Mom would be so mad when she’s found you two hours later, curled up in those horrible armchairs he loved.”

“I’m surprised you remember,” Derek said, sighing. “You were only eleven when the Argents put an end to all that.”

“Hard to forget Mom that one night, telling Dad he had to stop treating you like a human, you needed to be pack. He was so angry he threw that big vase at her and she started laughing…” Cora’s words were tumbling out like she couldn’t stop them. “And then Dad was laughing and saying you were always going to be his quiet little beta and then it was like overnight, boom, you suddenly were going out of your way to be social, please Mom, join the basketball team, and—”

“Hey,” Derek stopped her by reaching over and latching his hand into hers. “It wasn’t because of that. Not just that,” he amended when she gave him a pointed look. “Peter came back, and suddenly it seemed so easy to be popular, to do whatever Mom wanted,” he admitted. “Then there was Paige, and…”

“Peter told Stiles and I about her, about how the bite killed her,” Cora said. “I don’t think you asked Ennis to do it though.”

“Peter say that?” Derek guessed, shrugging. “No, it was his idea, not sure what his endgame was, but he asked Ennis. I just… didn’t stop him. Par for the course with me, I guess.”
“Stop it,” Cora scowled, hitting his arm hard. “So, is that why you hooked up with Kate?”

“Stiles told you?” Derek asked. When she nodded, he groaned. “Wish I knew how he got the whole story.”

“His dad put a lot of it together, trying to prove the fire was arson and link it to Kate. He had put together a lot about her having too much info, that she must have had information about the house and family,” Cora explained. “When Stiles put that together with how long she spent torturing you, I guess he filled in the blanks.”

“Not a pretty picture,” Derek muttered, surprised when Cora grabbed one of his ears and jerked. “Oww, what the hell, Cora?”

“You were 16, she was 24,” she snarled, eyes flashing golden. “Whatever picture you think it paints, you better believe both Stiles and I place any blame on Kate. You never would have been with her if you’d known what she was. She took advantage.”

Derek started to object, but backed down from the violent look on his sister’s face. “Why’d Stiles have to be the one to figure it out,” he grumbled, and to his surprise Cora started laughing.

“Oh, Derek, you’re hopeless,” she informed him. “He figured it out, because he’s always been paying attention.”

“I… I shouldn’t know what that means,” Derek admitted, ducking his head.

“He’s 17 and has both eyes wide open, big bro,” Cora reminded him. “He’s not you.”

He pulled into the parking lot of Jackson’s apartment building, helping Cora unload her stuff. “Just keep that in mind, okay?” she said, and he nodded his agreement.

Jackson met them at the door, moving Cora’s stuff to the guest room and looking excited. “Don’t date Jackson,” Derek remarked in pained tones, pitching his voice for Jackson to overhear.

“Eww,” she replied immediately, punching Derek in the arm, while Jackson made a gagging noise
from down the hall. “He’s just excited to have a pack,” Cora insisted, and Jackson returned to the room, hovering just where the hall met the drawing room. Cora exchanged a look with Derek, giving him a tight hug before vanishing up the hall.

“I know you don’t get why I’m doing this,” Jackson said, clearing his throat. “But, I don’t want McCall as my alpha. It’s not some petty high school thing,” he added, when Derek rolled his eyes. “McCall wants to save everyone. I… sometimes I wish you’d stopped me, I wish he’d let you kill me, so I wouldn’t be living like…”

Derek swallowed hard, unable to speak but willing to wait Jackson out. “I’m scared all the time that I’ll revert, that someone will use me again,” Jackson admitted roughly. “I can barely live with the blood I have on my hands now. Whoever my alpha is, red eyes or not, I want someone who understands why I wouldn’t want to be saved again. If I lose myself again, I don’t want to come back from it. I think I probably wouldn’t come back right. I’m barely all right now.” He was whispering at the end, and Derek understood the scraped out, raw feeling Jackson was describing all too well.

“I get it,” Derek replied, arm feeling leaden as he held a hand out to Jackson. Jackson stumbled past it and hugged Derek, throat carefully bared and tilted away, presenting himself as though Derek were still an alpha, his alpha, and Derek went very still, fighting his own fear before he relaxed, carefully setting his lips over Jackson’s pulse and pulling him in to a hug.

“Thanks,” Jackson voice was gruff when he spoke finally, pulling away and Derek pretended not to notice him rubbing his eyes clear.

“Cora, let’s go, I don’t want to miss my flight,” he called out.

-D-5-

Danny waited nervously at the airport, flipping the cardstock sign in his fingers and tugging the black cap he’d donned mainly as a joke, while he waited. The airport was busy, as two large transatlantic flights had arrived simultaneously, and Danny fidgeted, worried he would miss the passenger he was looking for.

He turned back to his left, jumping in startled nervous energy when Derek lifted an eyebrow, having noiselessly made it up to his side. “This is not what I call flying under the radar,” he snarled, plucking the cardstock marked ‘Hale’ from Danny’s fingers.
Jackson told me you were coming, and maybe needed my help,” Danny burst out, fighting the urge to gulp nervously under the withering stare. Okay, he’d brow beaten it out of Jackson and threatened not to do his favor till Jackson cracked and spilled everything. Derek didn’t need to know that though. “Look, you’re here because of Stiles, right?”

Derek grabbed on to Danny’s elbow, tugging him aside and eyes flashing once they were out of the main flow of traffic. “You should start talking,” he advised Danny in a low growl.

“No one else thinks anything is wrong,” Danny admitted, shoulders slumping slightly as worry took over from his nerves. “Stiles is back to normal, like the nemeton never happened. He picked a fight with Deaton, so he’s not studying to be an emissary, and Deaton’s not around much right now, so when I finally cornered him and asked, he just did that whole enigmatic blow me off thing. Stiles is chasing Lydia again, which keeps her flattered and not really paying much attention, but two weeks ago, when he had the nemeton’s focus, he couldn’t care less about flirting with her.”

“So something was wrong before,” Derek frowned, looking puzzled.

“No, the nemeton’s influence sucked, but at least it was real, what everyone was dealing with,” Danny explained. “Stiles suddenly being reset like none of it every happened, that’s not natural.”

Derek was silent, and Danny pressed on, “You wouldn’t be here if I was wrong.”

“I’ve been getting messages, from his old phone,” Derek admitted. “I know he damaged it the night of the lunar eclipse—”

“No, it was more recent than that,” Danny broke in, puzzled. “It was like two weeks ago, when he was out sick for a few days. He came back with a new phone, said the old one got fried going through the washer and dryer.”

“He told Jackson it was when he crashed the Jeep,” Derek said.

“He lied, then, and you didn’t know,” Danny guessed, reading the bunched eyebrows on Derek’s face as confusion. “There’s some other stuff you should know, about what’s going on around here, but I don’t think this is the place to talk,” he added, and Derek fell into step as Danny ushered him out toward the car.
“Okay,” Derek said, once they were in Danny’s car. “First, are you the only one who knows I’m here?”

“Yeah, just me,” Danny admitted. “Scott mentioned at lunch yesterday that Jackson had brought you up in his call. It seemed odd, so when he Skyped me for a favor for Cora, I pushed for details. Jackson’s always been lousy at keeping stuff from me,” he added apologetically.

“It’s fine, I think you can help me anyway,” Derek said, looking thoughtful as he eyed Danny. “As long as your hacking skills work when I’m not stripping.”

Danny felt his cheeks heat and laughed awkwardly. “Uh, yeah, I can mange,” he replied.

“Well, fill me in,” Derek said shortly.

“Deucalion’s dead, and we’re pretty sure Peter killed him,” Danny started. “The weird part is, even though he left the body and put a declaration of war on it, he hasn’t done anything yet.”

“Something must have gone wrong with his plan, or he’d have struck by now,” Derek concluded, and Danny found himself nodding in agreement.

Exactly, and there’s a lot of creatures coming to Beacon Hills. We’re pretty sure the new chemistry teacher is an incubus or vampire of some sort. The English teacher is a Selkie. There’s a new girl who’s a kitsune, and some type of were-out at the college, I forget what type. Sheriff Stilinski picked up an omega werewolf for a deputy, one who won’t swear allegiance to Scott, which he’s not nearly alarmed enough about, if you ask me, but Scott’s letting him stay. The bakery hired a girl who turned out to be a psychic of some sort and had it out for Deaton, so he’s been distracted by that and Stiles being mad at him, so he’s no help. I think it’s gotten bad, he’s literally vanished for the past three days.” Danny took a deep breath before plunging on. “And that’s just the stuff from outside the pack.”

“If it falls into teen drama, you can spare me,” Derek growled warningly, and Danny smiled helplessly, sort of seeing why Stiles liked the dour werewolf.

“Well, Scott, Isaac, and Allison are having some weird, three way sort of relationship, which is why they’re a little distracted,” Danny muttered rebelliously, enjoying the flicker of surprise that got from the older man. “Yeah, I guess that’s typical teen drama.”
“Do their parents--?”

“No, god, no!” Danny burst out, laughing. “That shit hasn’t hit the fan yet. But… look, there’s this drug, made of wormwood. I think Stiles brought it to you last summer.”

Derek nodded, making a vague affirmative noise. “Is it dangerous?” Danny asked, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel.

“For humans,” Derek nodded. “Especially psychics. It’s fine to do a small dose, maybe once or twice a year, I told Stiles.”

“Allison came up with this system, microdots,” Danny continued. “She says since it’s a small enough dose, she can take it daily. Stiles kind of okayed it.”

“Stiles did?” Derek snarled, startled. “He knows better than that, she’s going to blow her psychic receptors wide open.”

“What does that mean?” Danny asked, once Derek was sunk back in his thoughts.

“She’ll make herself receptive to magic, or maybe all sorts of supernatural energy,” Derek explained. “Maybe able to look at a werewolf and tell what they are, even if they’re perfectly in control. Or maybe she’ll start seeing ghosts. Depends on what sorts of talent her brain is hard wired for.”

“And the influence of the nemeton?” Danny asked, and Derek winced.

“Yeah, that’ll become more present, permanent,” Derek confirmed. “How long has she…”

“Maybe two weeks?” Danny guessed.

“She’ll have done some damage, but maybe not irreversible,” Derek said finally, looking troubled. “We’d need Deaton’s help to know for sure.”
“Not likely, but we can try,” Danny sighed. “What do you think is wrong with Stiles?”

“Possession, maybe?” Derek guessed, but from the furrowed eyebrows, Danny thought the older man wasn’t buying it. “Or maybe he’s—” Derek froze, and Danny jerked the car into park in front of his house a little more quickly than necessary.

“Sorry,” he apologized when Derek glared at him. “You just looked like… you had an idea?”

“You said your English teacher is a Selkie?” he repeated, and Danny nodded, waiting, as Derek thought. “How do you know she is?”

“Scott said she smelled like the ocean,” Danny replied. “Then after class, she showed him and Stiles her pelt, promised she was just there to teach.”

“How do you know she’s a Selkie, and not a Siren?” Derek asked, looking blankly at Danny.

“Uh… I mean, she said she was, and I guess because Scott didn’t hear her lie?” Danny replied.

“It wouldn’t be a lie. Sirens used to be Selkies,” Derek told him. “They killed another Selkie and stole their pelt. They can use it to shapeshift, look like someone who has handled the stolen pelt.”

“And you think Stiles touched it,” Danny said, and Derek actually rolled his eyes.

“It’s Stiles.”

“You know, this stuff really ought to be written down somewhere,” Danny said impatiently.

“It used to be,” Derek sighed, eyes distant and looking North, toward the Preserve. “My mom had a collection of past Alphas' Bestiaries, even kept her own.”

That sparked something for Danny. “A red leather bound journal?” he asked, reaching into the back seat for his backpack, rummaging through it and ignoring the fact that Derek was trying to bore a hole in him with his stare.
“It burned,” Derek gritted out through clenched teeth, but Danny tugged out the journal he’d swiped from Stiles a couple days ago.

“How?” Derek demanded, grabbing it from Danny’s hands. Despite the violence of the initial snatch, Derek was handling it now with kid gloves, reverently running finger tips over the faded handwriting inside.

“Not sure,” Danny admitted. “I swiped it two days ago from Stiles, or faux Stiles, or whatever. Before he went weird, Stiles was obsessed with reading it. If I had to guess, I’d say he probably got it from Deaton. It was about the time he started training.”

“You have somewhere we can work?” Derek asked, closing the book gently.

“My parents are out of town for the next week,” Danny admitted, juggling his keys awkwardly. “At least the next week. They, uh… they work a lot and travel for work…”

“I get it,” Derek said quietly, and Danny nodded gratefully.

“Anyway, my siblings both have rooms on the ground floor, master suite’s on the second floor, and the attic is all mine,” Danny explained, gesturing with his house key at each level. “As long as you’re quiet, they’ll never even know you’re here, plus, they won’t be home for a few more hours, if they come home at all. They… uh, a lot of their friends have them sleep over when Mom and Dad are gone.”

Danny’s room was a bit messier than he wanted for having someone over, but Jackson hadn’t given him much of a heads up, plus he hadn’t wanted to put away the research he’d had in progress. His queen size bed was mostly covered in notes and books he’d stolen from the library or swiped when Stiles and Deaton weren’t looking. It was a bad habit, his occasional light fingers and hacking, but Danny liked knowing if he needed something, he had the skills to take it.

The wall to the right was taken up by three desks running the length and width of the far corner, and those were dominated by four screens and half a dozen CPUs, along with two laptops. “It’s… well, you know I’m a hacker,” he shrugged, deciding that former Alpha werewolves who squatted in burned down houses couldn’t really judge. “There’s a third laptop in the bag on the shelf you can use if you need to,” Danny explained. “The CPU’s are networked, not enough of them to make my own supercomputer, but it’s not bad.”
He crossed to his closet, dragging out his air mattress, tossing it next to his bed, along with some spare blankets and pillows. “No complaining, it was good enough for Jackson,” he informed Derek, who simply raised an eyebrow.

“I have a place,” Derek reminded him, and Danny snorted, suddenly feeling amused.

“Yeah, and you’re trying to stay under the radar, right?” he responded. “Showing up at the loft that Stiles has keys to sounds like an awesome way to do that.”

Derek was silent for a moment, inclining his head in acknowledgment finally. “Thanks,” he said.

“So, here’s the thing,” Danny said, settling on his bed and flipping open one of his moleskins to jot down what Derek had told him about Sirens and Selkies. “Can someone else use the Selkies’ pelt to change shape? Cuz I saw Stiles and Ms. Kelly in the same room earlier today, so that’d maybe clear her?”

“I don’t know,” Derek admitted, and Danny watched him setting up the air mattress for a moment.

“That’d mean she’d have a partner, and well… you said Peter is up to something.” Danny doodled a little manatee in a pool on the side of his scrawl, then added a quick, cartoonish wolf to the side of the pool. When he looked up, Derek was staring at him. “What?” he asked.

“The reason I know about Sirens and Selkies,” Derek said slowly. “It’s because of Peter. He told my sister and I this story about rescuing a Siren who had a thousand faces. My mom told us it was a faery tale, since to have a thousand faces, she’d have had to kill hundreds of Selkies.”

“No offense, man, but that sounds like your Uncle’s type of friend,” Danny replied.

Derek unzipped his bag and tossed Danny a plastic Boots bag. “The messages,” Derek explained, when Danny dumped out a handful of fairly basic mobile phones. “I just got a different disposable phone in each country,” he added when Danny wrinkled his nose at them. “Didn’t see much point in getting a nice unlocked one and swapping SIM cards till I figured out what I was going to do next.”
Danny nodded, powering up the most basic one and hooking it up to his laptop with a cable. “Dude,” he breathed out a moment later when the data came up on screen. “I can see the message,” he said, when Derek looked curious. “Here,” he pulled up the information linked to a text message from Jackson. “That’s what it looks like when I pull the data I need for tracking from Jackson’s text message to this phone.”

He showed Derek the screen, which while filled with a lot of technical directions and additions, had clear locator phrases and numbers to work with.

“Okay?” Derek asked, sounding carefully neutral, not understanding.

Danny clicked over, showing Derek the message from Stiles. The screen was filled, edge to edge, with Cyrillic symbols. “That’s Stiles’ message.”

“That’s not English,” Derek observed, shrugging when Danny rolled his eyes.

“Thanks, Einstein,” he quipped, popping open a translation program and pasting it over. The program popped a progress bar, took far longer than usual, and spit out an error message. “It’s not any modern language. Stiles isn’t just hitting a few buttons on his phone, this is probably some sort of voodoo woo woo shit of his.”

“What does that mean?” Derek asked, and Danny sighed.

“How long does it normally take to get a new message from him, after you’ve activated a new phone?” Danny asked, and Derek dug a new prepaid phone out of his bag, still in the packaging and tossed it to Danny.

“Shortest time was four hours,” Derek replied. “Be sure to register it to my name. If he’s using magic to search me out, he’s probably looking for the ownership.”

“You just picked this up at the airport?” Danny asked, a little dumbfounded. Derek shrugged.

“Figured I might need more clues to find him.”
“Until the last message, they’ve all been about you, right? Basically a call out of knowing where you are?” Danny said, thumbing through the Moroccan phone and suppressing a smile when he recognized the song.

“Except the last one, when I went back to London,” Derek agreed. “That one was ‘Help’.”

“Did Cora get any messages?” Danny asked, frowning as another attempt to force a trace through another phone failed, generating the same errors. “No, if he were reaching out broadly, he’d have hit Scott’s phone or someone here, so no Cora. Which means it’s you, but once whatever he’s trying finds you’re out of network, so to speak, it stops trying. Wonder if that’ll change when we register a local number. But why you?”

Derek stared at Danny, who waved off the implied threat easily. “Not that,” Danny said. “I don’t care if you want to go on ignoring him, pretending you don’t know he’s attracted to you, but he’s got stronger ties than that, his magic would find those.”

“Cora thinks it’s not Stiles, maybe it’s Jennifer,” Derek suggested, apparently on board with Danny’s ‘let’s ignore it’ plan.

“She’s dead, so that’d be even freakier,” Danny replied, looking over when Derek’s head jerked up in surprise. “Sorry, I guess that happened after you left. Some hikers found her body, laid out on top of the nemeton. Looked like wild animals, and no one really wanted to dig into it too much since they traced all the sacrifices back to her. Stiles said he thought it was Peter, but no one paid attention then, not till after Deucalion got his throat ripped out too.”

“That’s an insane amount of power,” Derek mused. “What’s Peter waiting for?”

“I had a thought, probably a dumb one, but after what happened with Ethan and Aiden, and Stiles mentioned you gave up your Alpha powers. How would you get them back now?” Danny asked. “Just kill another Alpha, right?”

“Theoretically,” Derek agreed. “But… once you’ve lost the power, sometimes the second chance doesn’t go well.”

“Yeah, happened to Aiden,” Danny agreed. Derek raised an eyebrow, looking blankly at him. “Right, forgot to mention that, didn’t I? Old rival of theirs showed up, and Aiden took care of it, but we’re guessing he couldn’t absorb the Alpha powers right, he’s been unconscious in the hospital ever
since. Which is why Ethan’s not…” he gestured to the room, hoping it conveyed how distant his boyfriend had been for the past week. Things had been rough ever since he’d let Danny in on the big secret, Danny knew, but this was worse, like it had taken Ethan and Aiden out at once.

“And animal attacks?” Derek asked, and Danny saw the werewolf had been going through his notebook while he set up the new phone.

“Yeah, Scott’s asshole dad is still hanging around thanks to those,” Danny scowled. “Two guys, one not long after you left, and one this past week. The first guy said it was a dog bite, but the photo I got off the FBI server looks too big for your run of the mill Cujo. Second guy claimed it was a cougar and said he shot it, but no one has found a carcass in the woods. Neither of them died or turned.”

“Sounds like a good theory then, something went wrong with Peter’s attempts to get back to being an Alpha, but not wrong enough to knock him out of commission,” Derek replied, handing the notebook back. “This is good work.”

Danny choked back a hysterical laugh. “You and I both know what I’ve done in the last week would have taken Stiles one night,” he said, suddenly feeling the weight of the situation closing in, his lungs struggling to pull in a breath. “Jesus, Derek, all I’ve got is waiting till what we’re hoping is Stiles sends you another message and hoping that I can trace something off your phone.”

Derek looked uncomfortable, and this time Danny let the laugh escape. “Don’t try to be comforting,” he told the older man. “Stiles says it’s terrifying.”

“What else can I do?” Derek offered. “While you work the tech? Stiles isn’t here, so you’ll have to be the man with the plan instead.”

“We can’t worry about Peter yet, right?” Danny blew out a long breath, feeling himself calm down as he started planning again. “One problem at a time. Stiles was important enough to take out of play, so we need to find him. He’s got answers.”

“When’s the last time you’re sure Stiles was Stiles?” Derek asked, and Danny traced a finger over the wolf in his notebook.

“Before he got sick,” Danny made air quotes around the word ‘sick’ as he spoke. “Or at least that’s what his Dad told us all. He left school with Morrell and Deaton on Tuesday, and they discovered
Deucalion’s body, it would have been… hmm, two weeks ago yesterday. Wednesday he didn’t show, so Scott stops by at lunch and the Sheriff tells Scott that Stiles is sick, wouldn’t let him in the house. I guess Scott thought it was weird, because Stiles hasn’t ever really been sick, so after Stiles was out Thursday and Friday too, Scott went over on Friday night when the Sheriff was at work and no one was home. Stiles was AWOL till Monday.”

“Okay, that’s suspicious, but you said he had a fight with Deaton about that time?” Derek suggested, and Danny nodded.

“I think it was about how Deaton wanted Stiles to be a distant emissary, like he was with you,” Danny shrugged. He hadn’t understood it well, and Isaac, who relayed the story, had been trying not to eavesdrop. “Or Stiles objected to the way he was with you, like that’s not how it’s supposed to work.”

“I don’t know,” Derek admitted, and when Danny looked over at him questioningly. “I wasn’t supposed to be the Alpha, I didn’t get taught a lot of things that I probably should have been.”

“Well, here,” Danny nudged the red leather journal back toward him. “Maybe it can tell you what it’s supposed to be like.”

Derek picked it up, thumbing into it. “Seems like a good starting place.” He hesitated, then told Danny, “The emissary before Deaton, I only vaguely remember him, but he was like family. When I was little, I thought he was my grandpa, but my grandpa died before I was born.”

Derek settled into the black leather armchair in the corner of Danny’s room by his bookshelves, while Danny hooked the small disposable phone up to every program he thought his processor could handle.

He was about to suggest he make a run for snacks when the phone buzzed, lighting up his monitors with a dozen programs. Derek was out of his chair and at his side a moment later. “What is it?” Derek asked, as Danny clicked open the message, not paying much attention to it, more interested in the screens.

“I don’t know this song,” Derek admitted, and Danny focused, wincing as he recognized it.

“It’s a couple years old,” he hedged, his stomach rolling in fear. “By a group called The Fray.”
“Danny,” Derek growled, apparently seeing right through the hacker’s bluster.

“It’s called ‘How to Save a Life’,” Danny said, returning to his screens so he could pretend he hadn’t just seen the way the blood drained out of Derek’s face. “Come on, give me something,” he muttered, angrily clicking out of programs that hadn’t been able to get clear of the tangle of magic from the message. “What do you need, in terms of radius?” he asked Derek as he typed. “Before your werewolf stuff can take over. Like 200, 300 yards?”

“A mile,” Derek replied, sounding puzzled. “It’ll take a lot of effort, but as long as there’s no magic shielding him, I can probably pick up his scent.”

“That’s a lot farther than Ethan,” Danny admitted. “Or further than he admitted to me anyway.”

“It’s not…” Derek hesitated, clearly looking torn on sharing. “I couldn’t do it for everyone… just…”

“People you know very well,” Danny suggested, remembering they’d agreed to ignore why Derek would cross an ocean for Stiles.

“Did you get anything?” Derek asked, and the hope Danny imagined he could hear in the too bland question made him want to sigh.

“It’s going to take some time to sort through,” he admitted. “I think so, but… magic and tech, man, I don’t think it’s supposed to go together, and I’m pretty sure Stiles is operating on pure magic here.”

“Then why would the messages keep coming from his old phone?” Derek asked.

“Because it’s Stiles’ number?” Danny started to reply sarcastically, but let the response die out as he thought. “Because it’s Stiles’ number, and whoever is pretending to be Stiles is using a new number because it’s a whole new phone. Stiles might have his old one on him, using it as a focus.”

He spun in his chair, handing Derek his wallet before starting to type rapidly. “I have an idea, I need to work,” he mumbled. “Order pizza, pepperoni on one, my brother and sister might be home soon.”
He pretended he didn’t notice Derek setting the wallet back down and using his own card to order a couple of pizzas. “Any chance you know Stiles’ passcode?”

“Scott would,” Derek suggested, and Danny shook his head, resuming his hacking attempts.

“Really can’t bring him in on this yet,” Danny pointed out. “Urgh, I can run the program, but this is Stiles, it can’t be that complicated,” he tried two more variations on Lydia and Derek’s names, but neither cracked it.

“You said he’d gotten obsessed with my mom’s bestiary,” Derek observed, tapping the cover. Danny tried Talia and TaliaHale, but neither cracked it. “Not your mom’s name,” he relayed to Derek, who was flipping the pages. He was trying Miguel, not that he’d have told Derek that guess, when he noticed the pages had stopped flipping.

“You got it?” Danny prompted the werewolf, who looked like he’d been hit by a two by four. Though being a werewolf, Danny supposed it would take a truckload of two by fours to get that effect.

“Try TaliaVolkov,” Derek said, shaking his head. “But… I…”

Derek focused on the name on the page, uncertain. He remembered ‘Uncle’ Volkov, the old emissary better than he’d let on, remembered when the new emissary hadn’t wanted to be pack, for anyone other than Talia to know his identity. He’d mentioned it to Danny, but when he’d be 13 and someone mentioned it was a pity Derek had never met his grandfather, he’d been genuinely surprised. Talia had had to explain to him that Gennadiy Volkov had been family by choice, an advisor to the pack.

“I’ve never seen Stiles’ first name,” Derek managed to say finally, though it was a lie, he’d seen it once, ages ago, and he wasn’t sure he was right. “Do you know it?”

“Something with a G?” Danny replied vaguely. “He hasn’t used it since we were kids. It was his grandfather’s name too. Hey, that worked!”

“Great,” Derek replied, tucking the book away, saving that mystery for another time. “So?”
“I’m going to start sending him pings from your phone, see if I can get anything off the GPS,” Danny told him. “It’ll take some time, I don’t expect if I get anything back, it’s going to be stright tech.”

Derek settled in, bringing in the pizza when it arrived and left the box of pepperoni in the kitchen for Danny’s siblings, who he understood from Danny’s vague mumblings on the subject were just as likely to stay with friends as come home and might or might not text him to let him know. Danny barely grunted a thanks at the plate of pizza Derek left at his elbow, and Derek returned to the bestiary, hunting through and starting a rough list between it and his own memory of shape changers.

Doppelgangers came to mind right away, though it was rare for them to leave Europe, and if a skinwalker were powerful enough, it might be able to imitate a human. He underlined Siren twice. It seemed most likely that either the one shape changer they already knew about was powerful enough to change the shape of another or had a second siren friend somewhere in town. He skeptically added witch to the list, though he was fairly certain the amount of magic a spell of that magnitude would require and sustained over the past two weeks would have burned out a human magic user by now. Faery went on the list, then got underlined, because a glamour was definitely a possibility, and if Stiles’ friend Devine was to be believed, the Fae weren’t strangers to Beacon Hills.

“Skinwalkers are a thing?” Danny asked, perching on the arm of the chair and dropping a stack of satellite photos into Derek’s lap. Derek could see he’d used the bright red sharpie currently stuck behind his ear to mark out an area roughly five square miles in the preserve. “As narrow as I can get it,” he said heavily, sounding upset. “Any chance you’re underestimating your abilities?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Derek replied, snagging the marker from Danny’s ear and marking an X just off a through road. “He’s there.”

“What?” Danny demanded, grabbing his maps, blinking dully. “How do you know?”

“That’s the nemeton,” Derek said grimly, heading downstairs at a quick pace, Danny scrambling to keep up. “I’ll run faster,” he informed Danny when he grabbed his car keys.

“But you need backup,” Danny insisted, reaching out and grabbing his arm to stop him, even though Derek could read the ‘please don’t eat me’ panic that set in on the boy’s face when he grabbed hold, even if it was swiftly choked back. “Stiles wouldn’t let you go alone.”
That drew Derek up short, a slap in the face. “You can’t protect yourself,” he tried weakly, and Danny grinned broadly.

“I had Chris Argent outfit my trunk with some weapons, ones I know how to use,” Danny informed him, jangling his keys.

“Drive fast,” was all Derek said before shifting into his beta form and loping away into the darkness.

-5-
Derek reached the outer edge of the preserve quickly, finding scents of Peter and maybe a dozen other unidentified supernatural beings. The scent of magic was sharp, and the woods reeked of power and potential in a way they hadn’t since his mother was alive. Derek snarled, trying to force his focus back to the task at hand, but he couldn’t find Stiles amidst the jumble of scents, so he kept running, stopping short of the nemeton clearing when he caught the scent of an omega wolf, guarding the clearing.

He looped around, putting himself behind the omega, surprised when he got the drop on the other werewolf, claws swiping and nearly catching the throat, instead ripping deeply into the shoulder and at least temporarily paralyzing the wolf’s left arm. The omega roared and swung his right hand claws up at Derek, narrowly missing his chest. Derek’s step back let the omega regain his footing and they circled each other now, snarling.

The omega was bigger than Derek, built a bit like Ennis, with lank, long brown hair and despite the cool evening, he was barefoot, in a tank top and ripped jeans. He was here for one purpose, to fight and die guarding whatever was in the nemeton. ‘Stiles’ Derek’s wolf whined, suddenly catching the vaguest hint of the boy, surprised it had taken this long to reach them.

The omega charged forward and Derek dodged, claws raking across the bad shoulder once more as they spun, the omega’s claws managing to catch his forearm in return. Unlike the omega though, Derek was healing rapidly, the damage to his arm fairly superficial but bleeding sluggishly.

The omega reared, preparing to strike out again, when a loud crack echoed through the hearing, a new wound opening just below the damage Derek had inflicted. The scent of wolfsbane filled the clearing. Derek didn’t have to turn to know that Danny was standing behind him now with one of Chris Argent’s handguns.

The omega growled, then tossed his head back, and Derek recognized it as being about to howl for whomever it was working with, and darted forward recklessly, landing a lucky swipe of claws across the omega’s throat. He raked his claws back once more with a rough jerk, and felt the spinal cord give as well, the omega falling in a heap at his feet.
“Oh my god,” Danny gasped, looking vaguely ill as he slowly lowered the handgun. Derek just wiped his hand on his jeans, listening carefully to the woods around them, making sure nothing supernatural had been alerted by their fight or was lurking nearby.

“Okay,” Danny said finally, tucking the gun into a holster on his thigh. Derek might have noticed the rather appealing sexual image that made on Danny if he hadn’t been so focused on the hint of Stiles’ scent he could detect. “So you just killed the deputy. Next?”

“There should be a trap door,” he informed Danny, kicking fallen leaves out of his way, revealing the dirt and roots, continuing to search the clearing, not entirely sure from Scott’s description where it would be.

“Over here,” Danny called out, and Derek bounded over, stopping Danny’s reach with a quick hand on his forearm.

“It was mostly collapsed after… the Darach,” Derek swallowed hard on Jennifer’s name and spat out her title instead. “I’ll go first.”

“Be my guest,” Danny replied, gesturing to Derek. Derek was surprised for a moment, having half expected Danny to argue with him like Stiles would have, just for the implication that somehow being human meant Stiles wasn’t just as capable.

The hatch in the ground lifted easily, and to Derek’s surprise, even though there were some signs of the collapse damage Jennifer had done, the root cellar had been almost completely restored. Sniffing at the heavy scent of magic in the air, he couldn’t help wondering if it had been the work of whoever was now using the nemeton or if the nemeton itself had restored the space.

Derek jumped down, then noticed a new ladder at the bottom and slid it into place for Danny before turning back to the room below, following the scent of magic around the roots. There was a reddish brown light coming from the deepest tangle of roots, and as Derek stepped around, he lost his sense of caution. He darted forward, slamming hard into a barrier of mountain ash only steps later. He growled as he looked down, taking note of the two circles on the ground. The first, outer ring was a familiar line of black mountain ash. Inside it, the source of the dim light, was a ring of crystals, all pulsing faintly with an ominous glow.

Inside the ring of crystals, Stiles was stirring, looking pale and thin, lethargy heavily dragging his eyelids down over amber eyes. He was wearing only a pair of badly torn apart jeans, and Derek
could see an alarming number of ribs through his skin.

Stiles stared at him for a long moment, then Derek could see his mouth moving, but no sound was making it through the barriers. He cupped a hand around his ear, and Danny leaned in, breaking the mountain ash line for him. Stiles held up his hands, palms out, eyes widening in alarm and waving him off when Derek reached for the crystal line. Danny made the same gesture, and Stiles shook his head.

Stiles mimed reaching out and drawing back in pain, and Derek nodded his understanding. “Grab a branch, a root, something from the tree,” he growled at Danny, who darted away to find something. Derek stayed in place, watching a flicker of doubt cross Stiles’ face, then cataloguing the bruises he could see down Stiles’ bare arms and through the rips in the jeans, he could see similar bruises and scratches on his legs. Coupled with the fear and doubt on Stiles’ face, he felt his stomach drop, certain of how the past couple of weeks had gone for Stiles.

“Here,” Danny shoved a fairly thick branch at him, and before Derek could think about it too closely, he shoved on end of the branch right at the crystals, breaking the barrier. The pain arcing through him brought him to his knees, but the barrier broke, the branch hissing and smoking as it also cracked open, whatever power it had retained from the nemeton apparently offsetting the crystals’ magic enough to break the barrier. The crystals all blinked out, leaving the room dark except for the moonlight filtering in through the trapdoor.

“Derek?” Stiles gasped, his voice raspy with long abuse.

“Okay, we’re getting you out of here,” Danny said, but Stiles shoved himself forward, grabbing hard at Derek’s shoulders.

“Shift,” he barked out, shaking Derek, and Derek let him, staring in dumbfound disbelief.

“What?”

“Shift,” Stiles ordered him again. “I’m not falling for it again, shift now, wolf out, do it,” he shouted weakly, hands clenching into fists and hitting Derek’s shoulders now.

Stunned, he complied, letting his eyes flare and fangs jut out. To his surprise, Stiles collapsed against him, relief seeping into his body. “Okay,” Stiles said, nodding. “Okay, time to go,” he agreed. He tried for his feet, and Derek quickly looped an arm under Stiles’ arms, bracing his back and helping
him up, trying not to wince as he saw the left hip of Stiles’ jeans was soaked in blood, some old and dried, some new.

“I can carry you,” Derek started to offer, but Stiles wasn’t looking at him.

“Danny, I need the crystals,” he said hoarsely. “They should be safe to touch now, as many as you can gather.”

Danny looked down at the large pile of crystals and shrugged out of his jacket, shoving large armfuls into the fabric, managing to sweep about half the pile into his makeshift pouch.

“Smart,” Stiles croaked appreciatively, before reaching out a shaky hand over the crystals, his eyes closing as he concentrated.

Danny gasped, and Derek tightened his grip a little when the crystals seemed to collapse inward. A moment later, Derek realized what was happening; they had been reduced to a fine powder. “Gotta cover our tracks, Sourwolf,” Stiles murmured, head dipping in exhaustion for a moment.

“Don’t you dare burn yourself out,” Derek warned the boy in his arms, whispering in a low, harsh whisper, making sure Danny didn’t hear him.

“Trust me,” Stiles replied, nodding to the ladder. “I’ll let you carry me up,” he offered, mouth crooking upward in a poor attempt at a half smile.

“That wasn’t negotiable,” Derek replied, hoisting Stiles up onto his back. He scrambled up the ladder quickly, leaving Stiles by the omega’s corpse before he went back down to relieve Danny of the crystal dust so he could make it up the ladder himself followed by Derek, who managed to make it up without spilling the jacket full of magic sand.

“Here,” Stiles reached out, and Derek held the dust out to him uncertainly. Stiles drew out two heaping handfuls of the dust and dropped them onto the back of the corpse, then, as Derek and Danny watched, gaping, shoved his hands hard and the dust merged into the corpse, passing through his skin and animating his body.

Derek sniffed, lip curling as the corpse’s scent changed, matching Stiles’ own. “What are you,” he started to ask, jerking back involuntarily as the corpse shuddered and then began to crawl away on its
belly, arms tearing into the forest ground.

Stiles took the last of the dust from Derek, gathering the jacket in his arms. “I’ll cover our trail back out,” Stiles said roughly. “It’ll look like the omega went crazy, attacked me, then I crawled away. The corpse will throw itself in the river,” he added, voice cracking a little. “I’ll change our tracks, make whoever comes here next think he was the one who ran away to the road."

“Do you have enough energy left for that?” Derek asked, sniffing at the weak and exhausted scent pouring off Stiles, along with the ever sharpening scent of pain underneath.

“And walk to Danny’s car?” Stiles asked, tone lightening a little as he gazed up at Derek and managed a genuine, albeit weary, smile. “No. But if your offer of a ride is still on the table?”

Derek bent down, carefully scooping Stiles into his arms, trying not to flinch at the feel of the too sharp edge of Stiles’ hips and the once tight skinny jeans gaping at his waist. “Hah,” Stiles gasped, almost a weak huff of laughter. “I half expected you to throw me over your shoulder like a caveman,” he informed Derek, starting to throw down a line of crystal dust and muttering a quiet spell as they walked. Like the corpse, the dust vanished into the ground. The scent of the omega covered theirs, and even Derek couldn’t tell where their tracks had been, only the single tracks, which he was sure would match the werewolf guard’s, remained behind them.

Derek gradually became aware that the further they went, the colder Stiles’ skin was under his hands. He was growing even more pale, and full body shivers were setting in, despite Derek trying to wrap himself deeper into Stiles, pull him into his warmth. The next time Stiles threw out a shaky hand of crystal dust, Derek could see the blue pallor creeping up his trembling fingers.

“Danny, run ahead,” he said, swallowing down his urge to tell Stiles to stop, knowing they needed the protection. “Crank the heat in your car.”

Danny looked back, biting his lip in worry as Stiles’ breath started to come out in bursts of steam, clouding the air as he continued the steady murmur of his spell. “Will it help?” he hissed back. “Your breath’s only supposed to do that when the air is cold. His skin is so cold it’s making that happen. He’s freezing from the inside.”

“We’ll take him to the clinic, see if Deaton…” Derek started to say, and Stiles shook his head, grabbing Derek’s shirt above his chest, leaving a shimmer of crystalline dust behind.
“No,” Stiles croaked. “No Deaton.”

“Stiles,” Derek said helplessly.

“I’ll warm up once I rest,” Stiles promised, still clinging tight. “Just get me out of here, get me to the loft.”

“The loft?” Derek asked, and Stiles nodded, focus already back on the remaining crystals. “Go, Danny,” he said finally, deciding he had to trust Stiles to know best. Danny took off, moving as quickly as he could through the trees.

“If you die on me, I will hunt down a necromancer to bring you back just so I can rip your throat out myself,” Derek growled at Stiles, gaining an actual, weak chuckle from Stiles.

“Careful,” Stiles managed between chattering teeth. “I might start thinking you care.”

“I came back for you, didn’t I?” Derek muttered, his lips brushing against Stiles’ ear, keeping his voice low. He wasn’t sure if he even wanted Stiles to hear that, but no way did he want anyone other than Stiles to hear it.

Derek moved as quickly after Danny as Stiles would allow him, his grip getting tighter and tighter as Stiles grew colder and quieter, barely clinging to consciousness as they reached Danny’s Prius, tossing the last of the dust airborne as they arrived. It lingered in the air, hovering as though waiting. “It’ll cover Danny’s car leaving, no tracks,” Stiles mumbled, as Derek tucked him into the backseat. A moment later, he followed, tucking his limbs tightly to Stiles, determined to share warmth.

“All good?” Danny asked, and Derek took one last listen and sniff, not sensing anyone nearby. On Derek’s nod, he put the car in gear and sped out of the turnoff. As soon as he pulled onto the main road, Stiles sighed and went boneless, collapsed against Derek, out cold.

“He said to take him to the loft,” Danny said, looking a question in the rearview mirror at Derek. Not for the first time, Derek appreciated the way Danny deferred to him, looked to him for guidance, and wished he’d been the sort of teenager Derek had bitten. Danny would have made an amazing wolf. He nodded, and Danny took the ramp that led down to the outskirts of town and the loft instead of continuing on toward his own home closer to the center of town.
“He had keys to the place, could be he has magical stuff stashed there,” Derek replied. He pulled Stiles in closer, grasping his hand to Stiles’ forearm and pulling some of the pain from Stiles. It seemed to help a little, some of the tense muscles and pinched look easing, even through the unconsciousness, though the cold didn’t evaporate at all.

“Hot water is still on there?” Danny asked, teeth worrying at his lower lip as he looked in the rearview mirror. “Best bet to warm him up may be to get him in a hot shower then tuck him into bed with you,” Danny continued. “Wolves run a higher body temperature, right?”

“Yes,” Derek agreed, letting go of the pain draining magic finally. “I’ll do what I can to take his pain, give his body time to focus on the rest of it.”

Derek made Danny stop just down the road from the loft and left his leather jacket bundling up Stiles, doing a quick reconnaissance run through the area, making sure there were no nasty surprises waiting for them. Once he was certain the building was as quiet and abandoned as it seemed, he ran back to the car, tugging Stiles back into his arms.

They hurried up the stairs, Derek giving Danny his keys so he could roll back the heavy door ahead of them. He hurried in, turning back when Danny paused at the entryway, looking baffled. “What are you doing? Get in here and close the door,” Derek snarled, and Danny stumbled forward, eyes opening wide.

“I couldn’t cross the threshold,” Danny informed him, turning to roll back the door. Once the door was in place, a brief flare of magic illuminated the wall, which showed Stiles had been busy. The loft entrance was well warded, intricate designs painted in black lines all around the door. “Stiles has been busy,” Danny observed, and Derek could only nod. “I guess anyone no one other than probably you and Cora and Stiles can come in without an invite.”

Derek didn’t bother with a reply, cradling Stiles carefully as he hurried up the spiral staircase, nodding to a large cupboard as they passed it. Danny went to it automatically, finding the stacks of blankets and spare clothes inside and he started adding them to the bed as Derek kicked the bathroom door closed behind him. He set Stiles carefully down in the tub, starting the water to get it running hot. He unbuttoned the jeans, mentally apologizing to an unconscious Stiles for it, wincing when he found the wound underneath the left pocket.

Whatever had been in Stiles’ pocket had been glass, a couple of short shards sticking with the wound as Derek eased the jeans off Stiles. Soft green boxer briefs followed, and Derek plugged the tub before retrieving tweezers from the bathroom vanity. He worked the glass shards free, carefully clearing the wound, hating himself for having to keep his eyes trained on the punctures to keep his libido in check.
To his relief, Stiles starting shaking after several minutes in the hot bath, shivers wracking his body again as the hot water covered his body, a sign the risk of hypothermia was passing. “Shh, I’ve got you,” he murmured, easing a damp hand over Stiles’ matted, messy hair.

“I found a space heater in the closet and set it up in the bedroom,” Danny said softly, easing the door open and peeking in, handing Derek a pair of pajama pants. “What else can I do?”

“There should be a first aid kit in the kitchen,” Derek told him. “Nothing on his arms or legs looks too bad, doesn’t look too recent either, but whatever tore up his hip got pretty deep in a couple places,” he gestured to the jeans, which Danny picked up, checking the pocket, turning it out and dumping a lot of glass shards into the trash. The next large lump was a badly destroyed phone, some of the glass shards imbedded deeply into the phone, blood on the other ends showing them where it had dug into Stiles. Last, Danny fished out some painted wood, and as he was dumping it all onto the counter, the reflective surfaces showing Derek his own worried eyes and making something click.

“It was a mirror,” he told Danny, who was more interested in the phone.

“It was a magical hack,” Danny replied. “You were getting messages from a phone which had no reason to work, look at it.”

Derek spared it half a glance, then turned back to Stiles, who was stirring a little, shivering hard. His eyes were widening in panic, and Derek knew his eyes flared in response, bright blue. Stiles relaxed again, shivers growing but his eyes were slowly closing, dimly aware, and letting go, letting himself fall back under the darkness. The show of trust made Derek shudder slightly.

“I’ll get the first aid kit,” Danny said, clapping Derek’s shoulder. “You should get him clean, and then get him out. Too long will get him cold again. The best place he can be now is tucked in bed.”

“Yeah,” Derek agreed, taking a washcloth from under the sink and using it to gently clean Stiles’ face and hair. He cupped his hands, working soap and water through too long hair until it came clean, the water now dusty gray. He knew Stiles would probably need a shower again once he was well and truly conscious to get clean, but he needed first aid and warmth more now.

He gritted his teeth a little as he worked Stiles’ body into a pair of his own too large pajama pants, pulling the drawstring tight so they wouldn’t slip down over his hips. Stiles, mostly out of it still, whimpered a little and turned his face into Derek’s neck, lips pressing into Derek’s throat. Derek
swallowed hard, letting himself hold Stiles and feel his own pulse beat hard against the press of Stiles' lips for a moment before scooping him up again to take him out to the bed. To his surprise, once Stiles was in his arms, he burrowed his face right back into Derek's throat, the way a wolf might, seeking comfort from his Alpha. Having just gone through similar motions with Jackson, Derek felt something twist in his gut, wanting to check his eyes, but Stiles came first.

“Shh,” he murmured, easing Stiles down into his bed, then lowering his own face and placing a gentle kiss on Stiles’ throat, even though his wolf saw the gesture and wanted to lick and nibble and just claim Stiles. He shouldn’t have been surprised but still was when the gesture quieted Stiles, his face going slack and soft again. Danny cleared his throat gently, sitting down near Stiles’ knees and handing over the first aid kit.

“Tell me if you see anything we should take him to the hospital for,” Derek murmured. Danny looked confused for a moment, then the fact that Derek had never needed first aid must have clicked for him since he nodded.

“I should probably go to school tomorrow,” Danny said softly as Derek cleaned the wounds with alcohol wet wipes. Derek shot a questioning look at the clock, which was creeping up till midnight, and Danny nodded his understanding. “We need to see how the other Stiles is acting,” Danny explained. “If they buy it and think he’s dead, we make one plan, but if they know, it’s another. And it gives us time that we get the real brains of this outfit up and running to help us out.”

“You did good,” Derek reassured Danny, accepting the ointment Danny offered.

“I…” Danny sighed, running a hand through his hair and staring down at Stiles’ too still form. “I used to ignore him, be annoyed mostly, but he spent weeks helping me get my head around the bump in the night shit. And I didn’t believe him about the bisexual thing,” Danny complained, making Derek raise an eyebrow as he taped a gauze square over the punctures on Stiles’ hip.

“It was a thing, he said no one ever believed him,” Danny explained. “I guess I was the first one to believe it, and made sure the others got the picture too.”

Judging by the faint flush rising in Danny’s cheeks, Derek had a pretty clear idea of how he’d made that clear. “Let’s just have you not explain that,” he growled, making Danny grin coyly.

“Jealous?” Danny teased gently, and Derek barely choked back a real growl. “Maybe you should tell him that.”
“I can’t,” Derek said softly.

“He wants you,” Danny pointed out. “I know you know that.”

“Not yet,” Derek managed to choke out. “I can’t yet.”

“Okay,” Danny relented, which Derek was thankful for. “The point is, I owe him. Let me do this, let me help.”

“Find some pajamas and set your alarm,” Derek told the teenager, touching Stiles’ arm and finding it cold again. “You should sleep here, add to the warmth. And you shouldn’t go home tonight, in case they do catch your scent out at the Nemeton somehow.”

Derek meanwhile slid his shirt and jeans off and tucked himself behind Stiles, wrapping an arm around the younger man’s waist. Danny hesitated, then pulled out his cell phone and made a call. “Just making sure my brother and sister aren’t home,” he explained, once he hung up and ditched his own jeans, climbing in next to Stiles in his t-shirt and boxers.

Danny dropped off to sleep quickly, but Derek lingered awake, watching Stiles breathe deeply, pulse growing stronger and skin getting warmer under his touch for a long time before sleep claimed him.

He woke distantly when Danny’s alarm went off, and stayed awake long enough for Danny to press the new burner phone into his hand. “Constant updates,” he told Danny blearily before turning to check on Stiles, who was still too cool to the touch.

Danny nodded, smiling in a way that made Derek suspect he was finding Derek cute, but in the same category as bunnies and ducks, not intimidating but hot werewolves. He narrowed his eyes, but couldn’t work up enough indignation to actually growl, especially when Stiles burrowed deeper into his warmth.

He let himself drift off again, waking up again when the soft beep of his phone alerted him to Danny arriving at school safely. “Hmm,” Stiles murmured into his shoulder, wrapping his arms tighter around Derek’s waist, pulling them together tightly, belly to belly, and Derek had to take several long steadying breaths, thinking about anything that would shut down his libido.

“Wake up a little,” Derek urged Stiles, stroking his hair gently. “Just a little, so I can check for brain
damage, then you can go back to sleep.”

“Not brain damag’d,” Stiles insisted sleepily, then seemed to finish waking up, pulling away and shoving Derek hard onto his back, hands pinning him to the mattress. “Shift,” he insisted, and Derek complied, now used to the request. Stiles stared at him for a long moment, starting to shiver as the blankets slid away.

“It’s me,” Derek promised in a gentle voice. “I need you to get back under the blankets before you start freezing to death again, Stiles,” he added, and luckily, Stiles laid back down, shifting instinctively into the warm spot along Derek’s side, eyes still a little too wide and staring at him. Derek watched a hundred questions flit behind Stiles’ eyes, surprised they didn’t all come pouring out like he would have expected.

“How did you even find me?” Stiles asked finally, apparently having found a question he couldn’t sort out for himself.

“Danny traced where you were making your magic calls from,” Derek replied, easing an arm under Stiles, worried by the drop in his skin temperature that was happening. “He got it down far enough that I knew you had to be at the nemeton.”

“But…” Stiles bit his lip, taking the invite to curl in closer. “You left.”

“You doubted I’d be back?” Derek tried to joke, but something went watery and soft in Stiles’ gaze, making him regret it right away.

“After about a week down there, I didn’t think anyone was ever coming,” Stiles replied.

“You up for talking about it yet?” Derek didn’t want to press, especially when Stiles shuddered.

“I thought… I thought it was just Peter and his Siren, our English teacher,” Stiles replied, and Derek helped ease Stiles so he was lying mostly on top of him. Stiles took the invitation to press his face into Derek’s shoulder, words coming out muffled, but easier now.

“They pretended to be you, once,” Stiles said. “Couldn’t get the wolf eyes right. Sorry, I’ve asked you to shift a bunch of times, haven’t I?”
“It’s okay,” Derek replied.

“You’re being nice,” Stiles observed. “I’d ask why, but the answer’s either going to depress me or creep me out.”

“I’m terrified of you, frankly,” Derek joked. “You managed to send me a supernatural SOS on three continents.”

“Really?” Stiles lifted his head a little. Derek scowled and got a grin in return. “No, not about the terrified part, the only thing terrifying is that you thought that would be comforting. I reached you on other continents?”

“England and Morocco, England twice,” Derek explained. “Also Egypt. Germany. And then here.”

Stiles pumped a fist, then looped his arm back around Derek’s waist, skin cool against Derek’s own too warm stomach. “I’ve been studying magic,” he informed Derek. “Uh, not that I got that far before I was kidnapped. But um, the nemeton… I was down there alone during the days and… I think it thought it was helping? It started filling my head with things it learned from Jennifer and my grandpa and another emissary, from before them, like in the 20’s, I think, a Native American guy who might have been named Joseph? It’s not in my head well, I can sort of grasp onto an idea if I need it, but it’s just a mess in there. Which is stupid, because the whole darkness from the nemeton was making me uber-focused before.”

“Okay,” Derek said, not wanting to let on to the alarm Stiles’ words were creating.

“Your heart beat is speeding up,” Stiles observed, hand flat against Derek’s chest. “I am scaring you.”

“I’m scared for you,” Derek corrected him. “I don’t like the idea of that thing messing with your brain, Stiles.”

“Eh, at least I learned stuff while I was kidnapped,” Stiles objected weakly. Derek let it go, staying still and waiting.
“I don’t think it was really about Peter,” Stiles said after several long minutes. “But he asked me a lot about why he couldn’t shift into an Alpha, couldn’t access to the powers he should have. He’s killed Jennifer and Deucalion, thought it’d give him enough of a power boost to take on Scott.”

“Danny told me,” Derek reassured him.

“His eyes were purple,” Stiles told Derek. “Means he’s stuck, probably because of the whole back from the dead thing. He wasn’t really looking for that answer.” Stiles shivered, and Derek tightened his grip, fairly certain that hadn’t been caused by the cold.

“When did they take you, Danny wasn’t really sure on that,” Derek prompted him, and Stiles shrugged.

“I think Friday or Saturday, but they hit my head, everything’s pretty fuzzy from Friday morning till I was down in the tree, looking at a freakin’ copy of myself wanting to know where my grandfather’s magical items were and where some necklace was. I described the ones in the drawer next to you, but that wasn’t what it wanted,” Stiles relayed to Derek, sounding tired.

“I’ll check them later,” he reassured Stiles.

“How come you never mentioned my grandpa and your mom were all alpha-emissary bffs?”

“Well, Stiles,” Derek replied, putting a sarcastic emphasis on the teenager’s name. “Maybe if I’d known your actual first name, I’d have put that together. You’re also not a Volkov, you’re a Stilinski, so no help there.”

Stiles hmpfed against his skin, a happy sound and huff of air against his pec that had Derek slowly counting to ten and breathing carefully. “Nice, glad to see you haven’t gone totally Twilight Zone Derek on me,” Stiles muttered. “Why are you being nice, Derek? You don’t even like me.”

Derek slid down, face to face with Stiles, still holding him close, chest to side, and studying his face for a long moment. There was an awareness there, and it made Derek sigh, wishing it hadn’t been there yet. “I like you fine,” Derek replied, taking a deep breath. “I like you too much. I think you know why better than anyone else, Stiles.”

“You want to keep ignoring it?” Stiles offered, quirking his lips into a half smile.
“We should,” he said softly. “Till next April, just till then.”


“Next April…” Derek started to correct him, and Stiles shook his head.

“I’m seventeen, dude,” he said, scowling. “Did you miss how I was driving when we met?”

“You’re a junior,” Derek objected, and Stiles shrugged.

“When my mom died…” Stiles sighed. “Things went bad, okay? I had to repeat a year. Luckily that put me in Scott’s class, and he… he was the one, the best friend who stabilized me, got me moving again.”

They both fell silent for a moment, before Stiles made a rude noise. “Age is just a number anyway.”

“Stiles,” Derek said softly, and Stiles softened, nodding.

“Right, sorry, I know better,” Stiles echoed him, reaching up a hand to drag a thumb across the stubble on Derek’s chin. “Is there room for compromise?”

“If I let you kiss me, I can’t promise I can stop,” Derek replied hoarsely, shutting his eyes as Stiles continued to gently trace his jaw upward. “And maybe now isn’t the best time.”

“Fair,” Stiles agreed, tucking his hand back under the blankets and back around Derek’s waist. “Anyway, the Siren, she tried being Dad, tried being you, all trying to get to something in Grandpa’s collection. I thought they wanted it to help Peter, but she was only asking me about it when he wasn’t there. She’d give up for the night, then put my face back on and leave.”

“Are you sure it was the Siren, did you ever see her?” Derek asked, and Stiles thought about it, biting the quick of his thumb as he did.
“No,” he concluded finally. “Why?”

“Danny says he’s seen her in the same room as your double,” Derek admitted. “He has doubts.”

“He’s got good instincts, except for his taste in guys,” Stiles agreed, shrugging. “Speaking of, where are frick and frack? I’d expect him to go to them for this rescue.”

“Guessing this happened after you were taken then,” Derek said slowly. “Aiden is in a coma. He took on an Alpha, some grudge from the past, and I guess he won, but the Alpha power didn’t come back to him right.”

“Huh,” Stiles said, squinting his eyes strangely at Derek. “Huh, I may know what that’s all about. Peter was talking with Ms. Kelly, and she asked if turning something loose on the twins was a good idea. I thought she said Gollum, but… Lord of the Rings, so I figured I was hallucinating. Anyway, he said something about a Trojan Horse.”

“A Golem,” Derek said, nodding thoughtfully. “That could explain Aiden, if there was something poison inside the Golem, like mistletoe maybe. With a strong enough spell, it would look and smell like someone, but they’re pretty mindless rage monsters.”

“So not how they imitated me,” Stiles concluded.

“No,” Derek replied. Stiles was tracing a design of some sort on his ribs, fingertips teasing over his skin, so Derek reached out and took his hand, to stop him and to connect so he could pull some pain from Stiles.

“Jesus,” Stiles swore, melting into Derek. “I don’t need that,” he mumbled, even as he arched a little in pleasure. “They hadn’t taken me out of the bubble for a beating for days, not since I nearly crispy crittered one of the omegas Peter has pretending to be his pack.”

“You… nemeton?” Derek guessed unhappily, and Stiles nodded.

“I really want a shower,” Stiles groaned, turning big eyes up at Derek. “Help me in there?”
Danny nodded to Scott when he slumped against the locker next to Danny’s nodding a greeting. He’d been careful to shower and use his Armani bodywash -- Ethan hated how it covered Danny’s scent, so he was hoping it would work on the other werewolves too. And he’d grabbed one of Ethan’s shirts, hoping that it’d be enough to cloak any of Stiles and Derek’s scents that might be lingering from the night before.

“Any news on Aiden?” Scott asked, and Danny shook his head.

“I checked in this morning, no changes, unless you count Ethan looking worse,” Danny told the Alpha. “Any chance Deaton might get over to see him today?”

“He still hasn’t checked in,” Scott admitted. “Hasn’t been at the clinic for almost a week now. I never thought it’d take him this long to deal with a teenage witch.”

“Named Sabrina?” Danny quipped. Scott looked baffled, but a bark of laughter broke in as Stiles joined them, nodding to Danny.

“That sounds like something I’d say,” he informed Danny, who could barely force a smile.

Whatever it was, it still looked and sounded exactly like Stiles, and judging from the little bit of malice in the upturned smirk and glittering good mood in those eyes, he would bet that it was certain the real Stiles was now completely gone. “Hey, you hear anything from your dad, something about a body washing up down in the next county?” he asked, knowing if Derek found out, he would kill him for pushing his luck, but unable to resist.

“Oh?” Stiles asked, perking up in interest. “No, he’s been keeping the radio on lock down and taking his work calls on his cell. It’s like he knows I’m gonna listen in. What’d you hear?”

“Guess this lady my Mom works with, she lives over in Harrisonburg, her nephew is missing. She got called in to ID the body, but it was pretty bad, they couldn’t make an ID. Mom’s lab got disqualified from running the DNA, obviously, so they’ll have to send it to Sacramento. Mom was bitching about how it’ll take forever that way and why couldn’t she just run it,” Danny explained in a rushed whisper.
Scott was looking at him oddly, probably picking up on the lies mixed in with truths, although he was deliberately playing up excitement, hoping he’d put the odd heartbeat down to that. Mom did have a co-worker whose nephew was missing, but he was likely a runaway. His mom would bitch when their lab was disqualified, which it probably would by the time the body washed up. “Not that I was eavesdropping,” he added, which was apparently the lie that sold Scott. “But I thought it might be connected to those other animal attacks. Maybe Peter?” End it with truth, and Danny watched the Alpha relax into the story as expected. Damn, he really needed to thank Stiles for making that one of the first things he’d taught Danny.

“Wow,” Stiles sounded impressed, intrigued, but the triumph was written in every bit of his expression. “Guess I’ll have to see what I can get out of Dad.”

“If it is Peter, it’s probably another bad bite,” Scott replied, hands rubbing through his hair a little manically. “Not worth it, Stiles.”

“Manic Monday, buddy?” Stiles asked, dripping sympathy, and Scott nodded, letting his head drop to the locker behind him.

“I don’t know why, I just can’t get control of it like you and Allison,” Scott admitted, looking sad, and Danny felt a momentary stab of guilt, wishing he could tell the Alpha how absolutely not in control his supposed best friend and girlfriend were.

“Hey, Isaac was headed over to the library to use a study carrel, I bet he wouldn’t mind an interruption,” the thing masquerading as Stiles suggested, clapping a hand on Scott’s shoulder, all smiles and easy friendship, and for the first time, Danny realized just how much the creepy evil twin pushed Scott into Isaac and Allison time, a guaranteed distraction.

“Thanks,” Scott said, nodding to Danny as he pushed off the locker and headed up the hall. Danny watched him go, aware that faux-Stiles was still standing there, waiting to talk to him.

“Hey, I know he’s not worried about it, but if you hear anything else on that body, can you let me know?” the look-alike asked, doing a perfect imitation of Stiles’ wrinkled forehead of worry.

“Of course,” Danny replied, shutting his locker. “You think we should be worried?”

“Probably nothing we can do till we get a lead on Peter,” Stiles said, giving him a big smile and
clapping his shoulder. “Hey, how’s Ethan doing? Any change on Aiden?”

“Nothing yet,” Danny replied, checking his watch deliberately. “Hey, weren’t you supposed to be meeting Lydia in the cafeteria, she wanted your notes from Calc?”

“Shoot,” Stiles said, taking off quickly. “Thanks, man!” he called back after him, leaving Danny to turn back to his locker and retrieve his phone, sending Derek a status update.

“You’re scheming,” a voice said, low and near his ear, making him jump. Lydia looked at him through lowered lashes, smoky makeup making her narrowed look all the more intimidating. “And I want in, or I won’t go to the cafeteria and cover your lie.”

Danny looked at her, spotting the dark shadows under her eyes, just bad enough they couldn’t be completely erased by the expert hand with which she wielded her makeup brushes. “Let me see what I can do, and I’ll text you,” he promised in a low whisper, waiting while she pursed her lips, evaluating him with a long stare.

“Fine,” she said at last, nodding once. “But you’ll also owe me one.” She flounced away, and Danny sighed, typing a new message to Derek.

-5-

Lydia was used to being thought of as an idiot, especially when she made the decision to sit on her hands and do nothing, in favor of information gathering. She swung through the library to get to the cafeteria, confirming that Scott was exactly where she expected him to be—straddling Isaac’s lap in the study carrel in the stacks, Isaac’s tongue already down the Alpha’s throat, and it wasn’t even first period yet.

She sighed, putting on her too bright smile as she nudged Allison on past her toward the carrel, knowing Allison would join right in. She frowned, looking at Allison’s retreating figure for a moment, wondering if she really had seen a ring of bright green around Allison’s pupil, separating it from her dark brown irises, but dismissed it as lack of sleep and paranoia. Then thinking better of it, she filed it in her brain under things to maybe get paranoid about when she confirmed it was time to be paranoid.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said breezily, sitting down at the cafeteria table next to whatever the thing pretending to be Stiles was. She was pretty sure she had it narrowed down to Doppelganger, Selkie,
or Lamia. She really hoped it wasn’t a Lamia, because then it had eaten the real Stiles and was walking around in his skin. She had special plans for killing it, very, very slowly, if that was the case. She’d looked some methods for dealing snakes, after everything with Jackson, and besides, she could use new boots and a matching bag.

“Not a problem,” it said, smiling broadly in an old, almost worshipful way that made her skin crawl. Stiles really was much cuter when he wasn’t hung up on her. “Um, you needed Calculus notes?”

“Thanks, Allison’s are a mess lately,” Lydia replied easily, taking the notebook and starting to make a copy of them in her own. “It’s bad enough when a teenage girl tries doodling her boyfriend’s initials all over with a nauseating amount of hearts and stars and rainbows and whatever, but when she has two boyfriends? I’d put Oedipus to shame that’s how hard I want to stab my eyes out.”

“You think it’s weird, the whole threesome thing?” Stiles pressed, and thanks to years of playing the girl game better than whatever this creature was, she thought she knew exactly what it was angling for. A wedge to drive between her and Allison.

“Well, I can’t really talk,” she observed, shrugging. “I went through my boys as Kleenex phase, I suppose Allison’s choice is better than that.”

“Yeah, but you had reasons,” Stiles nudged her elbow, instantly turning adoring at her self-degradation. “Jackson. Peter. Werewolves.”

“What the fuck is my life?” Lydia replied, giving Stiles a smile as she handed back the notebook. “Keep good notes for me today too? I may bail at lunch with Danny to go give Ethan a break at the hospital.”

“Of course,” he replied, trailing her out of the cafeteria. She stopped at her locker, letting the imposter watch her touch up her lipstick before it headed off, then she discretely checked her phone. There was an unknown number on the screen, which she immediately clicked. ‘The loft, noon’ was all the message said, but it made Lydia smile with vicious pleasure.

Derek was back. She supposed he could have a wallet if they skinned that thing.

-5-
Stiles had fumbled through a shower, which he hadn’t been able to talk Derek into joining him for, though the werewolf had lingered just outside the door, calling out to him when Danny texted. He had laughed when Derek realized Danny had been testing Not-Stiles’ ability to catch lies and growled before sending a flurry of text messages that seemed to involve a lot of key smashing.

The key smashing halted for a moment, and Stiles stuck his head out around the shower curtain, ignoring the way his teeth started chattering the minute he was outside the hot steam. “What?” he asked, and Derek stuck his head in, scowling when he spotted Stiles’ undoubtedly blue lips.

“Lydia wants in on the conspiracy,” Derek replied, and Stiles grinned, unable to help himself. “Ten bucks says Danny’s wrong, and she knows that thing isn’t me,” Stiles said by way of an answer, unsurprised when Derek took to texting again. “Hand me a towel?” he asked, turning off the water before it got too much colder. Silence again for a long moment, then Derek’s hand, clenching a towel poked around the curtain. Stiles bit back his laughter, surprised by how much the older man was determined to avoid any temptation. He wrapped it around his waist, even though his chill made him want to curl up inside it, and stepped out, smiling up at Derek.

Derek lifted an eyebrow back at him, one corner of his mouth twisting up. “You think watching you shiver will make me think about you in a sexy way?” he mocked Stiles, who scowled, grabbing a second towel from Derek and wrapping it around his shoulders tightly like a blanket.

“I need clothes,” he snapped at Derek, who wrapped an arm around him, reeling him back into a hug for a moment.

“I want you,” Derek whispered in his ear, sending a shuddery thrill through Stiles. “I trust you. But I don’t trust me with you yet.”

“Okay,” Stiles replied, a little dazed, and let Derek turn him back into the bedroom, handing him a stack of sweats. Not his own, he noted, Derek’s. He knew his bag was somewhere around here, and nudging through the pile, he found that the underwear was his, so Derek had obviously found that and chosen to ignore the sweatshirts and hoodies inside. He quickly dressed, opting to dig in his bag for a pair of his own socks and then layer Derek’s over the top, still shivering ever with his layers. He walked slowly, pain easing back into his bruises as he moved, but once he was down the spiral staircase, he found Derek waiting for him, a mountain of blankets on the couch and to his surprise, the fireplace Derek normally didn’t even look at was lit with a merry fire.

“You didn’t have to,” he started to protest, but Derek cut him off with a swift look of warning. Not talking about it, Stiles was used to that, he supposed. “I’d be fine with you for a space heater;” he
added, unable to help himself from sounding like he was very badly trying to flirt, but it got Derek to roll his eyes and break the tension, so Stiles counted it as a win.

“Come on,” Derek settled on the couch, tugging the blankets back and guiding Stiles down so he was all but sitting in Derek’s lap, werewolf heat a solid wall at his back and the blankets and fire at his front.

He only knew he’d drifted off when the loft alarms went off and woke him.

Derek slid out from behind him, all easy werewolf grace and barely jostling Stiles, and he padded over to shut off the alarm. He tugged over a couple of chairs, and Stiles scowled at him. “We have visitors,” Derek said simply, though his eyes were laughing at Stiles.

Stiles didn’t have time to retort. The rolling door eased back, and Danny walked in, Lydia stopping at the threshold, snarling at Derek when she couldn’t pass. “You have to invite her in,” Stiles informed Derek once Danny let go of hugging him with a gentle grip, knowing eyes looking for signs of the bruises he knew were somewhere beneath the baggy sweatshirt.

Derek lifted an eyebrow at Lydia. She wasn’t paying attention to him, eyes stuck on the couch and Stiles.

“Come in,” Derek grumbled, and Lydia fairly flew across the room, burying Stiles in a tight hug, pinning him to the couch.

“You’re alive,” she said, holding him tighter. “God, I really was worried whatever that thing is had killed you and was wearing your skin around, and I couldn’t find a way to test for a lamia.”

“Of course you’ve been testing it,” Stiles winced a little as her grip tightened again. “Lyds, you gotta ease up,” he said, tapping her shoulder. “I’m sorta walking wounded here.”

Lydia pulled back, catching Danny and Derek’s stare and flipped her hair back elegantly, sniffing slightly. “If it had been a lamia, I had plans to turn it into a killer pair of boots and handbag,” she informed him.

Danny snorted, amused, and Derek settled on the arm of the couch, working his hand into Stiles’, absorbing some pain from him. “Thanks, but you gotta be careful doing that,” Stiles said, easing his
hand away after a moment. “You’ll connect us without meaning to, Hale alpha and Volkov emissary, it’s a thing.”

“I’m not an Alpha,” Derek pointed out, frowning. “I gave that up healing Cora.”

“Are you sure?” Stiles gave him an odd, sideways look, smiling too innocently. “Look at Peter. Look at Aiden, though pretty sure that’s a whole separate thing. Do you think you’d be the same as them? You think I didn’t see you check your eyes in the mirror last night?”

“You were asleep,” Derek retorted automatically, and then scowled as he clearly realized he was basically confirming everything Stiles had said.

“You may not know what you are, Derek, but you’re not a Beta or an Omega,” Stiles said smugly, trying not to preen. Hurt or not, Derek looked an inch from growling at him. “You wouldn’t have gotten my distress calls otherwise.”


“Damaged phone,” Stiles grumbled, even though he knew Danny was right. He’d gotten lucky Derek had even noticed anything. “So… evil me isn’t a lamia, Lydia?”

“Can’t be, they skin and eat their victims before they can take on their shapes,” Lydia replied. “It’s a wearing the skin thing.”

“Derek put together a list,” Danny offered. “Doppelganger, skinwalker, maybe a witch with enough power, something nasty from the faeries…”

“Nope, tested that,” Lydia said triumphantly. “Remember the brownies I brought in on Friday?”

“You baked iron into brownies?” Stiles asked, impressed. “Damn.”

“I got my hands on the powder edible kind. Figured it’d be an impressive explosion if it worked. Not a flicker from him, though, and he ate like four,” Lydia replied. “I was thinking Selkie? Or I
guess it’s a Siren when it can change shapes?”

“Ms. Kelly might have friends, I think it’s a good bet,” Stiles put in. “Skinwalkers usually can’t mimic humans, and it’d be really hard pressed to get the scent right, otherwise I’d be talking with Scott and Isaac right now, right?” He knew from the way Lydia’s expression softened she hadn’t missed the wobble in his voice when he asked about Scott.

“It’s really good at distracting people,” Danny said sympathetically. “With Scott and Isaac and Allison, they’re pretty hard in the honeymoon phase of their relationship.”

“He’s being nice,” Lydia replied, wrinkling her nose. “They’re disgustingly all over each other, like, all the time.”

“Huh, I did tell Scott to go for it,” Stiles shrugged it off, turning his mind back over the possibilities. “Deaton can’t tell it’s not me?” he asked, and Lydia shrugged.

“He had a big blow up fight with Deaton about two weeks ago,” Lydia explained, and Stiles winced.

“Two weeks ago tomorrow?” he asked, shaking his head. “That was actually me. After reading some of my grandpa’s stuff, finding out who he was, finding out my parents lied to me about how he died, finding out Deaton was nothing like him… let’s just say I wasn’t ready to talk to Deaton about how badly he’d failed the Hales, and he pushed before I was ready to deal with why I was so bent out of shape about it.”

“He never hurt Cora or me,” Derek said.

“He never helped you,” Stiles replied, feeling his fists clench. “Deaton decided he wanted to be emissary to the True Alpha, and the rest of us were an afterthought, including the pack he’d taken an oath to protect. I have no doubt he had some foresight into the fact that you’d be offered the option of a Volkov emissary again, so he’d be dismissed, but he left before that happened. Of course, on the other end of his looney family, you have his sister who refused to sever her ties even when her Alpha went psycho and talked other people into killing for power.”

“You’re not my emissary, Stiles, I’m not an alpha, so you can’t be,” Derek growled, standing and stalking away to the window. He felt his eyes flaring in anger, and tried to reign it in as he added softly, “Even if we’d like it to be that way.”
“He’ll come around,” Stiles whispered in Lydia’s direction, bringing his finger to his lips in the universal gesture of silence to keep Danny quiet when he spotted Danny staring after Derek with saucer round eyes. “So no Deaton. No test for Selkies. What about doppelgangers and skinwalkers?”

“I couldn’t find much in the Argent bestiary about doppelgangers,” Lydia admitted, tilting her head thoughtfully. “Derek, how did Peter get a Siren in his ranks?”

“He travelled a lot,” Derek replied, not moving from where he was gazing out the window. “For years during and after college, before coming back to Beacon Hills and the pack. My dad once told me…” he swallowed, turning back to the group, sighing. “Peter was supposed to be the Hale Alpha, not my mom, that’s why Peter left. Her parents married her off to an Alpha who was desperate for an heir, because she was a beta, didn’t really show any signs of being an Alpha heir.”

“He was old enough to be her grandpa, dude,” Stiles butted in, making Derek glower at him. “And then they had a human kid, joke’s on him.”

“Human kid means when he passed away…” Derek prompted Stiles, who chuckled, mind reeling. “Shit, she inherits his power,” Stiles realized. “Then returns home, because no real pack, gotta have a pack around while you’re mourning, especially when you’re a single mom with a baby and new alpha powers you have to learn to control, and then her dad dies like a couple days later, right?” Derek nodded slowly, and Stiles clapped his hands, excited. “Boom, Talia Hale is twice over an alpha within days,” he concluded. “And powerful to boot, able to turn into an actual wolf and all that.”

“A little more succinct than my dad was, but yes.” Derek’s lips were curling downward unhappily, and Stiles settled in, swallowing down some of his conclusions.

“Sorry, I just… it clicked in my head,” he said quietly, knowing Derek would hear him. “I get focused and forget I shouldn’t be an asshole.”

A hand stroked through his hair a moment later, Derek dropping down to the couch arm again. Lydia was staring at him oddly, and Stiles was going to snap at her if Derek took his hand away from where it had come to rest at the nape of his neck, fingertips gently stroking there. “What?” he asked finally, and she shook off her daze.
"Your clone," she said. "He doesn’t have your darkness from the nemeton. He’s like you, but the you from before the sacrifice. That’s why he seems different to Danny and I, but to Scott, it’s back to the Stiles that he’s always known and loved."

“That could be part of it," Stiles agreed, looking at his hands and focusing in the gentle touch on his neck to help bite back his anger. He didn’t know why he expected Scott to notice, Derek was the one always rescuing him lately, Scott just rode in at the eleventh hour and kept his secrets and…

“Uh, Stiles?”

“Hmm?” He didn’t really acknowledge Danny, and Derek nudged the back of his neck, pulling his attention back. “Yeah, sorry?”

“Calm down?” Lydia suggested, pointing to Derek’s coffee table, where two mugs and a half a dozen pens were levitating.

“Huh, sorry,” he said, focusing and setting them back down. It made his muscles ache, and he burrowed into Derek’s sweater a little, shivering. He needed to be more careful, he didn’t have magic to spare to losing control.

“You weren’t like that before either," Danny observed, looking a little wary.

“The nemeton and I have been doing a lot talking the past couple of weeks,” Stiles explained, making wiggly fingers at Danny, then tucking them back inside the sweatshirt, cold setting in harder now. “I can’t be sure, since I’m burned out for the time being, but I think it unlocked a lot of my power, more than I had before.”

“Budge up,” Derek said, settling in behind Stiles again, and Stiles relaxed back into his werewolf space heater with a grateful sigh.

“Thanks,” he said softly, rolling his eyes at Lydia’s too shrewd look. “Are you planning to go back to school, or can I send you two to Deaton’s for some B&E? With Deaton MIA, Scott won’t open the clinic till after school, right?”

“I can handle it,” Lydia replied, comically cracking her knuckles and making small fists.
“Or I can pick the locks,” Danny told her, nodding to Stiles. “I imagine we don’t want your dad
involved because she threw a rock through the window.”

“I have the keys,” Stiles said, trying to keep the dismay out of his voice. “Geez, the breaking part
was supposed to be metaphorical! My evil twin probably has the ring with my house keys and the
SUV, but the clinic keys are on their own ring, in my bag.”

Behind him, Derek was trembling slightly, a low rumble against his back. It took Stiles a moment,
then he realized the older man was laughing, low and barely contained. Sure enough, when he tilted
his head back to look, Derek was biting his lower lip and his lips were twitching helplessly upward.
He let himself stare for a moment, even though Derek was looking at him curiously.

“Right,” he coughed, ignoring the fact that Danny and Lydia were both now looking absurdly smug
and knowing. “I’ll make you two lists, one for what I need to try something for Aiden, and one for
me. Can we get Aiden, and by extension Ethan, back in play without letting anyone know?”

“Even Scott and the pack?” Danny asked, and Stiles nodded. “I’m getting better at lying to them,
but…”

“So, we won’t lie,” Lydia supplied easily. “Stiles, Aiden should see a specialist, maybe a magical
one.”

“Well, yeah, I mean, I sort of am? You mean someone else?” Stiles asked, baffled.

“Danny, repeat after me,” Lydia commanded him. “They’re talking about sending Aiden to a
specialist.”

“They’re talking about sending Aiden to see a specialist,” he repeated obediently, grinning. Stiles
looked back to Derek, who nodded, looking mildly impressed.

“Ethan knows someone who might be able to help, but they can’t come to the Beacon Hills
Hospital,” Stiles tried, and Derek nodded again.

“They’ll have to send Aiden away, and of course, Ethan will go with his brother,” Derek said, then
looked to Danny.

“Oh, right,” he grinned, apparently starting to enjoy himself now. “So they’re talking about sending him away to the specialist, and of course Ethan’s going to go with him.”

“What else do you need?” Derek asked, and Danny thought for a moment.

“How are we actually planning to move him?” Danny asked.

“I was thinking sneak in after visiting hours, give him the antidote, have him walk back out, but him going missing is just as bad,” Stiles replied. “Huh, maybe we need to loop Melissa in?”

Stiles scribbled out his list of ingredients while Danny and Lydia debated if they should ask Ms. McCall cover their tracks by telling her the same lie or the truth. “Your call,” he said to Derek softly, shrugging. “I’m good with either.”

“Can she lie to Scott?” he asked, keeping his voice just as soft, so Danny and Lydia wouldn’t notice.

“Better question is ‘will she’,” Stiles supplied, frowning. “Probably better not to risk it.”

“We could bring Scott in,” Derek offered, and Stiles shook his head.

“We need to keep the illusion of status quo, get more information about who Peter has in his little army of supernatural misfits. Once Scott is on the inside, he’s going to start looking for the angle on solving it, and that’s likely to tip our hand,” he explained, aware that Danny and Lydia had started listening in. He knew he was being a little gun shy of looping Scott in after Scott’s last couple of plans, joining Deucalion and tricking Gerard, which had worked out, but took Scott some places Stiles wasn’t sure he wanted to go.

“All right, Danny, let’s go burgle some magic supplies,” Lydia jumped up, turning back just as they hit the door. “Ahh, not to add more to the mix, but we have an Allison problem too.”

Stiles felt his mind go blank for a moment, then the pieces nudged into place all too suggestively. “Wormwood?” he groaned, and Lydia nodded.
“Other you told her it might be okay in her micro doses occasionally, but she’d already been taking them for a week straight by then,” she explained. “Pretty sure she’s pretty much always taking it now too.”

“Any signs it’s hurting her yet?” he asked. Danny shook his head, but Lydia bit her lip. “Lyds, I need to know where this is at on my list of priorities.”

“She made a bad choice,” she scowled, but continued. “I thought I saw a flash of… like a green ring around her pupil earlier today.”

“Not the whole iris?” Stiles asked, and Lydia shook her head.

“She should be okay, heal the damage, but maybe see if you can steal her stash?” Derek suggested. “We shouldn’t let it go on much more.”

“Withdrawal won’t be pretty,” Stiles mused, biting at a hangnail on his thumb as he thought. “She’ll be out of the fight if Peter makes a move in the next week.”

“Better than seeing dead people for the rest of her life,” Derek replied.

“Okay, I’ll try to get it,” Lydia agreed, looking suddenly very small. “Stiles, just something you should consider. If we’re making it look like we’ve sacrificed our knights, maybe we should bring a bishop back in?”

Stiles nodded his understanding, even though it made his heart pound. “Am I a pawn in this metaphor?” Danny asked plaintively as Lydia herded him out the door. “Lydia, am I a pawn?”

“The cute one that makes two opening moves?” Stiles heard Lydia suggest before the door rolled closed behind them.

“You and Lydia aren’t pawns,” Derek said quietly, and Stiles shrugged, burrowing back under the blankets and into Derek slightly. “What would you be on the game board?”
“Rooks, I guess,” he said, knowing that Derek was testing the metaphor. “Though maybe Lydia’s the
queen, because really, I want to meet the bitch who takes the crown from Lydia.”

“Scott’s the king, so Allison’s his queen. Aiden and Ethan are the knights in the metaphor, so that
makes me one of the bishops, doesn’t it?” Derek spelled out and Stiles sighed, giving in.

“Yes, Lydia wants you back in play,” Stiles snapped, irritated. “She wants you for your senses and
to push fakes Stiles’ buttons, and dammit, she’s right, it’s the best move.”

“But?” Derek prompted him, sounding unusually patient, which made Stiles give in to the urge to
roll his eyes.

“But nothing. We’re not discussing it,” Stiles reminded him, rearranging himself so he could lay
down. “I’m going to catch a nap while they’re gone.” It was a low blow, knowing Derek wouldn’t
keep pressing if Stiles indicated he would rest, but Stiles needed time to swallow down the lump in
his throat and put away his fear before they went on.

-Chapter End Notes-

I think it's been Jossed (or who knows with ages and this show) but Stiles’ birthday will
always be April for me, and it sort of made sense to me that'd he'd be older, maybe had
to repeat a year, and that was part of why Scott was so easily able to roll with the
concept when it came to Allison - he was already familiar with the idea thanks to his
best friend.
Six Weeks Since... Friday

Chapter Notes

Some minor magical consent issues in this chapter.

-6-

Allison popped open her locker, dumping off her books and reaching for her purse. It had been a long, exhausting Friday, and the weekend wasn’t just calling, it was screaming her name at full volume. She smiled at Lydia, who had stayed all day at school for the first time all week, even if she’d slid into first period just ahead of the bell, but the redhead’s return smile was weak. Apparently Ethan had was taking Aiden away that evening to see some magical specialist.

“Hey, want to catch a movie or something?” Allison offered, digging in her purse as she offered, trying to find the strip of wormwood microdots she’d put in that morning. She’d seen a hint of Kate in the shadows behind her in the mirror after class. Today was apparently going to be a two dose day, if she could find the strip of sheets somewhere…

“No, thanks,” Lydia replied, closing her locker and pursing her lips thoughtfully. “I’m in more of a ‘crash alone with my copy of The Notebook and ice cream before I end up Skyping Jackson and later regretting all of it except the movie’ kind of a mood.”

“Okay,” Allison agreed, digging deeper, but coming up empty handed. “Shit, I think I lost… never mind,” she said, when Lydia tilted her head curiously.

“Okay,” Lydia brushed it off, and Allison just hoped she could keep the ghosts of Kate and her mom at bay till she could get home and take a dose from her stash there.

She trailed Lydia to the parking lot, nearly running into the shorter girl when she stopped suddenly just outside the school doors. “Look at what the cat dragged in,” Lydia practically purred, grinning at Allison. Allison followed her gaze to a familiar black Camaro, owner in a black leather jacket leaning against the hood, obviously waiting, probably for Scott.
“Come on,” Lydia tugged her arm, and hurried across the parking lot, putting on what Allison secretly thought of as Lydia’s ‘Happy Birthday, Mr. President’ smile, a little Marilyn, and a lot making men weak in the knees. “Welcome home,” Lydia greeted Derek, and to Allison’s surprise, not only did Lydia hug the older werewolf, he accepted the hug.

“Lydia,” he said coolly, then looked over at Allison, tilting his sunglasses down so he could look her dead on. She didn’t miss the subtle sniff and frown that followed. “Allison.”

“So you’re back,” she said, folding her arms. “To join Scott’s pack?”

“No,” Derek replied, shrugging. “Not sure how long I’m staying, but Ethan asked for my help with Aiden.”

“How’d he reach you? Stiles said your number was out of service,” Allison asked, suddenly suspicious. She couldn’t put her finger on it, but something about Derek was setting her senses on edge, like a knife was about to fall.

“A friend of Cora’s reached us,” Derek replied, apparently unconcerned about having been out of touch.

“I’m really glad you agreed to come help,” Lydia was saying, but Allison had turned her attention to the school, where Scott and Stiles and Isaac were leaving the building. If nothing else, Stiles’ reaction should be funny, she thought, hoping it’d be enough of a distraction so she could slip home and get a second dose of wormwood. Kate was winking from every window of the Camaro, making lewd faces as she rubbed her hands over his reflection, Allison feeling her face flood bright red in both embarrassment and relief that the nightmare Kate couldn’t actually touch Derek.

“Hey, man, welcome back,” Scott slapped hands with Derek, looking genuinely pleased. It grated on Allison’s nerves; wasn’t Scott supposed to hate Derek? She accepted Isaac’s hug, holding onto his waist, hoping he’d hang back with her.

“Scott,” Derek greeted him, nodding to Isaac. “Isaac.”

“Hey, Derek,” Isaac replied, letting go of Allison and then awkwardly embracing Derek, muttering something about being sorry. Allison bit down the impulse to roll her eyes, looking instead to Stiles, who was hanging back, face neutral as he watched Derek and Isaac hug it out.
“Right, welcome back, Derek,” Stiles said, waving awkwardly but keeping his distance.

“Stiles,” Derek said, looking a little surprised at the distance. “Car still in one piece?”

“Yeah, I’ve stayed out of trouble,” Stiles replied, twirling his keys on one finger. “I’d ask if you want it back, but it looks like you broke out the cool car instead.”

“Figure I’m not the Alpha anymore, I can drive the irresponsible car,” Derek smirked, running a hand over the hood. “Other than Aiden, how have things been?” he asked Scott.

Allison watched Stiles, surprised he’d played it so cool, but maybe Scott had been wrong about Stiles having a crush on Derek. He’d been pretty into Lydia lately. “We should catch up, everyone at my place?” Scott was saying to the group.

“I’ve gotta get home, Dad’s off tonight so I’m gonna catch some time with him,” Stiles said, bowing out easily. “But, hey, welcome back and all that, Derek. I’ll see you guys tomorrow at the meeting.” He waved goodbye before turning and heading quickly to

“I should go home too,” Allison said, struggling to keep her composure and not get caught in a lie when both Scott and Isaac’s attention was on her. “I’ve got a massive amount of homework this weekend. I don’t want Dad trying to keep me home tomorrow night.” Two unlinked true statements, with enough correlation to allow them to draw their own conclusions. Perfect.

“Ok,” Scott said, and she gave him a quick kiss, then did the same to Isaac, who followed Scott back toward their bikes, waving to Lydia as she ducked off toward her car.

“Allison,” Derek said softly, the same frown returning. She forced a light smile to her face, hoping like hell her mask wouldn’t break, before she turned back, carefully keeping a few feet of distance between them. “You need to stop.”

“Scott and Isaac and I know what we’re doing,” she replied, folding her arms. “Our relationship may not be traditional but—”

“You know that’s not what I’m talking about,” Derek said, reaching out a hand to grasp her shoulder and turn her toward the car. “Look in the mirror,” he said, and she blinked up at him, scowling.
“I don’t know what you think is going on, but I’m being perfectly safe,” she snapped. “I’m carefully with the doses.”

“Your eyes are turning green,” he insisted, and that drew her up short. She bent down, trying to see her own eyes, but all she could see in the reflection was Kate, gazing back at her.

“They look fine,” she said, standing and folding her arms.

“And when you eventually develop an immunity, when one dose stops working all day?” Derek stared at her, eyes flinty and angry. “Has it happened already, are you taking more?”

“I’m fine,” Allison replied, digging her keys out of her purse. “Leave it alone, Derek, you’re not even pack. Why should I listen to you?”

She stormed away, ignoring the nagging little voice at the back of her mind, pointing out that Derek was right, she was developing a resistance. Once in the car, she looked in the rearview mirror, but again, Kate blocked her view of her eyes. “Kiddo, you can’t listen to the big bad wolf,” the ghost in the mirror said with a laugh. “Of course he wants you weak, you’re a threat.”

She flipped the rearview mirror up, putting the car in gear and pushing the speed limit all the way home. “It’s only two microdots,” she said aloud, trying to comfort herself. “That’s barely anything compared to the drop I took in the club. It’ll be fine.”

The elevator crawled up four floors once she’d made it into the building, tapping her foot impatiently as she waited, ignoring the voice at the back of her mind getting louder telling her not to take the second dose. It took three tries to get her keys into the apartment lock, and just her luck, her Dad was sitting at the kitchen table, not sealed away in his office like usual.

“Allison,” he greeted her, and she forced a smile. “I thought we could have dinner.”

“Sure, let me put my stuff away,” she told him, making a quick break away to her room. She dropped her bookbag at the foot of her bed, digging into her nightstand drawer where she kept the microdot supplies and extra dots. She tossed out a couple of books and a folder, digging to the bottom of the drawer, coming up empty handed. She turned around remembering the spare strip of dots she had in her other purse, and noticed for the first time that her room had been tossed, drawers open and the purse in question was emptied onto her dresser, but no microdots were there.
“Dad?” she called out, turning on heel and stalking into the kitchen. “Were you in my room?” She stopped dead, watching her dad slam close a padlock on the inside of the door, spinning the combination pointedly at her. “What the hell?” she demanded, feeling panic start to close up her throat.

“You think I wouldn’t notice?” he asked, pointing to the dining room. The gas fireplace on the far wall was lit, a small fire burning, and the microdot making supplies she’d stolen from the chemistry cupboard were sitting on the hearth next to it, but no sign of the microdots. As she watched, he pulled a strip of her microdots out of his pocket.

“Dad, I can explain,” she tried, feeling her skin flush.

“No explanation necessary,” he said, tossing them into the fire. He picked up the poker, pushing them further in, then scooped up the supplies and tossed them in as well.

“No, you can’t—”

“That’s the last of them,” her dad actually raised his voice, speaking over her as he finished using the poker to push the syringes into the hottest part of the fire. “I can’t pretend to know what you’re going through,” he said, voice softer now as he set the grate back in front of the fire and returned the poker to the fireside stand, “But this isn’t how we’re going to deal with it. You’re officially locked down till you detox, Allison.”

“You can’t just lock me up, throw away the key and hope that solves your problems!” Allison yelled as he retreated down the hall. “I’m calling Scott!”

“Go right ahead,” her dad called back, and Allison dug her phone out of her purse, mocking him under her breath as she did, jaw dropping when she saw the service disconnect message on the screen.

“Family plan,” he shouted from his office, before she could even start to yell at him. “You can feel free to shout, break things, whatever you need, but you are on lock down. I checked with a friend of mine, he says a week should be enough to guarantee that poison is out of your system.”

Allison started stomping toward his office, catching her reflection in the hallway mirror. True to Derek’s earlier words, she could see a thin ring of bright green separating her pupil and iris. The
reflection rippled, and Kate looked back at her. “Rehab’s gonna be a bitch,” she said, laughing as Allison lashed out, punching the mirror.

Her dad came running out of the office, sighing when he saw her sinking down to the floor, hand bleeding and staring at the shards of falling mirror, hundreds of reflections of Kate, all laughing up at her mockingly.

-H-

“Huh,” Isaac said, waving his phone at Scott. He’d just closed the door behind the last of the group to leave Derek’s impromptu welcome home gathering, and Scott was a little grateful it had broken up early, his own exhaustion from the week threatening to get the best of him.

“Guess Allison was getting sick after all,” he told Scott, who frowned, checking his own phone. There was a text from Allison, letting them know she was down with a bad strain of the flu. It was followed by one from her dad, asking the pack to stay away as the doctor had suggested stress of any kind would add to her recovery time.

“Her dad seems…” Scott couldn’t put a finger on it, and Isaac nodded.

“I wonder if it’s also a darkness thing, maybe it was getting to her more than she was letting on,” Isaac suggested. “She wouldn’t want to admit to that.”

“Yeah,” Scott agreed, tilting his head back and resting it against Isaac thigh when he sat on the couch behind Scott. “I’ll call him tomorrow, see if she’s feeling up to a visit then. Hey, Stiles never showed up,” he realized as Isaac started running his fingers gently through Scott’s hair.

“You thought he would?” Isaac asked. “His dad’s had a pretty tight leash on him lately. I think he’s scared something will happen to him if Stiles keeps running with the pack.”

“Yeah, I figured he was just ducking out to avoid Derek, mostly,” Scott admitted. “He seemed upset to see him.”

“How’d you react when Allison came back after the summer?” Isaac asked curiously, and Scott smiled.
“I may have told Stiles to run a red light to avoid seeing her,” Scott admitted, making Isaac laugh softly. “Yeah, I see your point. I guess he wasn’t ready.”

He pulled his phone out anyway, sending a quick text to check in with Stiles. **U ok? Kno D back = weird 4 u.**

He relaxed into Isaac’s gentle touch, taking time to sort his thoughts from the evening. “Did Danny seem weird to you, about the whole Ethan leaving thing?” he asked, and Isaac paused, hands stilling for a moment.

“Yeah, a little,” he said finally. “I knew he was having trouble with the whole werewolf thing and what Ethan did when he was an Alpha, but I didn’t realize there was that much distance, you know? I thought he’d be more upset about Ethan leaving.”

Scott’s phone buzzed, and he looked down at it. **Didn’t expect him to come back, you know?** Stiles had sent to him.

**He askd abt u a bunch,** Scott typed back. **Thnk he missd u.**

“Maybe he’s just expecting Ethan to come back,” Scott suggested, and Isaac nodded thoughtfully. “Just doesn’t want to deal with it.”

“Like the reverse denial Stiles had going?” Isaac suggested, confirming that he was reading over Scott’s shoulder. “If you really want to get Stiles flustered, you should tell him that Derek still smells a little like Stiles. I think he’s been pining.”

“Seriously?” Scott asked incredulously, turning to face his boyfriend with a pained look. “I know, I’m trying to be supportive best friend, but other than that night at the club, I just haven’t seen it. He barely looked at Derek earlier. And it’s Derek!”

Isaac chuckled. “Honey, you can barely handle being attracted to me, and you do like me,” he commented dryly. “I’d die of shock if you got the attractiveness that is Derek Hale.”
“I can handle being attracted to you just fine,” Scott replied grumpily, looking up at Isaac worriedly. “You know I’m not just doing this for Allison, right?”

Isaac sighed, shrugging. “Look, it’s hardly ever just the two of us, which, you know… we live under the same roof. Seems like sometime in the past two weeks we should have… at least… something,” he stammered, flushing as Scott watched him. “We both have time with Allison, and with all three of us, but you sort of disengage when it’s just the two of us.”

“We’re usually here,” Scott replied, then winced when he saw the hurt on Isaac’s face. “No, that totally came out wrong! What I mean is… well, we’re always here, in my house, my mom and dad coming and going whenever they want and…”

“You’re scared of getting caught by your parents?” Isaac realized, and his lips quirked up, suddenly amused. “The Big Bad Werewolf is scared he’ll get grounded if he gets caught making out with his boyfriend.”

“Hah, that’s not what Mom would say,” he admitted ruefully. “She’d be wailing on me for helping you cheat on Allison and how could I do that to such a sweet girl.”

Isaac laughed, nodding his understanding. “Well, your mom’s working all night, going to be there to help Ethan slip his brother out without raising any red flags, right?” he said, tugging on Scott’s hands and pulling them both to their feet. “And your dad’s out of town.”

“And everyone else went home early,” Scott played along, grinning as he leaned in to kiss Isaac softly. “And we’re really overdue for some alone time, I hear,” he added.

“So very, very overdue,” Isaac replied, kissing him again for a long moment, before tugging him toward the stairs. “Your room or mine?” he asked.

“Mine’s closer,” Scott managed, half stumbling up the stairs as Isaac kept kissing him, the tangle of hands and legs not ideal for making it up the stairs, but he wasn’t about to stop.

“You sure you don’t want Lydia along?” Stiles asked for the third time, and she whapped him with the ladle, making him scowl at her. “Dammit, Lydia, I can manage one magical potion on my own, I
don’t need a babysitter, no matter what you and Sourwolf here think,” he insisted, and Derek leaned in, pressing his fingers to Stiles’ forehead, checking how cold he was. “Fuck off,” Stiles growled, stomping back to check the book on the table.

“Hey,” Derek said softly, following him over to the stack of notes and books that covered the kitchen table. “I’ll be fine, stop worrying so much, Stiles.”

“Class B felony to remove a patient without a doctor’s consent, it’s technically a class B felony kidnapping,” Stiles quipped, blowing his hair out of his face in frustration.

“We have the next of kin’s consent, and your Dad is hardly going to bust us when he finds out you were replaced by a supernatural clone and this was step three or four of securing your safe return,” Derek quipped back, looking amused.

“It’s like step ten, Derek, and my double could be thinking about coming after you and—”

“Your double looked about as pissed to see me as you actually would have been had I not been rescuing you from a magical cage under an evil tree,” Derek replied dryly.

“Honestly, Stiles, it’s not like this is Scott’s plan,” Lydia tutted impatiently, shoving the ladle back into his hand. “It’s your brain child, so it’ll work, right?”

“No!” Stiles shot back, scowling. “What the hell are you all doing listening to me? I’m a spastic, human idiot who can’t even…” he slammed the ladle down on the side board, stomping over to gaze out the large window. “It needs to simmer,” he snapped at Lydia when she reached for the ladle, even though he wasn’t looking, and she held her hands up, backing away.

‘Darkness,’ she mouthed at Derek, tilting her head subtly in Stiles’ direction. Derek nodded, slipping through the kitchen and joining Stiles at the window. Stiles was slumped inward, making himself as small as possible inside the layered sweaters he’d borrowed from Derek.

“Don’t exhaust yourself while I’m gone,” Derek said softly, ignoring the fact that Lydia and Danny were both eavesdropping shamelessly.

“Oh, so I can’t, but now you get to worry?” Stiles retorted, but it came out tired. Derek took a chance and leaned in, pressing his chin to Stiles’ shoulder so he could gage how cold Stiles’ was.
His skin was pale, but not scarily so, and Derek could feel he was cold, but not alarmingly so. “I know what you’re doing,” Stiles murmured, leaning his forehead against the windowpane.

“So?” Derek replied indifferently. “You can snap and snarl at me all you want, Stiles, I’m not backing off. Not this time.”

“Pretty words,” Stiles sneered, then stared at his own reflection for a long moment, looking startled. “I didn’t mean that,” he said slowly. “I’m really unfocused tonight, can’t get anchored.”

“Isn’t that what Lydia’s supposed to do for you?” Derek frowned, still not certain how the whole sacrifice and anchor dynamic was supposed to work.

“Not sure that’s actually how it works,” Stiles replied. “Sure, if she was still the center of my universe, maybe, but she’s not.”

Derek inhaled sharply before he could help it, his heart picking up its pace a little at Stiles’ words. His biggest worry was that Stiles was still in love with Lydia, that whatever was between them wouldn’t last another six months waiting if Lydia ever noticed Stiles. “Could you anchor yourself to something else? Wolves change anchors sometimes. I’m... I’ve changed mine more than once.”

“I’m trying,” Stiles replied, rubbing wearily at his eyes. “Maybe once we get rid of my doppelganger and I can go home and can focus on my dad, family? I can’t focus on Scott because part of me is mad that he didn’t notice I was gone. I can’t focus on you, because you’re not mine.”

“Focus on pack,” Derek suggested, enjoying the eye roll that earned him. “Your universe doesn’t need a center, you have a pack. Lydia, who is your friend and noticed you were gone. Danny, who apparently made sure everyone got the message about your coming out once and for all. Your dad is suspicious, I promise, or he wouldn’t be keeping such a close watch over your look alike, right? And you have me, I am yours, Stiles, even if it’s not everything you want yet.”

Stiles’ eyes were distant, nodding and focusing again once Derek was silent, and Derek could tell from the way Stiles had stopped shrinking in on himself that the words had had their intended effect. “Okay, we can do this,” Stiles resolved quietly, giving Derek a small smile. “Go, get out of here before you leave Ethan hanging around the ambulance bay for too long and someone catches on.”

“Come on,” Danny jingled the spare keys to the Camaro at him, grinning widely. “Can I drive?”
Derek snarled and snatched the keys out of Danny’s hand, moving quickly out of the loft before he could change his mind. Danny mercifully kept quiet until he had pulled the car out of the loft complex. “You should just tell him,” Danny remarked, reaching for the radio and getting his hand slapped back for the effort.

“Tell him what, exactly?” Derek asked, carefully lacing the hint of a threat under his words. Danny just rolled his eyes, and Derek briefly took a moment to mourn the fact that, like Stiles and Lydia, he no longer scared Danny.

“He’s your anchor, or part of it, isn’t he?” Danny said. “Him, Cora, Jackson… maybe me and Lydia too, you consider us pack, even though you’re not the Alpha anymore. You’ve done some weird Beta-adoption of us, like Scott used to do with everyone before he was really an Alpha.”

“You’re all Scott’s pack, not mine,” Derek grumbled.

“Cora’s not. Jackson never will be, he told me that himself,” Danny countered. “Stiles can’t be.”

“He’s Scott’s best friend, of course he can be,” Derek objected.

“He’s an emissary, or will be,” Danny said, shaking his head. “And I got nosy when I started getting suspicious, lifted his journal, lifted the bestiary, and I learned something interesting. Stiles can’t be Scott’s emissary. Deaton told him.”

“Deaton wants to be Scott’s emissary, he’s not a reliable source,” Derek protested weakly. “He’s already proven he’s going to think about himself first.”

“Apparently Stiles agreed with his assessment, otherwise Deaton never would have started training him,” Danny observed, sounding all too innocent.

“So what about you, Danny?” Derek turned the conversation back around on the high schooler. “Where do you fit in the big picture? Do you want the bite, want to be a werewolf? Pick up magic, be a wizard too?”

“I want to hack things,” Danny replied. “Break into vet clinics and steal potion ingredients. Lift magic books off of shape shifters who could probably break my neck with their pinkies if they caught me. Someday, I want to blow up a building just to prove I can. I can do all that and be
“Your life’s ambition is to be a criminal,” Derek summarized flatly.

“My life’s ambition is to live,” Danny corrected him. “Fast, loud, run with werewolves, do what I want.”

“You’re a very strange human,” Derek decided, turning into the hospital parking lot and turning off the headlights. He drove carefully around the outside edge of the parking lot, easing the Camaro into the alley alongside the ambulance bay.

They slid out of the car, Danny stepping ahead of Derek to pick the lock on the side door to the ambulance bay. “We could wait for them to open it from the other side,” Derek pointed out, but Danny had already jimmed it open.

“Strange human, remember?” Danny told him, grinning triumphantly. “Gotta keep my skills sharp.”

The ambulance bay was dark, and fortunately, empty. “Never going to be a better window to do this,” Danny observed in a hushed tone. “Let’s hope they’re not far behind us.”

Derek focused his senses, carefully picking out Melissa and Ethan’s scents, then the ticking of the wheelchair wheel that was rolling alongside their footsteps, placed the noise of a nurse in the ER admitting station against it to gauge the distance and nodded. “They’re coming down the hall now.”

“Freaky,” Danny observed, though he sounded more impressed than intimidated. “What’s your range on hearing and smelling when it’s not Stiles?”

“More than Ethan’s,” Derek replied, folding his arms and glaring in a way that he hoped would discourage further questions.

“But how—” Danny broke off as the ambulance bay sliding doors opened, letting Melissa and Ethan push Aiden, unconscious and slumped in the wheelchair, down the ramp toward them.

“I still think this a very bad idea,” Melissa hissed at them. “Without the IV’s, without care, his
condition could get worse, Ethan.”

“He’s a werewolf, and he’s not healing,” Ethan said, stopping the wheelchair and putting on the brakes. “Gotta try something, Ms. McCall.”

“If it doesn’t work, we can have him back quickly,” Derek put in, nodding to her as Ethan bent down and easily lifted his brother over his shoulder. “It’s not that far away.”

“Derek,” she said, looking faintly surprised and more relieved than Derek would have expected. She nodded once, resolve seeming to set in, and she helped Ethan load his brother carefully into the back of the Camaro, Danny helping Ethan cradle Aiden between them for the drive.

“I need a moment,” she told him, pulling his arm and shutting the car door. “How far away can they still hear this?”

“Further than I’m comfortable stepping away when we’re in the commission of something dubiously legal,” Derek admitted, even as he followed her a few feet away. To his surprise, she drew a small vial out and tapped a small amount of powder into the palm of her hand. She closed her eyes, then breathed across it, the powder forming a fine curtain between the car and them. Derek glanced over his shoulder, and judging by the put out look on Ethan’s face, he’d been cut out of the conversation.

“I hate doing that, I’m gonna have to eat a really big burger and fries to deal with the kick back of not really being magical, like hardly at all according to Deaton, and it’ll only last a few minutes,” she said, words tripping over each other as they came out. “Scott needs help, he hasn’t been controlling the darkness well or the new alpha powers, or I guess, both? Can you come to the Argents’ apartment tomorrow morning? We have a parents’ meeting, me, the Sheriff, Chris, and Deaton, usually.”

“You have a parents’ meeting?” Derek repeated, blinking at her for a moment, dumbfounded. “Um, yes, I guess I’ll be there,” he decided, mind swirling. “Me. And maybe someone else, I… have to have a discussion.”

“Thanks, nine a.m.,” she told him, just as the powder fell to the ground in a gravity defying rush. “Thanks, Derek.”

He nodded, shoving his hands in his pockets, and walking slowly back to the car. “What was that about?” Danny asked, and Derek shook his head.
“Let’s just get Aiden back to the loft,” Derek said, making his tone hard so Danny would know not to push.

Lydia drew in a shaky breath, watching as Stiles continued to stir the mixture on the stove, the color lightening, but not to anything she could call pale green yet like the book on the table described, it was still mostly brown. “Still got ten minutes,” he reminded her, continuing to stir the pot steadily.

“What if we don’t have it right?” she asked, letting her fears out for a moment, letting Stiles see past the mask of worry.

“Then we try again, start a second batch,” Stiles reassured her, flashing a too-confident smile.
“Shouldn’t you be worrying about whether or not I’ll have enough power to get through the magical part of this?”

“No, I came up with a solution to that half an hour ago,” she admitted, pulling a sharp knife out of the chopping block. Stiles looked up just in time to see her slice open her palm in a quick, deft move.

“Are you out of your mind?” he asked, and Lydia turned a quick, razor sharp grin on him.

“ Entirely possible,” she agreed, grabbing hold of his right hand. “Keep stirring,” she admonished him, when his left faltered.

“Right hand for receiving power,” she reminded him, somewhat absently as she drew the runes from Deaton’s notes up Stiles’ forearm in her blood.

“You’re lucky Derek isn’t here, he’d be having a fit,” Stiles said shakily. She shrugged at it, still smiling a mischievous little smile.

“Lucky I waited to do this till after he left then, hmm?” she replied, projecting innocent into her tone, even though she knew he’d never buy it. “And…” she traced the last symbol, final stroke making her shudder and gasp at the feeling of the conduit of her powers opening. Stiles kept stirring, but she
looked up in time to see his pupils dilate, far beyond what a human eye should be capable of, clouding out almost the entire iris for a moment, then contract back down.

“Quite the kick,” Stiles murmured, his own smile too sharp and a little dangerous. Lydia clenched down on her own reaction, determined not to be afraid of him. “Nice little jolt from a banshee, yes, I can work with this. Just loop it in like so…” he shuddered, and the potion suddenly bubbled furiously, going ink black before suddenly clearing, becoming a pale, translucent green. The liquid had also lost almost all its viscosity now, splashing away from the movement of the spoon as easily as water.

Stiles stumbled slightly, the connection breaking between them in a visceral way that brought Lydia to her knees. She struggled to pull in a breath as her magic rushed back in, capping and throwing up its usual walls in a smothering rush. The blood on Stiles’ arm hissed, evaporating in a thin, red haze that drifted into the air.

“You’d better open a window,” Stiles remarked coolly, though Lydia could see him trembling slightly. “And bandage your hand. Don’t want our overprotective wolves catching the scent of blood.”

She nodded, rising and telling herself not to move too quickly to the windows, watching with one eye as Stiles measured the potion out into a series of glass vials. “We should be able to store the rest of these, in case of mistletoe poisoning in the future,” he said, setting the pan down again once he had finished. He turned off the burners, turning back to Lydia and folding his arms, waiting expectantly.

“If you’re waiting for me to apologize,” she started, and Stiles’ chuckled.

“Oh, I’m sure Hell will freeze over first,” he remarked quietly. “And if you’d just volunteered, I’d have let you do it, Lydia. Never do it again without my permission.”

Lydia winced, but nodded. If he’d been angry, yelling, it would have been easier, but the cold disappointment stung. “You weren’t going to ask,” she observed, keeping her voice soft.

“My choice, Lydia.”

She watched him start cleaning the kitchen, finally making the decision to roll up her own sleeves and tackle cleaning out the large stock pot they’d been using as a cauldron. Stiles nodded at her
slightly, corners of his mouth turning up slightly, and she knew he’d understood her apology, even if she’d never actually say it. “You used knowledge from the nemeton to finish the potion, didn’t you?” she asked, once the pot was scrubbed clean.

“Hmm, it seemed familiar with banshee magic, not surprising if your family has been here long enough,” Stiles agreed, not looking up from where he was stoppering all but one of the vials.

“Pretty sure it was my great, great, great grandma who moved here?” Lydia said, racking her brain. “No, only two greats on that,” she deciding, nodding to herself. “Everything I’ve read suggests most of the power part skips generations, and the first one from our family was supposedly running from something bad.”

“Doesn’t mean she had powers,” Stiles pointed out, and Lydia smiled tightly.

“Power attracts darkness,” she replied acidly. “Why else would Peter come after humans like us? Well, I suppose we have a little extra. What’s in your blood, what makes you magic? Baba Yaga? Maybe a Psnotnik?”

“Not banshee,” Stiles snapped back, subduing at the sound of car tires crunching on the gravel below. “Is it them?” he asked, and Lydia went to the window, nodding.

“You dodged the question,” she observed, watching his cheeks flush a little. “Because you think I’ll make fun of you.”

“I know you’ll get a good laugh,” he replied, rolling his eyes. “My grandfather’s journals suggest it was Berstuk.”

“Berstuk?” she repeated, running through her poor amount of Russian mythology. “Akin to Erlkonig… but Russian, so he wouldn’t be an elf, a forest spirit like that would be a Vila.” It took her a moment to bounce through the lines to find the joke, and by the time she made it to Harry Potter, Stiles was already glaring at her.

“You are very pretty,” she told him, patting his cheek.

“It’s only the women who get the beauty,” he sighed. “My mom was ridiculously beautiful. Even at the end, with the cancer, I still remember her being beautiful.”
Lydia bit back a joke and was glad she did as the door rolled back and Derek was saying quickly, “Come in, come in,” to Ethan, who was carrying Aiden.

“Get him on the couch, head tilted back,” Stiles told them, picking up the unstoppered vial of peridot colored water. “Any trouble?” he asked Derek quietly, as Lydia moved to help hold Aiden’s head.

“We’ll talk later,” the werewolf replied, and Stiles nodded in understanding.

“Stiles?” Ethan asked, frowning as he stood from where he’d been crouched by his twin. “I thought you said you couldn’t help.”

“Oh, well, not me,” Stiles said, waving awkwardly at Ethan. “I’ve got a Doppelganger.”

“Literally?” Ethan asked, frowning. “I thought they never left Europe, were like all but extinct.”

“Okay, we don’t know what it is, but it’s not me,” Stiles replied impatiently. “So no, it wasn’t about to help you, because hello, not me. Bad guy, in fact.”

“Stiles,” Derek said softly, and Stiles sighed, rolling his eyes. Not for the first time, Lydia observed that in spite of his polite masks, Stiles didn’t actually like the twins.

“Okay, you’ll need to hold his feet,” he informed Derek, pointing Danny toward the knees. “Everything I’ve read suggests he’s going to have a pretty violent reaction to this, you know, if we did it right.”

“You did it right,” Lydia muttered under her breath, and regretted it a moment later when Derek’s hazel eyes flicked her direction, catching the soft words. She scowled, reminding herself it wasn’t really her lookout if Stiles wanted to play down his abilities, might even be hypocritical of her, since Stiles had never really called her on it when he shouldn’t have. And given the narrowed eyes Derek was currently leveling at Stiles, this might have been one of the ‘shouldn’t have’ times.

“So, I’m immune, I’ve got the teeth,” Lydia quipped, determined to diffuse the tense moment. “Ethan and Derek have the claws, and so help me Danny, if he wolfs out and I don’t see you backing the fuck away, I will show you what a banshee scream can do.”
“You know if this works, he won’t be an Alpha, and they’ll be able to hold him just fine,” Stiles started to say, earning himself a warning snarl from Derek. “Of course I’m just going to pour the potion down his throat then back the hell away, so you know, example, feel free to follow, yadda,” Stiles said cheerfully, ignoring the way Danny snickered at the byplay.

He tipped the vial into Aiden’s mouth, and contrary to what he’d said, he stayed in place, coaxing his fingers along Aiden’s trachea to stimulate the swallowing reflex. It would have been much easier if he could have just injected the damn stuff, Lydia thought, determined to play with the formula and improve it so if this ever happened again, they could.

Aiden was still as Stiles backed away, putting himself behind Danny and closer to Derek, which seemed to settle the werewolf some. “How long is it supposed to take?” Ethan asked, looking back at Stiles, who shook his head, eyes focused on Aiden.

They were all silent for a long moment, then Stiles sighed. “I must have not—”

Aiden convulsed, legs shuddering in a violent way that suggested they’d have kicked out if Derek weren’t holding them down. Lydia choked back a startled noise when Aiden’s teeth elongated then retracted, blood speckled foam appearing at his mouth.

“Okay, good,” Stiles snapped sharply, and Lydia nodded back at him as she tipped his head sideways toward the bucket they’d left there earlier. “Hold his shoulders, he’s going to purge the toxins,” Stiles explained to Ethan, who helped tip his brother over, just as black ooze started pouring out after the foam.

-A-6-

Aiden reached with his claws, tearing into the Alpha, ignoring the stink of death in the air that came with the fresh welling up of blood his claws had loosed.

“Come on, beta,” Patrick snarled, dark muzzle elongating and eyes flashing red. “Give in, you’re no match for me now!”

Aiden growled back, letting his own blue eyes flash as he charged in again, swiping claws at Patrick’s throat. The Alpha was too quick, laughing as he caught and jerked Aiden’s arm upward, cracking the bones easily. “I wonder, will your twin feel your death?” he asked as he dragged
Aiden in close, closing claws around Aiden’s throat.

“Not how it happened, bro,” a new voice interjected, and Aiden fell suddenly, the clearing dark and still. He struggled up to his knees, looking over at Ethan, who was watching him.

“You’re not supposed to be here,” he managed to say hoarsely, trying to clear his throat. “Ethan, run.”

“Not this time, how many times has he ripped out your throat?” Ethan asked, folding his arms and setting in, looking stubborn.

“Always, he always…” Aiden choked out, and suddenly he was on his feet again, arm broken and wrenched up in one of Patrick’s clawed hands, the other wrapped around his throat.

“Remember what you did,” Ethan barked out sharply, and Aiden looked up, realizing he’d just looked up from biting range of Patrick’s throat. That was what he was supposed to do. Bite down, tear… he gagged as the toxic, death laden blood filled his mouth, violently jerking away…

Aiden sat up, coughing violently, and following his brother’s guiding grasp to purge his insides once more, before collapsing back weakly into Lydia’s lap. “What the fuck,” he coughed out, barely able to lift his head. He hadn’t felt this weak and trembling since he was human.

“Poison, from a Gollem,” Stiles answered, and Aiden looked up, trying to nod gratefully at the young emissary. “It’ll take a couple of days for you to finish healing, but that should have taken care of the worst of it.”

“So I didn’t kill Patrick,” Aiden remarked, sounding disappointed, and immediately hating the narrow, pinched look Stiles gave him for it. “My eyes?” he asked, letting them flare, and Ethan shook his head slightly. “Good,” he decided, letting his eyes close. “Ethan, I think it’s time to go back to being lost in L.A, or somewhere big,” he coughed, falling into a light doze, half listening, half resting. Lydia’s hands were still resting on his head but they’d stopped stroking his temples, and he knew if he cracked his eyes open, she’d be giving him a cold eyed glare.

“I’m sorry,” he heard Ethan say quietly. “He’s been talking about leaving ever since the Darach split us. It’s not easy, being betas again.”
“We’re going to need your help,” Stiles remarked, voice calm but there was an undercurrent of irritation Aiden could make just make out. “Peter’s amassing an army of supernatural creatures to take out Scott, who frankly is the only one in this pack who thinks you’re worth a second chance. Should have guessed they’d bail,” he grumbled, in what Aiden thought was probably meant to be a quiet aside to Derek but his werewolf senses picked up all too easily.

“We’ll help bring Peter down,” he growled, struggling to sit up and move away from Lydia. “Then we’re square. And Ethan and I go, right?”

He looked to his twin, who was gazing at Danny. For a moment, Aiden wondered if his twin was about to go his own way, but Danny broke the gaze, shifting slightly, his stance putting him just behind Stiles’ shoulder, like a second in a pack would do for an alpha, except Stiles was standing shoulder to shoulder with Derek. He wondered briefly if Peter was going to live long enough to regret what he’d woken here.

“We’ll lay low at one of our safe houses till you call for us,” Ethan decided, looking over at Aiden. “Come on, bro, I’ve got clothes for you.”

Aiden looked down, wrinkling his nose in disgust at the pale blue striped hospital gown he’d been stuck in.

“I’ll take them to their safe house then go home,” Danny told Derek, nodding past Aiden to where Lydia was sitting.

“I’ve had enough excitement for tonight,” she said acidly, pursing her lips as she regarded Aiden coolly. “Guess I’ll see you when we actually need you,” she quipped, standing and stalking out of the room. Stiles hurried to help her tuck some books in her bag, the pair exchanging some silent dialogue in looks and exchange of notes. “See you tomorrow, after the pack meeting,” he heard her tell Stiles softly, then with pointed flip of her hair as she passed him, she left the loft.

He grabbed the bag with his clothes and headed to the bathroom to change, shamelessly eavesdropping on the conversations he left behind.

“I’ll be upstairs when you’re ready to talk… when they’re out of earshot.” He could practically hear the way Stiles rolled his eyes before his footsteps on the stairs and Derek moving away into the kitchen area to give Danny and Ethan an illusion of some privacy.
“Look, Danny,” Ethan started.

“No, I get it. You’ve got to protect your family, and I’ve got to protect mine. No middle ground for us here, is there?” Danny sounded resigned, but not as disappointed as Aiden would have thought. “And let’s be realistic. We both know I’ve spent the last six weeks since you brought me into this wondering what’s real and what’s because you were ordered to be with me.”

“Danny,” Ethan tried again, and Danny sighed, just audible enough to catch Aiden’s hearing.

“Right,” Ethan gave in, and he sounded like Aiden had expected, dejected and resigned in equal measure.

He wriggled into his jeans and a shirt, ducking out. “You done breaking up?” he asked, keeping his voice flat and unimpressed, even if did hate that his twin was hurting. It was past time for them to break the bonds holding them here and get somewhere anonymous and safe.

“Let’s go,” Danny said gruffly, looking pissed. “Before I change my mind about the offer of a ride.” He grabbed his keys, nodding to Derek as he came back into the living room space. “I’ll be back in the morning, research to do,” he informed the former Alpha.

Derek stopped Danny with a surprisingly gentle touch to his shoulder, checking over Danny’s face before nodding once, and Danny seeing to draw strength from the silent check Derek had done.

Aiden stared at Derek, who gaze back coolly, looking unruffled. He was not entirely sure the older man wouldn’t have ripped out his throat if he hadn’t needed the twins, and given the way Aiden had helped decimate his pack, he supposed it was deserved. “Tell Stiles thanks,” he said finally, and Derek nodded once.

“Put your hoods up,” Danny hissed at them as he rolled the loft door open for them.

“They gone?” Stiles asked, looking up from one of his grandfather’s journals when Derek reached the top of the spiral staircase, nodding tiredly before he sat on the mattress. “What are the odds they skip town tonight once Danny drops them off?” he added, enjoying the way Derek smirked slightly at his acid tone.
“I think Aiden is the type to need to wipe the slate clean before he leaves,” Derek replied. “And he owes you.”

“I somehow doubt that means the same thing to him as it does to you or me,” Stiles replied dryly, but returned to the notes he was making on his grandfather’s recipe for stopping a foe in their tracks. It was only good for a few moments, but if he could get his hands on the herbs, a few seconds were all Derek usually needed to get the upper hand. “So what’d you need the private confab for?”

“Melissa McCall invited me to their parents of the pack meeting,” Derek scowled, and Stiles felt his lips twitching as he tried to hold in his laughter.

“Like you’re a real adult and everything?” he asked, trying for a straight tone, but he could tell from Derek’s deepening scowl that he’d completely failed.

“Do you want to come with me?” Derek asked, visibly gritting his teeth around his pained expression. “Might be our chance to let your dad and Chris Argent in on things.”

“Where are they meeting?” Stiles asked, nibbling on the end of his pen as he thought it over.

“Argents’. I think he’s got Allison under lock and key to detox.”

Stiles made a face. “Sorry, Sourwolf, that’s deep in enemy territory. Ms. Kelly lives in that building, pretty sure she was the inside woman getting Peter in to kill Deucalion.”

“Peter couldn’t have taken him in a fair fight,” Derek remarked, shrugging. “Someone had to give him an edge.”

“Never underestimate the femme fatale,” Stiles quipped, before sighing. “I want my dad in on this, but I can’t think of a way to do it without exposing him to danger.”

“I want you anchored,” Derek replied, leaning in and grasping a hand to the back of Stiles’ neck, pulling him in so their foreheads rested against each other. “Your dad’s a big part of that. If I can make it happen, I’ll find a way.”
“Thanks,” Stiles replied, feeling his heart start racing, mouth going dry as he struggled to breathe. He felt like he was aching to close the space, press his lips to Derek’s. As if sensing the struggle, Derek pulled away, dropping his watch on the rickety bedside stand and heading for wardrobe where his clothes were stored. “I can sleep on the couch tonight,” Stiles volunteered cautiously, unsurprised when Derek frowned at him. He crossed the room, fingers finding Stiles’ too cool skin along his forehead.

“It’ll be fine, if it’s too much or I mean…” Stiles blew out a long breath, feeling his face flush slightly. “There, see, you got me all flustered and I’m plenty warm.”

“I want you close,” Derek admitted quietly, looking pained at the words. “I want… just stay here, Stiles.”

“Oh, okay,” Stiles agreed, swallowing down his smart aleck response. “I can stay here.”

He tucked his notes into his grandfather’s journal, and set it on the side table, determined to get himself tucked in under the covers before Derek came out of the bathroom, avoid any further embarrassment if he could.

The lights went out behind him, room dimly lit from the lights in the living room below. Derek slid into bed behind him a moment later, and Stiles flushed bright red at the squeak of noise that escaped him when Derek draped his front along Stiles’ back, easing an arm around his waist. “Okay?” Derek asked softly, and Stiles nodded frantically, trying to think of anything other than the heat of Derek’s bare chest, warming his skin even through the sweatshirt he was wearing. “Relax,” Derek suggested dryly, but the way his hand found the bare skin where the sweatshirt had ridden up, gently stroking the skin at Stiles’ waist focused his mind exactly where he didn’t want it to go. Derek was pressed so close that Stiles knew there was no way he could be missing the scent of arousal pouring off him.

“Easy for you to say,” he grumbled. Derek’s hand was completely under his shirt now, warm and massive and gently stroking down his ribs and to the curve of his hips and back up. Each stroke was easing the pain slightly, just enough that it was actually calming Stiles.

“That’s it, just relax,” Derek said softly, voice low along Stiles’ ear. He shivered slightly, letting a chuckle escape.

“Tease,” Stiles murmured, even though he was quickly succumbing to sleep.
Danny dropped his keys into the basket by the door, toeing his shoes off and sighing tiredly as he headed for the kitchen. To his surprise, his sister Delia was sitting at the island in the kitchen, working on homework and nibbling on cold pizza. She was a freshman this year, though she avoided Danny in the hall the way only a little sister with aspirations of ruling the school in Lydia’s footsteps could manage.

“You okay?” she asked, blinking at him when he dropped into one of the kitchen barstools, a cup of his little brother’s chocolate pudding in hand.

“Ethan’s moving,” he lied easily, and Delia gave him a sympathetic smile. “And we’re out of ice cream. Making due.”

“Sucks, but you know you can do better, right?” she told him, giving him a quick smile.

“Sure, but really, can you trust my taste in guys?” he asked, licking his spoon clean slowly.

“At least this one was pretty decent, right?” Delia asked, and Danny shrugged.

“Haven’t been so sure about that lately,” he admitted. “What about you, anything exciting?”

“Sasha Lisik, she’s new, from Austria or Romania or somewhere like that, asked me to the Winter Formal,” she told him, giving him a sideways glance.

“Is she one of the ones you wanted to ask you?” Danny strained to remember the list of names she’d rattled off the week before.

“Yeah, or Mike Newsome asked too, but I think I’d rather go with Sasha,” she told him. “Her uncle is creepy though, I met him last week when I was over doing homework. She lives with him, since her parents died when she was a kid.”
“I guess that’ll make this your big coming out?” Danny asked, and Delia shrugged.

“All my friends already know I’m bi,” she said. “And I’m your sister, so it’s not like it was some huge surprise. Everyone thinks it’s some cool testimony to genetics or how we were raised.”

“Or lack thereof,” Danny suggested.

“Right?” she smirked.

“Sasha’s uncle going to have a problem with it?” Danny asked, wondering what qualified as creepy with people outside his social circle these days.

“Nah, he’s gay, I guess he’s been down to the Jungle a few times,” she told him, and Danny paused, spoon halfway to his mouth, thoughts clicking into place.

“Any chance Sasha is Ukrainian?” he asked, setting down the spoon.

-Stiles clenched his hand, fighting the urge to slam it down on the exam table. “And what color would my eyes be, Deaton, if I’d been bitten? If I tell you they’d be blue, am I done? Are we done?”

Panic swallowed him whole, shrunk him down into his eleven year old self.

“Hey, Gennadiy,” his mom said quietly, pulling him back from where he was watching his dad leave on a call.

“Mama,” he said, and she pulled him up onto the bed beside her. Melissa had gotten on shift earlier, or he wouldn’t have let her. The other nurse was always yelling about how his mom needed her rest and he shouldn’t be up there.

“I love you,” she murmured, kissing his forehead and snuggling in beside him.
“Love you too, Mama,” he said tiredly. He’d been at the hospital for almost two days, his dad had been called out so many times.

“Hand me my pain button, please?” she asked softly, and Stiles reached over, handing her the button for her morphine. Her arms were too shaky to reach, and she had to have help sitting up, the cancer stripping her down to her final strength it seemed.

“It’s gonna beep,” he complained, and she smiled.

“No, little darling, Melissa helped me turn off the beeping,” she promised him, kissing his head softly once more. He sighed, tucking his head in so he could go to sleep, dimly aware of the button clicking over and over again.

Panic washed him away again.

“Blue eyes,” he insisted, slamming his hands down on the exam table, glaring at Deaton. “Or was it about wanting the True Alpha?”


Peter stood over him, teeth bared. “Why am I not an Alpha? You know something, so start talking or I’ll start peeling your skin away a strip at a time, Stiles.”


He paced the loft, angry and buzzing with energy. “Screw this,” he said aloud to the loft. “Alone isn’t working. Fuck Deaton, Stiles, let’s just go out.”

PanicFlashPanicPain.

“I’m surprised to see you again,” Colin said, hands curving around Stiles’ hips. “Can I talk you into coming with me tonight?”
“I think I might be persuaded,” Stiles agreed, tilting his head up for a kiss which landed sloppily on his jaw.

FlashPainPanicPanicPanic…

Stiles sat up, gasping and coughing, dimly aware of Derek holding onto him, trying to ease him gently into awareness and bring him back down from the panic attack.

“I remembered,” he choked out, coughing again and shaking as Derek drew him in, stroking a hand gently down Stiles’ trembling arms. “I fought with Deaton, told him he was wrong, I’d have blue eyes, and I was mad, so mad, and I couldn’t settle down, so I went out. I went out to the club and I left with Colin. He’s the one who knocked me out that night.”


“A few weeks ago,” Stiles said, breathing deeply and feeling calm start to set in again. “The whole pack went to the Jungle. I danced with this guy, Colin. When I first saw him, I thought he was… someone else,” Stiles flushed, suddenly hesitant to admit he’d picked up Derek’s look alike, especially when it was likely there was a very good reason the man had looked like Derek. He’d been bait all along, to get Stiles away from the pack. “And I flirted with him. He wanted to take me home, even though everyone said he never picked people up. I didn’t go with him, but when I went back, after my fight with Deaton…”

“He was there,” Derek filled in the end of the story, nodding.

“He was Ukranian,” Stiles added, pieces clicking together. “Eastern European. He’s a doppelganger. He took on a form to tempt me, got me out of the club, slammed my head into the wall, dumped me under that tree, and then he took my place.”

“You were going home with him?” Derek asked, looking like he regretted asking as soon as the words left his mouth. Stiles opened his mouth to reply, but was cut off by Derek’s phone ringing. “Danny,” Derek said, ignoring Stiles as he answered the phone. His eyebrows lifted. “Yeah, Stiles remembered that too. He…”

Derek listened for a moment, then nodded. “Danny knows who the doppelganger is,” he relayed to Stiles. “And he thinks he knows where he’s living when he’s not being you.”
Derek was silent after he’d thanked Danny and said good night, and Stiles started babbling in spite of the warning in his head. “Nothing happened, Derek, and I was mad at Deaton, and had so much magic and energy and darkness buzzing in my head and I hadn’t gotten off in weeks and he looked enough like you that I thought maybe I’d—”

“You didn’t owe me anything,” Derek broke in, making a pained face. “And I have no right to be jealous.”

He turned over, settling his head back on the pillow, as though that would shut Stiles up on the subject now that he’d started talking. “Well maybe I want you to… I don’t know have that right, humor me and pretend you’re jealous or… give me something here, Derek.”

“Go to sleep, Stiles,” was all he got.

-6-

Peter paced the room, taking in his makeshift army of allies, nothing that could properly be called a pack. Most he’d have to do away with once he figured out how to start building a proper werewolf pack, once he got past whatever was blocking his Alpha abilities.

“You don’t think he’s suspicious?” he asked, and the doppelganger shrugged.

“You really think he cares that much about a skinny 17 year old kid?” he sneered. “I can scarcely stand looking at him in the mirror, you think that’s really going to turn Derek Hale’s head?”

“I think it’s a bad idea to presume to know anything about my nephew’s head,” Peter growled at Colin.

“There was something about the kid,” Siobhan put in, her lips curling in a lazy sneer. “Werewolf-nip.”

He bared his teeth at her at the veiled reminder that the omega he’d so carefully placed in the Sheriff’s station had messed up so badly.
“There’s the matter of my payment,” Colin said cautiously. “The kid didn’t give up the location of my pendant before your omega apparently couldn’t resist the ‘nip.’

“It’s in that house somewhere, I guess you’ll just have to look,” Peter snarled, glaring. “Where’s Fiona?”

“Still dealing with Deaton,” Siobhan told him. “The old man is proving more difficult than expected. On the good news side, his sister has fled.”

“I’m not so sure I’d call it fled,” Colin put in, smirking. “More like cheerfully packed her bags and danced over Deucalion’s grave as she left town.”

“Yes, too bad her morals weren’t a little more flexible, we could have used her,” Peter remarked. “What’s our witch need to deal with the Druid?”

“Permission to kill him rather than just continually trying to contain him would be a start,” Colin suggested.

“I had plans to interrogate him,” Peter sighed, narrowing his eyes at Colin. “Though if you couldn’t break the apprentice, I doubt you could break him. Tell her if she can kill him to go ahead,” he told Siobhan, who nodded and took her cell phone out, stepping aside to make the call.

“I need my nephew lured in,” Peter decided. “I should have just killed him for the power to begin with, maybe that’s the mistake to correct next. You should be… happier to see him, Colin.”

“And after you kill him?” Colin asked.

“Whether it unlocks my powers or not, we attack Wednesday. New Moon, the True Alpha at his weakest, and all his allies tied to the moon as well. Not like us,” Peter smiled, looking around the room. Colin and Siobhan, his shapeshifters, had gone right to work, but just lying in wait he had three more Gollems, a Weretiger, a new omega, and…

He turned to the Vampire, smiling. “I think it’s time one of the True Alpha’s lovers had a very special after class visit from you on Monday. Drain one of them, I don’t care which.”
Six Weeks Since... Saturday

-6-

“Scott! Isaac!” Melissa called up the stairs, rolling her eyes when all she got in reply were tired groans. “I’m leaving and you have pack coming in a couple of hours!”

“Yeah, Mom, we know,” Scott called back down, and she shook her head, gathering up her keys and her purse, opening the door just as her ex-husband had lifted his hand to knock.

“Charlie,” she greeted him, blocking the entrance. “He’s still asleep, and I’m on my way out.”

“I was actually hoping I could take you out to lunch,” he said, and she shut the door behind her.

“I have plans,” she replied.

“You can make time for lunch, right?” he tried.

“I’m meeting Chris,” she replied firmly, stepping around him. “Another time, Charlie.”

“I’m leaving, long term assignment,” he told her. “Apparently the bureau doesn’t feel they need my presence here any longer.”

“Well, enjoy DC, or wherever they send you this time,” she said blithely. “Maybe actually say goodbye to Scott before you leave this time, if he lets you. Goodbye, Charlie.”

“You know, he might not shut me out if you didn’t provide him with the example, Melissa,” he called after her, and she paused after setting her purse in the car, looking back over at him.

“You know, he might not,” she parroted a little sarcastically. “Then again, he might not shut you out if you’d been a better example yourself.”
“Bye, Dad!”

She looked up to where Scott was leaning out the window, grinning and waving. “Don’t let the door hit your butt on the way outta town!” he called down, then slammed the window shut.

“Yup, that’s my kid,” she said proudly, before getting in the car and driving away.

She blasted the radio after the first stop light, the joy bubbling up inside her at the thought of her ex-husband finally leaving almost too much to contain. She was singing along with Blondie when she pulled into the parking lot, grinning at Derek, who had just pulled in beside her.

“You’re in a good mood,” he observed as she looped her arm through his.

“Kid, my ex-husband is leaving town,” she informed him. “And you’ll smile and be pretty arm candy escorting me upstairs, then you’re gonna help my kid with his control. And then… I don’t know, Disneyworld, maybe.”

“Disneyworld?” Derek asked dryly, but she noticed he didn’t pull away or object to her arm-candy remark. She suddenly remembered Derek’s sisters and mother, the way he’d been the quiet kid the few times she’d been around the family. He might have been a lousy Alpha, but she suddenly suspected he’d been a good kid once upon a time, and resolved that, in her benevolence brought on by her rejoicing, she was wiping his slate clean for the time being.

“You never had an ex you were glad to escape?” she replied, and he winced.

“They’re all dead,” he said flatly. She felt her face fall, and he added hastily, “Not that it’s a bad thing on the last two, not really.” His face fell now, looking horrified. “That sounded awful, didn’t it?” he asked plaintively, and she found herself chuckling.

“I’m sorry, Derek,” she told him as they stepped off the elevator on Chris’s floor, letting go of his arm.

“Forget it,” he said gruffly, forcing a smile that made her understand why Stiles’ had once referred to the idea of Derek and happy face as a terrifying concept. It really was unnerving to watch him fake it. “It’s your day of freedom, remember?”
“Yes!” she agreed, grinning widely, pleased when a bit of the brittle edges fell off the werewolf’s own smile. “My day of freedom!” She knocked out ‘Shave and a Haircut’ on the door, leaving off the last two beats, just to annoy Chris, who tugged the door open with a raised eyebrow.

“Hello,” he greeted her, sounding wary, both eyebrows shooting upward when she darted in and pressed a hard kiss to his lips.

“My ex is leaving town,” she informed him, grinning as she swept past him to where John had stood up from the couch before treating him to the same jubilant kiss.

“If you greeted Derek that way, it’s no wonder he looks terrified,” the sheriff joked, offering Derek a hand to shake as Chris re-bolted the door.

“Derek, thank god,” Allison shot into the living room, skin waxy pale and looking wild. “Tell my dad there’s nothing wrong with me. Or… or better, tell Scott and Isaac I’m here, that’s he’s locked me in!” she shouted the last few words at her dad, who folded his arms firmly.

“Oh, Allison,” Melissa said, taking in her poorly bandaged hand. “How about I look at that for you?”

“Leave me alone! All of you just leave me alone!” she snarled, before vanishing down the hallway, slamming her door in her wake.

Chris looked torn, but Derek looked thoughtful. “I wasn’t sure, if it could wait, till things settled, but I’m glad I didn’t wait,” he admitted. “She’s worse than I expected, and better.”

“Better?” Chris latched on, and Derek nodded.

“She’s angry,” he explained. “She’s going to fight back. That’s a good thing.”

“This darkness is killing them,” Melissa muttered, sitting down on the couch beside John, curling her legs under her.
“As much as it pains me to say it… thank you,” Chris said to Derek, voice low. “I didn’t know. And the damage she could have done…”

Derek nodded his head, turning to the other two parents. “No Deaton?” he asked, and John shook his head.

“We haven’t heard from him in almost a week, Scott said something about a rival in town, maybe trying to kill him,” the sheriff explained, getting a pinched, worried look.

“Scott… he should be more concerned,” Melissa told Derek. “But he’s having problems with being an Alpha, with his wolf or with his control now, I don’t know the terms, but he said it wants to bite everyone. Even Lydia sometimes, even though he knows it wouldn’t work.”

“It sounds like he has two problems. One I can’t help with, is that he’s still fighting himself, viewing the wolf part of him as something ‘other’ and unwanted. I don’t know how to help him, I was born a werewolf, the wolf part of me is me, not separate. The other though… he’s not anchored in his pack enough, not sure of their loyalties,” Derek told her. “Maybe not consciously, but his subconscious has picked up on the fact that they have uncertainties, doubts. When I was… I felt it all the time. My doubts, Erica’s, Isaac’s… not Boyd’s so much, he was steady, grounding.”

“So Scott wanting to bite Stiles is because he can sense that Stiles’ isn’t going to be his emissary?” John asked, looking skeptical.

“Because Stiles belongs to someone else,” Derek confirmed. “Because he belongs to another pack.”

“But there is no other pack in Beacon Hills,” Melissa said, confused, especially because something secret and unspoken seemed to be passing between Derek and the Sheriff.

“Just like his grandfather, then?” John asked, and Derek nodded, once.

“How is Stiles this week?” Chris asked.

“Good,” John admitted, the pinched worried look undermining his too light tone. “Still good. Too good. After you told me about Allison, I wanted to toss his room for drugs, but there’s so much hocus pocus stuff in there I wouldn’t know what to look for.”
“Are you maybe borrowing trouble?” Melissa couldn’t help asking. “Stiles has always been special. Maybe he’s really got the darkness under control.”

“Maybe,” John said, looking over at Derek, who looked too blank, to emotionless. “Hale?”

“I’m concerned about Peter, and the outside threat,” Derek redirected them. Melissa listened with one ear as Derek outlined the army Peter was amassing, the other thinking about the darkness and worrying about Allison’s injured hand.

“I’d ask about looping my werewolf deputy in on this, but he’s gone missing,” the sheriff said, and Melissa tuned back in, just in time to see Derek suddenly look abashed. “What?”

“I’m … he was working for Peter too,” Derek said.

“And if I asked where the Deputy is now?” John asked, voice getting a little hard.

“Stiles would point out that I didn’t shoot the sheriff?” Derek suggested, and Melissa stared for a moment before cracking up, helpless giggles escaping her, unable to stop herself.

A moment later, to her relief, Chris’s chuckles started as well and John groaned good naturedly. “Please. Just. Don’t ever let my son find out about that sense of humor,” he remarked, shaking his head. “I’m filing that away in my problems solved file and ignoring it then.”

Melissa wiped her eyes, nodding to Chris before she slipped away from the quiet discussion, retrieving first aid supplies from the bathroom before knocking softly at Allison’s door. “What?” Allison demanded, then looking surprised to see Melissa.

“I’m going to take a look at your hand,” Melissa said firmly, gesturing Allison toward her bed.

“It’s fine,” Allison replied, but sat anyway, offering the hand to Melissa.

Some of the cuts were deep enough that they might have needed stitches the night before, but had
healed over enough that Melissa focused on fighting the infection and getting her hand properly wrapped. “When my husband left,” she said, keeping her voice neutral. “I started smoking again for a couple weeks. Weed, not nicotine,” she clarified, smiling a little when Allison’s expression went from indignant to amazed. “Derek runs away. The sheriff drinks. You dad… well, I’ve noticed he’s buried himself in anger and violence, so he’s not exactly a role model for coping mechanisms either.”

“So, what, it’s all your faults I’m messed up on drugs?” Allison asked rudely.

“No, I’m saying sometimes life sucks and you want to escape,” Melissa replied bluntly. “The problem with escaping the bad is you escape the good and miss out on it too.”

“I’m seeing my dead relatives in the mirror,” Allison replied caustically.

“Some people would see that as a blessing, kiddo. Not us, I know. You know what my favorite movie is?”

Allison blinked at the apparent non-sequitor. “What?”

“Have you seen The Labyrinth, the one with David Bowie in the…”

“Really tight pants?” Allison finished for her, a ghost of a smile on her face now. “Yeah, those are carved into my mind.”

“I loved the line, that Sarah says in the Escher room with all the stairs, the one it takes her forever to remember. ‘You have no power over me.’ It’s cheeseball as hell, but I’m trusting you not to tell anyone. Anytime I used to hear Scott’s dad’s voice in my mind after he left, and Charlie… Charlie loved to criticize me. I’d take a moment. Imagine that room of staircases and tell him, out loud, ‘You have no power over me’.”

“Did it work?” Allison asked, looking fascinated in spite of herself.

“Not at first, not right away,” Melissa said honestly. “But the thing is, if you just keep telling yourself something over and over again? Eventually you believe it.”
She taped down the last piece of gauze, Allison’s hand neatly wrapped now. “I’ll be back tomorrow to check on you, Allison,” she said reassuringly, then on impulse, leaned in and kissed Allison’s forehead like she would normally do for Scott. “Hang in there, kiddo.”

She got out to the living room, Derek and John standing to leave. “…so I’m in need of a new deputy,” she heard John hinting, and Derek looked startled.

“I’ll think about it,” he agreed softly, and John clapped his shoulder.

“Let’s talk about it, hmm? I want a werewolf on my team, and I’m willing to fast track paperwork to make it happen,” he said.

“Can you stop by the loft tonight to talk about it?” Derek asked, suddenly looking rather determined.

“I’ve got a double tonight, but I can stop by after shift tomorrow morning,” John suggested, and Derek nodded, something in the set of his shoulders relaxing oddly.

She had intended to follow them out, but something in the way Chris was watching her stopped her short, waving them on as she lingered behind. He rebolted the door behind them, raising an eyebrow at her as she stepped closer. “So our plan worked, and your ex is gone,” he said, voice a little too calm and casual to be genuine.

“It seems to have worked,” she agreed. “Pretty sure my son got out of bed this morning just to flip him the bird as he left.”

Chris laughed softly, nodding. “That sounds like Scott. So I guess this means no more lunch break dates at the hospital then.”

“Well,” she said, dragging the word out a little. “I wouldn’t mind seeing you if you wanted to stop by. And you do still need someone to keep the Hunter families from sending eligible daughters your way.”

“Is that all?” Chris asked, stepping a little closer, hooking a finger into the belt loop on her jeans. She shook her head, mouth suddenly going dry. “Yeah, me either,” he agreed, before lowering his mouth to her. Unlike the dozens of easy, light kisses they’d traded for the benefit of scaring off her ex-husband, this one rocked Melissa up on her toes and had her tangling her hands in the short tufts
of hair at the nape of his neck, eager to press in for more.

Chris looped an arm around her waist, tugging her in tightly for a long, lingering kiss before breaking away, resting his forehead to hers. “So can I maybe take you out for a real dinner once I’m sure I can leave Allison alone for a night?”

“I’d like that,” she agreed, smiling.

Danny waited in his car for the Camaro, feeling rather odd but determined not to set foot in the McCall house until Derek arrived. The silver SUV the Doppelganger was driving, Derek’s old car, was already in the driveway, along with Scott’s lime green bike, next to a black one, which meant he and Isaac were also already here. Allison was on detox lockdown, which just left—

He jumped about a foot when Lydia knocked on his window. “Jesus, Lydia, you scared me,” he said when she tugged the door open for him.

“Why didn’t you go in?” she demanded, giving him a hard look.

“Waiting for you or Derek,” he admitted sheepishly. “Come on, Lydia, I’m the weakest link here. I’d rather let you guys talk than open my mouth and get caught in the lie.”

She looked skeptical, especially since Danny wasn’t usually this uncertain. “Truth?” she asked, and he shrugged, not certain he could put the feeling into words.

“It just… it feels like I’m supposed to wait and show up with Derek,” Danny tried, frowning. “Ugh, that came out all weird.”

“Who would have thought?” Lydia pursed her lips, amusement written all over her face. “All the wolves and supernatural creatures running around and the one person who is actually capable of intuiting pack behavior is the normal human?”

“I’m not normal, I’m queer,” Danny shot back, finally taking his keys out of the ignition and
stepping out of the car. “And shut up.”

Lydia just laughed, linking her arm through his. “You’d make a good wolf, if you’re thinking about asking for the bite. Way better than Jackson.”

“Low bar,” Danny answered, smiling as the Camaro pulled up to the curb across the street from them. “He turned into a mass murdering lizard.”

“Any reason you’re waiting here?” Derek asked them as they joined him in front of the McCall house.

“Safety in numbers?” Danny suggested, and Derek scowled.

“Which would have involved going inside the house, not sitting alone in your car outside,” Derek cuffed Danny lightly on the back of his head. “I swear, you’re just as bad as Stiles.”

“No one is as bad as Stiles,” Lydia remarked, grinning when the Doppelganger opened the door. “Speak of the devil,” she quipped, brushing past him, leaving him gaping after her.

“You were talking about me?” he called after her, then frowning back at Danny. “It wasn’t good, was it?”

“Derek finds my idiocy familiar, apparently,” Danny commented dryly, following Lydia inside, unable to fully suppress his desire to get away from the creature wearing his friend’s face.

“Where’s Allison?” he heard Lydia asking Scott and Isaac, who told her something about the flu. Danny wondered briefly if they were lying to the group or if Mr. Argent had lied to them. He got lost in his head for a moment, tracing all of the trails of who was lying to whom, then determined the best way to deal with it all was to have everyone lay all the cards on the table once they got rid of the mole in their midst.

He started to look for Derek, then realized the Doppelganger and Derek were still on the porch. He looked back out the front windows in time to see the fake Stiles take a chance and lean in to kiss Derek. To his surprise, instead of growling or pushing away immediately, Derek allowed it for a moment, then slowly broke away, holding Stiles’ double at a distance. Whatever he said, the Doppelganger did a good job of imitating the way Stiles looked when he was crushed.
Derek glanced up, wincing slightly when he spotted Danny watching, then he gestured Stiles back into the house. The Doppelganger headed for the dining room and Scott, but Danny lingered. “You know you’ll have to tell him,” he warned Derek lowly.

“I will,” Derek promised, sighing. “Trust me, I know.”

Danny knew he should be focused on the meeting, Scott’s concern for everyone reassuring and warm, but Danny couldn’t help turning over in his mind what would be happening if Scott knew how close Peter had gotten to the group.

By the time Stiles’ Doppelganger had advocated a wait and react policy enough for Scott to buy in and agree, he found he was surprisingly dedicated to spending the rest of the weekend finding a way to eliminate or contain the Doppelganger.

-6-

Scott made a startled noise as Derek pulled him into his mom’s office. “What’s up dude?” he asked, easily extracting his arm from Derek’s grip.

“Your mom asked me to talk to you about your control issues,” Derek said, folding his arms.

Scott felt his jaw drop, a furious anger rising in him. “What the hell?” he hissed, and Derek grabbed his shoulder, spinning him to face the mirror on the far wall. He was already in beta form, red eyes glowing. “Shit,” he muttered, forcing it down with more of a struggle than he’d wanted to show Derek.

“What’s your anchor?” Derek asked him, and Scott sighed.

“The pack, I’m focusing on the pack,” he said, the wolf still writhing to get free under his skin.

“Not good enough,” Derek said brusquely. “Are you using Ethan? Aiden?”
“Bad choice,” Scott gasped suddenly, seeing Derek’s logic. “Not really a fixed point with those two, huh?”

“Get past what you think you need to rely on as an alpha and tell me what’s at your core, what you actually need, not what you want to need. Where is your anchor, Scott?”

“Allison,” he admitted, the wolf suddenly quieting as he reached past the darkness, finding something solid and familiar. “Isaac. How I feel about them.”

He fell silent, waiting for Derek to say something, anything.

“Better?” Derek asked, and Scott frowned, looking down at human hands.

“Somewhat?” he said, experimentally reaching for his werewolf side, feeling the darkness still seething there.

“It’s not a fix, but it’s where you need to start,” Derek explained.

“Deaton said it would be easier as an Alpha to focus on pack as an anchor,” Scott said cautiously.

“Deaton was emissary to a pack that was also blood kin. Family. It’s different. Pack is a hard anchor, one you have to be careful of. Your subconscious can pick up on so many doubts, so much chaos from them, it often makes for a poor anchor. And your pack is like mine, you’re bearing the weight of one of my mistakes. They’re all too young to be that devoted. They have families and are part of couples and they aren’t there yet, not to be pack yet.”

“It feels… disloyal,” he admitted, chancing a glance up at Derek. “Stiles, my mom, they’re family. But…”

“Sometimes family isn’t pack,” Derek said softly. “My mom’s sister wasn’t pack. She had her own pack, one she used to be emissary to. It didn’t make her any less of family. Sometimes it’s about duty, not love. Stiles and your mom love you, but they have other duties, other human needs that come first.”
Scott thought about it, nodding. “So your anchor, is it still anger?”

Derek’s jaw set in a hard line, and for a long moment, Scott didn’t think the older werewolf would answer. “No,” he said finally. “I’m pretty sure it hasn’t been since Boyd died. But I had to become aware enough to accept the change. That took a lot longer.”

“And?” Scott pressed, and Derek glowered.

“It’s still a work in progress.”

“You have to tell him,” Danny hissed at Derek, glaring hard as he rolled open the loft door. “Or I will.”

“I’m going to tell him, chill out,” Derek bit out his words, matching Danny’s glare, as he yanked the rolling door closed with a resounding clang.

“Tell me what?” Stiles asked, looking up from his research, handing Danny a small book and his notes when Derek jerked his chin toward the spiral staircase. He stood, stretching, the shirt revealing a strip of skin and doing little to calm Derek down. “Bad?” he asked, traipsing up the spiral staircase after Derek, plopping down on the bed with an expectant look. “Is the Doppelganger onto you? What happened?”

“He… the Doppelganger… I think he picked up the cues of the others, realized they expected him to have more of a reaction to me being back,” Derek said, forcing himself to stand still and look Stiles in the face. “He kissed me.”
Stiles stared at him for a moment, blinking. “And you kissed him back?” he asked, voice a little too calm.

“No,” Derek replied instantly, and then awkwardly clarified when the corners of Stiles’ lips turned down skeptically. “Not really. I shut him down, told him he was too young.”

“Not really,” Stiles repeated, his face flickering toward anger for a moment. “Because if you hadn’t played along, he’d have known something was wrong.”

“Stiles, I didn’t want to…”

“No, I know,” Stiles agreed, though there was no belief in his voice and he had turned his face away, eyes trained on the floorboards. “Evil version of me, that wouldn’t be appealing, though you really should be avoiding kissing evil people given your history with it.”

The words stung, but Derek didn’t bother dodging them. “Stiles, look at me.”

“Derek, just leave it alone,” Stiles groaned, standing and starting to walk toward the stairs. “I’m being an asshole about nothing.”

Derek darted across the space quickly, wrapping a hand around Stiles’ wrist. “Don’t,” he snarled, pulling Stiles back and crowding him against the wall. “Don’t do that. Yell at me, be angry, don’t just think I don’t want you and decide to accept it.”

“For fuck’s sake, Derek, of course I think that,” Stiles tossed back, trying to duck under Derek’s arm, but he lowered his arm, catching Stiles gently along the ribs and keeping him trapped. Stiles slumped back against the wall, and Derek kept his hands on the wall, caging Stiles but not holding onto him, knowing that might make Stiles actually panic or lash out.

“I’m me! No one, especially not you, should want me! You kissed him but you won’t kiss me, of course I think that you don’t want me,” Stiles continued, swallowing hard when Derek reached in and cupped his chin gently. “Don’t do that, don’t look at me like that when you don’t mean it.”

“I mean it, Stiles, I do,” Derek promised, keeping his voice low. “I’ve told you, I don’t know if I can
“I don’t care,” Stiles replied. “I’m so ready to lose my virginity to you. Pin me to the bed and take me, Derek, I don’t want you to stop.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Derek said, flushing as Stiles reeled him in, wedging his thigh between Derek’s. “I can stop before we go too far, Stiles.”

“Okay, now I’m really confused, working on not getting pissed,” Stiles said flatly, knuckles turning white where his hands were wound tightly in Derek’s shirt.

“If I kiss you, if I say you’re mine, I won’t be able to stop kissing you, thinking of you as mine,” Derek growled, but he didn’t pull away. “I should want you to date other people, go to college and screw around and figure out if you want to be with me, only me, because I don’t know if I can stop once we start, do you understand?”

Stiles pulled away, eyes glittering with an angry mischief as he perched on the rail at the top of the spiral stairs. “Danny,” he called down, eyes pinned on Derek the whole time. “I need your help.” Derek stared at Stiles, worried about where this was headed but unwilling to stop it or look away from the promise of a head on collision in Stiles’ eyes.

“What’s up?” Danny asked, jogging up the stairs and quirking an eyebrow at the room. “Uh, I’ll corroborate what he’s said, the whole thing lasted like five seconds, and Derek looked really unhappy.”

“No, we’re past that,” Stiles said coolly. “I need your help to prove something to the sour wolf here. Kiss me.”

“Is this a bisexual thing again?” Danny whined, rolling his eyes. “Do I really have to kiss you again or can I just tell Derek you really enjoyed it in a way no straight guy ever would? I can tell him about the time I offered to take your virginity?”

Derek was growling before he was aware of it, making Danny hold up his hands in what he probably thought was a pacifying way. “Danny, just kiss me,” Stiles said, and Derek grabbed onto Stiles wrist again, tugging him away and putting himself between Danny and Stiles.
“Danny,” he said slowly. The younger man tilted his head up as Derek loomed over him, unconsciously baring his throat and calming Derek down enough to redirect the possessive anger welling up in him. “My wallet is on the kitchen counter. Grab some cash and go get some dinner for us. Your choice, since you got dragged into this. Take your time.”

“Done,” Danny agreed eagerly, turning tail and running down the stairs. Derek waited until he heard the heavy rolling door closed, then turning back to Stiles, stalking over to where he was sitting on the bed, looking smug.

“You think you proved a point?” Derek asked, but it came out soft, not a threatening growl he’d intended.

“You think you’re the only one it’s too late for?” Stiles demanded, reaching up and tugging on Derek’s hand until he sat down on the bed as well. He kept his eyes down, not wanting to look at Stiles yet. Stiles, as usual, ignored what he wanted, squirmed into Derek’s lap, knees bracketing Derek’s thighs and bringing them face to face. “Derek, here,” he said, guiding Derek’s hand to his crotch, making Derek flush hard and make a startled noise at the fact that Stiles was already half hard from just the suggestion of a kiss.

“That’s a novelty since the sacrifice,” he informed Derek. “Between that night and you finding me, it happened once.”

“But you’ve been hard around me before, and this week,” Derek said, feeling his flush grow darker.

“Yeah,” Stiles replied. “And the one time in between, that’s down to you as well, by the way. Because I thought he was you. Not thinking about Colin at the club because that did nothing for me, but imagining it had been you. Imagining how my night could have gone if it had been you. The darkness from the Nemeton, well, let’s just say the focus isn’t a blessing, even if it’s nice that I wasn’t dependant on Adderall while I was being held prisoner in that fucking root cellar. You’re it for me too, Derek. All my focus, all my lust, all on you.”

“I should want…” Derek trailed off, seeing anger blaze in Stiles’ eyes.

“What you should want is something other people get,” he spat out. “Normal people, people who talk their friend into going out into the woods to find a dead body and the worst thing that happens to them is that they get busted by his dad and grounded. For the school where the worst thing to happen to the king of the jocks is that he gets drunk and gets busted and loses his scholarship, not that he turns into a nightmare snake and kills a bunch of people. It’s for the guy who can’t stop supernatural creatures with a bit of mountain ash and the guy who didn’t have a teenage crush turn
into a psychopath and murder his whole family. Normal is never going to be us, and if I can’t have that, Derek, then why the fuck can’t I have you?”

Stiles was breathing heavily, the speed of his words overwhelming Derek, who felt every last inch of his resolve crumbling. “Tell me you’re scared this makes you like Kate, tell me you don’t trust me not to be Jennifer, and I’ll stop,” Stiles swore in a low voice. “But dammit, Derek, I’m not letting you fall onto your sword for some misplaced hope that I’ll ever be normal, not be all twisted up with all things supernatural because that is —”

What exactly it was Derek was pretty sure he’d never know, because his resistance broke and he swooped in, stopping Stiles’ rant by smashing their lips together. It wasn’t a kiss, not in that first heartbeat where Stiles’ lips were still moving, trying to tell him just how much Stiles’ was *his*, but then Derek felt the other boy’s shock set in, Stiles freezing for a soft, terrifying moment. It melted away with the next thud of Stiles’ heartbeat, Stiles’ reaching up a hand to cup Derek’s face and their lips sliding together in a frightening synchronicity.

“Derek,” Stiles murmured into the kiss, and Derek took the moment to close his flat, human teeth ever so gently on the edge of Stiles’ lower lip. “Nggh, Derek,” Stiles managed, before they were kissing again, Stiles opening his mouth to Derek’s tongue too easily, melting into Derek’s arms and using his knees as leverage to try and push Derek backwards.

Derek slid backwards, finding the pillows Stiles had left piled against the headboard, leaning against them and tugging Stiles up between his legs and pulling him back in to a fierce, claiming kiss. He wove his fingers behind Stiles ears to cradle his head and tangle his fingers in Stiles’ hair, gasping as Stiles’ quickly tried to take back control by inching his own hands under Derek’s t-shirt.

Derek moved with supernatural speed, flipping them and pinning Stiles down and holding his hands still by his waist. “Only so far this can go for now,” he told Stiles, voice rasping as he spoke.

“You want me to be 18,” Stiles filled in, eyes surprisingly soft with understanding.

“Not just because of her,” he said, leaning down and softly nuzzling at Stiles’ throat, letting his tongue trace gently over Stiles’ pulse. “You can feel it too, right?” he whispered, feeling Stiles arch and mold to him, trying to press them together. “It wouldn’t take a ritual,” he said, giving just a hint of his teeth as he tasted his way lower, tracing the line of Stiles throat down under his shirt to the hollow above his collarbone. “No magic, no bite, but Hale and Volkov, coming together that way…”

“I tip you into being an alpha and become your emissary, sealed for life,” Stiles finished, ending on a
groan when Derek began to suck a mark into his skin just above his collarbone. “I want that too, you know.”

“I know,” Derek reassured him, coming back up to press a gentle, chaste kiss to Stiles’ lips. “But I’m not ready yet.”

“I know,” Stiles smiled up at him, relaxed and confident. “And when you are, we’ll deal with it,” he said. “For now, is second base really too far?” he asked, grin growing. “I really want to get my hands on you without your shirt on,” he added impishly.

Derek let go of his wrists and made quick of tugging Stiles’ shirt off him, a little claws and tearing going a long way. “Your shirt,” Stiles squawked, laughing helplessly. “I wanted your shirt off.”

“I took my shirt off you,” Derek pointed out, offering him a wolfish grin that made Stiles’ mouth drop open.

“You sneaky son of a bitch, you can’t play semantics with me!” he protested, trying to get Derek’s shirt off, and Derek squirmed, determined to make it difficult for him. “Hold still,” Stiles laughed, and Derek noted with pleasure that Stiles was flushed, skin warm and rosy with the flush of laughter and arousal, healthier than he’d looked since Derek had pulled him out of that damn tree.

Impishly, Derek leaned down, grazing teeth and tongue over one of Stiles’ flat brown nipples, making him gasp, hips lifting from the bed then he went boneless, letting Derek nip and tease at it, running a rough thumb over the other, enjoying the groaned curses that produced. Unable to resist, he sucked another mark into Stiles’ skin above his heart, biting with his human teeth in a way that made his wolf side satisfied, giving Derek a mental image of rolling over and showing his belly, the submissive pose tripping Derek up and surprising him, but he had learned to never ignore those instincts.

He pulled away, tugging off his own shirt and rolling Stiles back on top gently. “Derek?” Stiles asked, and Derek answered him by leaning up to kiss him gently.

Stiles took the hint, and just held him for several moments, tongues tangling and tasting, slowly learning each other. Stiles pulled away, studying Derek’s face for a moment, then, apparently satisfied with what he found, leaned back in to plant a line of soft kisses down Derek’s throat, making a soft, pleased noise when he dropped a final soft brush of lips to the hollow of Derek’s throat before rocking up onto his knees in between Derek’s legs.
“You trust me,” he murmured, sounding so pleased it made Derek sigh out his own satisfaction. “Down to your wolfy core, you trust me.”

Stiles’ eyes were on Derek’s face as his fingers slid slowly up his stomach, exploring the lines of his abdomen, before stroking gently up his sides over his ribs. “Not here, not so much,” Stiles noted, running the back of two fingers over the skin just under Derek’s belly button. “Here,” he noted, treating the skin just under the juts of Derek’s collarbone to the same soft touch which made Derek’s muscles clench a little, leaving him shivering pleasantly. “And I think…” he leaned in, using his tongue and teeth in a passing imitation of what Derek had done to him to nibble just below Derek’s ear, then closed his teeth gently on Derek’s earlobe, coaxing a groan from Derek. “Thought so,” he said, giving Derek a self satisfied smirk.

“Very smart,” Derek replied dryly, pulling the younger man down into a searing kiss. He brought his hands down Stiles’ back, fighting back a smile to keep kissing Stiles, then grabbed onto Stiles’ butt, making Stiles squeak, then cry out in surprise when the grip rolled their hips together, groin to groin. He stroked their tongues together, rolling his hips again as he did.

“Oh god, stop, have to stop now,” Stiles babbled, rocking back, one hand flying down to press against his cock through his jeans, gasping as he did. “Sorry,” he chuckled nervously, running a shaky hand through his hair. “It’s been a while since I’ve gotten off.”

“Not just you,” Derek reassured him, sitting up and wincing a little as his own erection pressed against his zipper. “Uh, flip a coin for who gets the bathroom to deal with it first?” he suggested, making Stiles laugh.

“If I go in there first, you’ll be able to hear me,” he observed, and Derek nodded, mouth going dry. “So maybe, I’ll go in there, and think about you out here, and you’ll just have to maybe actually give me something to think about.”

“You could just make it up,” Derek suggested, but he was already leaning back against the pillows and undoing the button on his jeans, giving Stiles a glimpse of the blue boxer briefs underneath.

“Um,” Stiles stammered, eyes definitely following Derek’s fingers as he traced his happy trail pausing at the edge of the underwear and raising an eyebrow at Stiles.

“I thought you were going to jerk off,” he said, and Stiles jumped, startled. “Pretty sure watching me is past second base.”
“Uh… so where do we stand on third base?” Stiles asked, voice a little husky. “That’s third base, right?”

“Sounds about right,” Derek agreed, easing his zipper down and wiggling out of his jeans. He wanted to flush horribly at the way his cock was tenting his briefs, wet spot forming at the tip, and Stiles was just watching, eyes lit up in fascination. “Not going to be a one way show, if we’re going to do this,” he added, looking pointedly at the bulge in Stiles’ borrowed sweatpants.

“Okay,” Stiles agreed, slowly sliding the sweatpants down his legs along with his own boxers. Derek watched Stiles’ cock, hard and flushed purple, leaking slightly as it brushed against his stomach. He was circumcised, long and decently thick, though the length was definitely the more impressive part. He fought down the urge to say to hell with third base and swallow Stiles down, to taste every bit of him.

“Your turn,” Stiles said, sitting on the end of the bed, keeping a careful bit of distance between them. Derek leaned over to the night stand, pausing when he found an unfamiliar box there. He set it on the nightstand, then dug deeper in, finding his lube. He took a deep breath, tugging off his own boxer briefs, letting Stiles do his own staring now.

Unlike Stiles, Derek was uncut, and knew his cock was thick, rather than long, an inverse to Stiles’. “You’re sure we have to wait till I’m 18 for you fuck me?” Stiles asked, looking eager.

“I have to wait just as long to suck you,” Derek replied, pouring lube into his hand and tossing it to Stiles before stroking himself, hissing at his own touch a little. “And, god, believe me, that’s the top of my to do list for your 18th birthday.”

“Ugh,” Stiles groaned, grabbing the base of his dick before glaring at Derek. “You can’t just say that,” he objected before very slowly starting to stroke himself.

“Why not?” Derek gasped, slowing his own strokes to mirror Stiles, to try and learn what Stiles liked. “I haven’t been able to think about anything other than how I’m going to choke on it when I blow you, have to get you so deep in my throat just to get you all in, haven’t been able to think of anything else since I saw your cock.”

“God, now you find your words,” Stiles muttered, hand speeding up.

“You want me to tell you all about the things I want to do to you?” Derek asked, feeling his
mischievous side kick into high gear suddenly. “You’ve got such thin, long fingers, I bet you’ll yell for me the first time I put one of mine inside of you, open you up wider than you can manage. You’re used to just yours, aren’t you?” he asked, and Stiles nodded eagerly.

“Just mine, no one else, Derek,” he panted, “I only want you.”

“I know,” Derek replied, surprisingly hurtling closer to the edge at Stiles’ words. “I’m not just going to fuck you, either, want you to fuck me too,” he said, and Stiles came, crying out, sounding half surprised.

Derek slowed his strokes, satisfying himself by watching Stiles’ face relax. His eyes cracked open a moment later, determined to watch. “Show me,” he croaked, and Derek complied, shortening his strokes the way he liked and playing with his foreskin, swiping a finger against the slit once it was exposed and making himself moan a little. He kept going, eyes locked on Stiles’ face, waiting. “Come,” Stiles told him suddenly, reading the needy little thrusts and tightening grip with frightening accuracy. “Stop holding back and—”

Derek let his hips thrust into his fist once more and spilled across his stomach, slumping down into the pillows as he did. He was dimly aware of Stiles getting up and going into the bathroom, then his eyes opened when a warm washcloth was rubbed across his chest. “Shh,” Stiles whispered, hands making quick work of cleaning Derek up and tossing his jeans aside. “Stay with me till Danny gets back,” he asked, and Derek nodded, tossing the blankets back and scooting to make room for Stiles. Stiles tossed the washcloth back into the bathroom and then climbed in, tucking his head into Derek’s shoulder as had become all too familiar the past couple of days.

“You left marks,” Stiles said, and there was no mistaking the delight in his voice.

“Mm hmm,” Derek hummed, bringing his fingers up to the one just above Stiles’ collarbone. “Probably won’t limit myself to just under your shirt once everyone knows about us,” he warned Stiles before cracking a yawn.

“I’m okay with that,” Stiles said, shrugging as he snuggled in. “Surprisingly, really good with that.” He was quiet for a long moment, but Derek could tell it was thinking, not falling asleep. “You’d really let me top?” Stiles asked finally.

“Of course,” Derek shrugged. “I enjoy it a lot too.”
Stiles made a growling noise, surprising Derek into a smile. “Jealousy goes two ways, huh?” he asked, barely able to stifle his laughter when Stiles bit his shoulder, leaving an impressive mark for a few moments, before it faded with his rapid healing.

“It’s okay,” he whispered when Stiles made a little noise of disappointment. “I’m all yours.”

He’d probably read the same paragraph four times, determinedly not looking over at Derek, who had taken up a spot in the kitchen on his sad excuse for a table, looking over city maps and marking out the homes of Peter’s allies that they knew about and trying to determine where their central base might be located.

Danny was printing reams of information on Doppelgangers, seemingly just as invested in getting Stiles back into his life as Stiles himself was. Stiles was a little glad of it, as Danny hadn’t mentioned the way Stiles and Derek kept losing focus, gazing at each other instead of the research. “Check this one,” Danny said, handing Stiles the file he’d just printed and helping himself to the carton of cold pho noodles Stiles had abandoned a couple hours ago. Stiles made a face, but Danny just shrugged.

Stiles stated skimming the notes, then paused, starting from the top. “Between the lines, this seems like…”

“Like someone hiding a firsthand account in a good story, a story within a story that only someone in the know can fish out?” Danny suggested, excited.

“I’m having a problem getting past the fact that they keep referring it as a fetch,” Stiles grumbled, and Derek looked over, frowning in confusion.

“Isn’t that one of the proper names for a Doppelganger?” he asked.

“Stop trying to make fetch happen,” Stiles said at the same time as Danny, exchanging a grin before he settled back into reading the story again. “This part about Lincoln and his Doppelganger, it’s in my notes, or maybe I’ve heard a variation on that urban legend before,” he said, and Danny nodded.

“In history class last year, but the way Ms. Trask told it, Lincoln saw his shadow self in the mirror, and it was a portent of the coming assassination. But what if this is what happened, a Doppelganger
of Lincoln trapped in a mirror, waiting for a more stable vessel to contain it?”

“It might explain the mirror I found in my attic,” Stiles tapped his fingers thoughtfully on the page. “What’s this?” he asked, pointing to an image on the third page, handing it back to Danny. “Roman god, right?”

“Janus,” Danny said, dragging out the Y-sound of the first letter as he began thumbing through his stack and pulling out another packet. “I found a reference to him as the Doppelgangers’ god, but it didn’t lead anywhere.”

“But a pendant with his dual head?” Stiles said, lifting an eyebrow. “Sounds like something they’d use to boost their powers.”

“You said he was looking for a pendant,” Derek put in, dropping his pen on the maps and walking over to join them.

“Pretty sure that’s the one,” Stiles agreed, making a quick note on the page. “Actually, was pretty sure he meant that one at the time too, just knew better than to admit it.”

“So, mirrors to trap him,” Danny prompted Stiles. “Trap is good, I mean, but we need something long term.”

“Maybe a hall of mirrors type trap?” Stiles mused, frowning at his notes. “I’ve got a couple of sources that say iron can be used on them, which would suggest they have something in common with the Fae.”

“Beheading works on pretty much anything,” Derek shrugged, and Stiles flashed a quick grin.

“Tell that to the headless horseman.”

“Is that a real thing?” Danny asked, before looking up and realizing it was a joke.

“Up until yesterday, I wouldn’t have confirmed Doppelgangers either,” Derek pointed out unhelpfully.
“Okay, let’s assume they are some type of under-fae,” Stiles said over them both, some corner of his mind registering his extreme focus kicking in. “Makes sense, shape changers and faerie glamour are pretty similar. And neither can imitate the presence of magic, which would track with why he can’t quite get my scent right, couldn’t do Derek’s eyes. But Lydia fed him iron. So there’s a difference. How do we get to that difference? What makes the Doppelganger tick differently?”

He pulled out a text on the Fae that Lydia and Danny had liberated from Deaton’s office, immersing himself in the research. He was skimming, looking for ways to kill faeries that didn’t involve iron, when he became aware that Danny was no longer at the coffee table with him. He looked up, suddenly aware that almost half an hour had passed, and Danny was helping Derek work radiuses on the county maps.

He stretched, joining them. Danny gave him a half smile, and Derek looked up with a slight worried wrinkle in his forehead but he didn’t comment. “How do you kill a Faerie if you don’t have iron?” he asked Derek, who shrugged.

“I’m not sure,” he admitted. “But don’t you have an expert on the Fae on speed-dial?”

“Devine,” Stiles said, scrambling over the table for Derek’s phone, flashing a wide grin at them. The phone went to voice mail, so Stiles sent her a text to call him back at Derek’s number.

“Do you have a location?” he asked, and Danny nodded slowly.

“Maybe. We’ve narrowed it down to a couple places,” he said. “But we need more intel, because we come up with a few possibilities depending on which of the new supes are working for Peter and which are just drawn in by the Nemeton.”

“Supes?” Derek repeated dryly.

“Is that racist?” Danny asked, flashing a quick grin at Derek, who actually smirked slightly, looking amused. Not for the first time, Stiles mused how good Danny was at the pack thing, the little things coming almost as second naturedly to him as he’d seen with Derek and Cora.

“Peter liked to brag,” Stiles observed, looking to Derek. “The back half of your mom’s bestiary is like a corrective manual because Peter was always bragging to you, exaggerating she thought, though it seems like there’s usually some truth to his story telling. So what’s not in your memory?”
Derek frowned, leaning down and looking over the map. Danny had put the names and locations of Peter’s known allies in red, with the name and address for the dead omega marked through once in black. The uncertain names were in blue.

“Cora was going through a hero worship phase on Buffy the Vampire Slayer, I can’t rule the chem. teacher in or out. Peter told Vampire stories, Mom told them, even Dad did a few times just to amuse her,” Derek admitted. “But this one, I don’t know anything about kitsune other than they are were-foxes.”

“They are chaos creatures,” Stiles put in, as Danny underlined the name and address in green. “It’d make sense she’d get drawn in by the Nemeton.”

“She’s young too,” Danny pointed out. “A grade behind us. It’s not impossible that Peter recruited her, maybe through a parent or relative, but it makes her an even less likely candidate.”

“What about the were-tiger?” Stiles asked, making a face. “When’d we get one of those?”

“The Monday after you were replaced,” Danny said. “He swore he was a pacifist and told Scott he was here to study the Nemeton, had a theory about regrowth and cleansing the power. He’s a professor out at Beacon Hills Community College.”

“How old?” Derek asked, and Danny shrugged.

“Older than Peter, older than our parents,” Danny said. “Little guy, grey hair, glasses, edging past middle age I’d guess.”

“Aren’t were-tigers usually like body builder types?” Stiles asked.

“That’s what I always thought,” Derek agreed, and Danny underlined it in red.

“Meets all the criteria,” he explained when Derek and Stiles looked surprised. “And if he’s not your usual tiger, then maybe he’s an outcast, perfect for Peter to recruit.” Stiles saw Derek wince at that, and wondered for a moment how much of Peter’s influence when he was younger had gone into some of Derek’s early choices as Alpha. “Short of going around and holding stakeouts on all of
“them, we can’t hope for much better.”

“Good point,” Stiles agreed as the phone in his pocket started ringing. “By the way, you’re missing Peter’s downtown apartment.”

He answered the phone, noting that both Derek and Danny were looking at him blankly. “Hey Devine,” he greeted the drag queen.

“Been too long,” she replied. “And something tells me you’re in trouble.”

“If you didn’t do so much wormwood, you wouldn’t know that,” Stiles chided her gently, and she laughed. “By the way, never give it to a friend of mine again.”

“You cope your way, I’ll cope mine. What’s up, sugar?”

“I need a way to permanently incapacitate or kill a faerie other than iron,” he explained.

She was quiet for a long moment. “You in big trouble, Stiles?”

“You could say that,” he agreed. “If you see me, I’d avoid me, if you know what I mean.”

“Didn’t think I could help you, but you just said some magic words there, Stiles. For obvious reasons, I have an interest in shape changers. The ones who can wear new faces and genders. St. Johns Wort can seriously weaken them, and if they’re immune to iron, they won’t be to lead. It’s always one or the other with them if they can change into new people.”

“St. Johns Wort, the stuff you would use for depression?” Stiles asked, and Devine hummed affirmatively. “Thanks. I’d say I owe you one, but how about I just agree to wipe the mess with my friend Allison off the slate?”

“Hey, I warned the girl,” Devine replied, irritated. “But we’re cool, Stiles, wipe the slate, and call me when it’s all done. I’m leaving town till then.”
“Smart girl,” Stiles informed her before hanging up. “Lead weapons, sounds like we may need my Dad.”

“Ignoring the fact that bullets aren’t actually made with lead anymore, let’s back up a little further,” Danny suggested, dropping his marker. “Peter has an apartment downtown?”

Stiles looked over to Derek, who was looking faintly puzzled, arms crossed expectantly. “Uh, yeah? You don’t know where?”

“I didn’t even know it existed,” Derek replied. “How do you?”

“Uh, he told me,” Stiles scratched his ear, thinking. “When you were busting Cora and Boyd out of the bank vault on the full moon, and we were here going through the blueprints.”

“And he just happened to mention he had a place?” Derek asked, giving him a wary look. “Why?”

“I may have made a joke about wolf dens,” Stiles admitted, offering a wary grin. “He was trying to shut me up.”

“Huh,” Danny remarked, turning back to the map. “Doesn’t sound like he planted info then, just genuinely slipped up.”

“But I didn’t see me as a threat,” Stiles remarked, earning a disbelieving snort from Danny. “What?”

“Stiles, you were such a big threat he kidnapped you and replaced you with a Doppelganger,” Danny pointed out, shaking his head. “Up until Derek and I found you, you were the only one with a good grasp of how many players were on the board and what Peter was planning.”

“Huh, maybe I’m a bishop, not a rook,” Stiles mused, looking up when Derek closed the distance between them, something soft and amused in his hazel green eyes. “Yes?”

“You should get some rest,” Derek replied softly, cupping his face gently, thumb tracing a gentle arc along Stiles’ bottom lip. “It’s almost midnight. And you’re shivering.” Stiles paused, noticing how
chilled he was for the first time.

“I can head home as well,” Danny admitted. “Or Delia and David are both with friends for the weekend, though so if you want to keep working…”

“Stay on the couch, or Cora’s room,” Derek replied, hooking his thumb at the closed door off the living room. “No need to be on your own when none of us should be.”

“Uh, I may not have werewolf hearing or anything,” Danny started, and on anyone else, Stiles would have called it blushing.

“No worries, dude,” he said, yawning. “I’m wiped, and also, he refuses to have sex with me till I’m legal.”

“Way too much info,” Danny laughed while Derek glared at Stiles.

“Good night, Danny,” Derek said gruffly, nudging Stiles toward the stairs. “Tomorrow, we deal with the Doppelganger,” he added, and Danny nodded his agreement.

“St. John’s Wort and lead,” Stiles hummed as he gave in to Derek’s nudges and started up the spiral staircase. “Hey, where do you even get lead nowadays? Cheap Chinese toys? Pencils are out, that’s graphite, did you know that? And bullets are out, apparently.”

“I think we know a weapons guy who can probably help us out,” Derek replied, tugging Stiles toward bed. “Turn off your brain and go to sleep, Stiles.”

“Not that easy,” Stiles admitted. “Especially because when I’m this focused this close to bed, I tend to have nightmares. Not sure if that’s the darkness or just my brain processing the fact that there’s a lot of crazy shit in my life lately.”

“Does having me here help?” Derek asked, and there was such a soft, uncertain hopefulness that Stiles couldn’t stop himself from leaning in and kissing him softly.

“Of course it does, so much,” Stiles admitted, pressing a second soft kiss to the corner of Derek’s
mouth. “I… I don’t want to get used to that though, we’re taking my life back tomorrow, right? And you’ll be all distant again, I won’t get you here, like this, not till I’m 18, right?”

“Stiles, I’m yours,” Derek told him, settling down on the bed and letting Stiles curl up in his arms. Stiles liked being the little spoon, even if his slight height advantage made it a little awkward. “If it’s three in the morning and you need me to crawl in the window and stay with you till your alarm for school goes off, I will be there.”

“That’s gonna freak my dad out,” Stiles groaned into the pillow. “So… what if I go gooshy and decide I wanna ask you to prom?”

“The prom is in May, your birthday is in April,” Derek replied, maddeningly calm.

“Are you… did you just say yes?” Stiles demanded, turning over to face Derek.

“When you actually get around to asking, maybe,” Derek replied, then sighed. “If I’m here. I made some promises.”

“Cora,” Stiles guessed, and Derek nodded.

“And Jackson,” he admitted, looking warily at Stiles.

“Cora’s in London with the reptile, who wants you for an Alpha, huh?” Stiles remarked. “Okay, so why London?”

“I was a shitty Alpha the first go around,” Derek said.

“You were an untrained Alpha, one who didn’t have an Emissary or a Second,” Stiles replied, feeling something hot and protective uncoiling inside him. “Oh. Huh.”

“Boyd was my second,” Derek protested weakly, and Stiles nodded.

“He was but… Danny,” Stiles felt his lips curling slightly. “Danny’s a natural second. And you’ve
accepted him there without even thinking about it.”

“We’ll talk about it in the future, when Danny decided what he wants and can make an informed choice,” Derek replied, frowning in response. “He doesn’t want to be a wolf.”

“Doesn’t have to be,” Stiles muttered rebelliously, then shrugged. “So… London, huh?”

“There are Alphas there who could mentor me, teach me things I probably should have learned…”

“If you hadn’t been part of a ginormous family and shown the least inclination of all your family toward inheriting the Alpha powers?” Stiles supplied, earning a playful nudge from Derek. “Well, that does make my college choice interesting then.”

“Hmm? Berkley, right?” Derek asked, and Stiles shook his head, butterflies starting in his stomach as he admitted his plans aloud for the first time.

“Ms. Morrell offered to write me a recommendation to her alma mater, a University of Westminster Annex School in Croyden, if I promised to stop referring to it as Hogwarts,” Stiles told him. “And I think I’m going to say yes.”

“So you can study magic?” Derek asked, sounding faintly puzzled.

“From a number of teachers,” Stiles explained. “I feel like I can never be sure I’ll get a full story and complete lessons from the super secret siblings, you know? I’m terrified of leaving my dad behind, but at the same time, I know I need to learn to get control of it all. And if I actually spent four years, got a degree in metaphysics, maybe even took a semester abroad in Russia with my mom’s family…”

“You don’t have to do it for me,” Derek said abruptly, and Stiles frowned.

“No, I have to do it for me, otherwise I think the darkness and the Nemeton will consume me,” Stiles replied bluntly. “Deaton’s first lie about my abilities was calling them a spark. I have a tidal wave of power in me, and I know I’m capable of drowning in it and coming out no different from Morrell or Deaton or even the Darach.”
“You wouldn’t. You won’t,” Derek’s soft faith reminded him painfully of his dad saying the same thing the last time he’d seen his dad.

“You don’t know,” Stiles tried to explain, and Derek leaned in, softly kissing away the next protest.

“No, I don’t,” he agreed. “But you’re part of my anchor, Stiles, so having faith in you is second nature.”

“So.” Stiles toyed with the edge of the blanket covering them up. “I finish high school. We spend four or five years in England and figure out where the new Hale pack will call home.”

“You gonna be okay with Jackson?” Derek asked, and Stiles groaned, burying his face in Derek’s shoulder as he mumbles out mostly incoherent complaints.

“Why’s he gotta want you for an alpha,” he whined, tilting his head just enough to let words come out clearly.

“He asked for a promise he didn’t think Scott could give him if he should ever revert,” Derek explained.

“Ahh,” Stiles nodded, easing his head onto Derek’s shoulder. He was silent for a long moment, biting his lip, but he needed to ask. “If I ever go dark, become a Darach, will you be able to help me that way?”

“No,” Derek said, pressing his lips to Stiles’ temple. “But I think Cora would step in for me, so I wouldn’t have to.”

“Good enough,” Stiles murmured, sleep creeping in.
Danny was fairly certain he would have stayed asleep another hour, but the knocking on the metal door startled him to the point he nearly fell off the couch from his dead sleep. None of the building alarms had gone off, and Stiles’ wards were strangely still. He climbed to his feet as the knocking started again, Stiles now sleepily stumbling to sit on the spiral stairs, looking at Danny blearily.

“I dunno, but friendly, not setting off any of my spells,” he admitted, and Danny walked over to the door, peering out a small crack.

“Uh, Stiles?” Danny said, drawing in a quick breath. “It’s your dad.”

Derek stepped out of the kitchen, smirking slightly up at Stiles. “Did I forget to mention I invited him over?”

Stiles came flying down the stairs in a flurry of foot stomping, tugged Derek into a quick, enthusiastic kiss, then bolted over to the door as Danny rolled it open. The sheriff stepped inside, nodding to Danny before spotting Stiles, hand flying quickly to his hip, resting on top of his holster. “Hale, you wanna explain to me how I just left my kid at home and he ended up here in pajamas?”

“Dad,” Stiles whined slightly, drawing Danny’s attention to the fact that Derek was between Stiles and the sheriff, looking wary. He hadn’t seen the werewolf move, but he figured it had probably happened at the same time the sheriff had reached for his gun.

“That’s not Stiles at your house,” Danny supplied, rolling the door back into place. He froze, looking at the door for a moment. “Wait, how come you didn’t have to invite him in?”
“I wrote the wards to include him,” Stiles replied. “In case of emergency.”

His dad turned, inspecting the runes all over the door, lifting an eyebrow. “Okay, that’s a start,” he remarked, hand relaxing down to his side. “But I’m gonna need a little more to understand what’s going on here.”

“Remember when I took off for a week, spent time reading Grandpa’s journals and such?” Stiles asked, trying to move around Derek, who subtly hip checked him back, shaking his head ever so slightly. “I didn’t come back, Dad. I got snatched by Peter Hale and replaced by a doppelganger.”

“So… doppelgangers are a thing?” his dad asked, looking baffled. He frowned at Derek, sighing slightly. “I’m not going to shoot him, Hale, I’ve thought something seemed off for a couple weeks now, just couldn’t figure out what. Can’t believe you being replaced didn’t cross my mind.”

Stiles looked up at Derek, eyes wide and unblinking, and Danny barely muffled his amused snort. Derek rolled his eyes, stepping aside, and Stiles practically flew at his dad, wrapping him up in a too tight hug. “Hey, kiddo,” his dad said, melting into the hug, eyes closing as he held on tightly. “I’m so sorry.”

“Not your fault, you couldn’t have known,” Stiles replied, voice soothing. Danny nodded to Derek before slipping upstairs to change. He saw Derek lingering in the kitchen, but starting to mix something that looked suspiciously like pancake batter in a large bowl, one eye on the Sheriff.

He changed quickly, Derek’s overprotective concern rubbing off on him a little, he suspected, because equal parts of him were wanting to give Stiles a moment alone with his dad as were wanting to stay close in case the sheriff didn’t believe what was happening. He threw on his jeans and splashed his face clean before trotting back downstairs to join Stiles and his Dad at the battered metal table that was passing for Derek’s idea of a kitchen table. Proper furniture and a total revamp of the loft building were on his to do list if Derek intended to stay there.

The thought of Derek leaving threw a sudden jolt of icy cold water over his enthusiasm. Danny had spent a good deal of time last night, not able to fall asleep, making sure he didn’t have a crush on either Stiles or Derek, this whole pack thing throwing him for a loop. He didn’t normally trust people the way he had fallen instinctively into with Derek, and Stiles had never been someone he was so determined to protect before. He’d been relieved it wasn’t a crush on either of them, or even the idea of them together, but something odd, and familial, akin to what he wished he had with his own family. “You should get another layer on,” he informed Stiles, nudging him slightly, frowning at his t-shirt.
“I’m doing better,” Stiles replied petulantly, and Danny narrowed his eyes, then looked deliberately to the sheriff.

“They were keeping him under the Nemeton, mostly naked,” he informed the sheriff, who took on the same narrow-eyed look Danny was sure he was sporting himself. “He’s lucky he didn’t get hypothermia.”

Stiles’ jaw dropped, looking to Derek, who was barely suppressing a smirk and keeping his head buried in the pancakes he was making. “Fine,” Stiles huffed, rolling his eyes. “But only because I know Derek got whole wheat pancake batter for Dad.”

Stiles vanished up the stairs and the sheriff turned his speculative look back on Danny. “And how do you fit in to all this, Danny?” the sheriff asked, sounding far too casual to actually be casual. Danny swallowed hard, trying to remember that the Sheriff had gone to bat for him when he’d been caught hacking the FBI when he was 13. Scott’s dad, on the other hand, had been obsessively determined to make Danny serve some time in Juvi.

“I knew something was wrong with Stiles,” he muttered. “I sort of helped Derek find him, nothing big.”

Derek set a steadying hand on Danny shoulder. “He and Lydia were the only ones who knew the doppelganger wasn’t Stiles. He made Jackson tell him when I was getting into town, and without him, I wouldn’t have gotten Stiles out so quickly. He’s been invaluable at helping me plan what to do next.”

Danny felt his face flush, keeping his gaze steadily on the table. “And how much of that has involved hacking?” the sheriff asked, and Danny winced, feeling the weight of having let the man down. “Hey, Danny,” the sheriff said, tapping the table gently to direct his attention upward. “I’m not mad, I need to know if I need to do anything to protect you.”

Danny felt Derek’s hand tighten on his shoulder again. “Nothing that can or would be traced,” he mumbled, and the sheriff nodded.

“Thank you,” he said slowly. “For helping find my son. Even if I’d prefer you weren’t so eager to break the law.”
“You know the best of the FBI’s cyber crime division used to be hackers?” Derek suggested, and Danny made a face.

“Yeah, so my mom says,” he agreed. “I’d rather be a criminal for hire for a werewolf pack. Is that a job I can do in a pack?”

“You can’t do anything in a pack till you’re 18,” Derek growled, returning to the pancakes.

“Rather glad to hear you say that,” Stiles’ dad said over Danny’s grumbling. “I assume that applies to you and my son as well?”

Danny froze, seeing Derek’s shoulders go stiff and guarded. Stiles, who had just stepped back in, glared at his dad. “Jesus, yes, nosy father of mine, Derek’s not going to do anything till I’m 18.”

“I meant about the emissary thing, but nice to have that confirmed as well,” his dad remarked dryly. Derek brought over a platter of pancakes, face all too neutral. “Derek, son... it’s all right. Deaton had already given me a heads up that the darkness in Stiles might make it so he’d never have someone in his life that way unless there was a Hale Alpha again. I’m glad he’s not alone.”

Stiles leaned heavily against his dad’s shoulder, smiling up at him. “I take it you all have a plan for getting rid of the doppelganger?” John asked.

“We have a shopping list for you,” Stiles admitted, tearing a sheet out of his notebook and handing it over.

“Uh huh, and since when is Argent Weaponry a good place to shop?” the sheriff asked dryly, nodding. “I can run over there, I imagine if he doesn’t have lead bullets, he’ll have a sword or something equally ghastly.”

“Keep in mind it probably has to be me using it,” Stiles put in, ignoring the scowl Derek sent his way. “If the doppelganger is in my form, it’s likely to be more susceptible to me. I become its weakness, so to speak.”

“But we can help,” Danny prompted helpfully. “I can do the St. John’s Wort, right?”
“Actually, I was thinking Dad might handle that,” Stiles said, looking to the Sheriff. “How’s your acting, Dad?”

John wasn’t a fan of the plan, but he hadn’t been able to find a better one, so he ran the errands Stiles had requested with Danny, while Derek and Stiles took advantage of the fact that Lydia had lured the doppelganger out to the mall, claiming a craving for retail therapy.

The first stop was to Deaton’s clinic, a sign declaring the business temporarily closed now gracing the front door. Scott had been able to keep the clinic open for a few days, but now, the vet’s absence stretching beyond a week, it had become prudent to close down. Danny easily slipped the lock, ignoring John’s scowl and pointed jingling of the keys.

“Let’s hope he’s got what we’re looking for or we’ll have to try our luck with the pharmacy stuff,” Danny said, picking the lock on the herb cabinet just as easily. He quickly rifled through the vials and jars, pulling free a couple of jars, one full of leaves, the other of powder, and finally a vial of liquid, nodding as he tucked all three in his knapsack.

“We can bring back anything we don’t use, but might as well go in loaded for bear, right?” Danny said practically when he saw the look on John’s face. “Besides, I don’t know if Argent can make us some special bullets, but if he can, I don’t know which form of the herb he needs.”

“Fair enough,” the sheriff sighed, gesturing Danny out of the clinic and locking the door behind them. They were climbing back in the car when Scott pulled in on his bright green bike, waving at the Sheriff as he did.

“Hey, Sheriff,” he greeted John, who nodded back.

“Scott,” he greeted the werewolf. “Was just stopping by to see if there was any sign of your boss.”

“Any luck tracking him down?” Scott asked hopefully, and the sheriff shook his head.

“Sorry, Scott, last report I got was of a fight in the warehouse district three days ago. Maybe a lightning strike two nights ago in the old cemetery, but I can’t confirm that was related to Deaton,” he said.
“Hey, Danny,” Scott said, smiled slipping a few degrees and eyes narrowing slightly. “What are you…?”

“Apparently the Sheriff feels I would benefit from the reminder that I have legal options for my talents that don’t involve hacking,” Danny said, in such pained, perfectly teenage tones that John had trouble keeping a straight face for a moment.

“You weren’t interested in the inside of a jail cell,” he shot back in his best official voice, and Danny sighed, climbing into the car. “Stay out of trouble, okay?” he told Scott, who nodded, still looking suspicious. As long as they could make it to the end of the day before Scott caught on, John thought, understanding why Stiles wanted to keep Scott quiet and in the dark a little longer. They really couldn’t chance tipping their hand, and Scott’s priorities were for his entire pack, which meant they didn’t match John’s at the moment.

Danny was quiet on the drive out to meet Argent, only stirring from his thoughts when they reached the building. “All right?” the sheriff asked, and Danny nodded.

“Just running all the details in my mind, making sure we didn’t miss anything,” Danny explained. “I feel like I’ve missed a variable somewhere, but I haven’t been able to find it.”

“You find it, you let me know,” the sheriff said a little more fiercely than he’d intended. “Time to get everyone in on this conspiracy, kid.”

“Agreed,” Danny replied, shrugging when John looked at him in surprise. “I’ve been feeling like that’s the call as soon as we’ve got Stiles back in play for a while. But Peter can’t know we’ve knocked the doppelganger out. Ergo, soon.”

“Ergo?” John snorted, unable to resist wrapping a companionable arm around Danny’s shoulders to jostle him slightly before letting go. “You kids are getting way too damn good at this.”

Chris lifted an eyebrow when he saw Danny, but let them in, gesturing to keep their voices down. “Allison just dropped off, finally,” he admitted, rubbing a hand over a haggard looking face. “It was a bad night.”

“I remember,” John said, wincing. “And believe it or not, I need your help to get those charming nightmare screams back under my roof.”
“Stiles? Was he taking the wormwood too?” Chris asked, face flickering in alarm.

“Stiles wasn’t Stiles,” John replied. “Apparently doppelgangers are a thing.”

“A really nasty thing,” Chris said, crossing the room to a bookshelf and pulling out a text in what looked like Cyrillic script when he laid it out on the table.

“You can read this?” Danny asked, impressed, and Chris rolled his eyes, sliding a sheet of lined paper out from between the next pages.

“Translation,” he grunted, but Danny took it eagerly, reading quickly.

“Stiles’ was right, it’s more likely it’ll be fatally wounded if he’s the one to shoot it or stab it or whatever,” Danny confirmed, frowning. “Lead, but it suggested stripping it of as much power as possible first.” He tugged his phone out of his pocket, clicking a picture of the page. “Mr. Argent… where’d you get this information?”

“Book’s old, family thing. I think, but the translation is newer,” Chris replied, shrugging. “Before the Alpha pack and Gerard’s vendetta against Deucalion, maybe about a decade before, we had a passing acquaintance with the old Hale emissary. He translated it in exchange for some wolfsbane bullets for his gun, if I remember correctly.”

“Wait, the old Hale emissary and your father?” John asked, frowning.

“No, my mother, actually,” Chris admitted. “She wasn’t nearly as hard line about werewolves as he was. Actually, she was kind of obsessive the other way, had to have absolute proof the code had been broken. Gerard used to obey her rules, but when she passed away, he… got obsessed.”

“Explains how you turned out normal-ish,” Danny muttered under his breath, but from the quick glare Chris shot over at the teenager, John was sure the hunter had heard the comment.

“So your mom and my father-in-law,” John mused, and Chris started, looking surprised.
“Your wife was a Volkov?” he asked, sounding vaguely impressed.

“I’m starting to get the impression that means a lot more than I ever suspected,” John admitted, folding his arms. “Wanna clue me in?”

“The Volkov family produced some of the most powerful witches of all time, emissaries to packs that could fully shift, a witch who cracked half a continent to create a river, were so feared they were hunted by things much worse than werewolves, almost to the point of extinction, if you believe the stories,” Chris told him. “Local lore says the Hale family, which runs back further than the Argent records have scoured, has always had an emissary of the Volkov line until Deaton.” Chris was pursing his lips thoughtfully. “Alan should have been aware of Stiles’ heritage, so why wasn’t he training him?”

“He was, up until a couple weeks ago,” John started, but Chris shook his head.

“Stiles is 17, he should be 5 or 6 years into his training by now,” Chris explained. “It could be he didn’t want to train anyone after the Hale fire, or more likely, he didn’t want the competition.”

“From what Stiles’ says, he had no interest in being Derek’s emissary,” John pointed out. “And he certainly didn’t help the Hale kids, letting them go on the run on their own after the fire.”

“But when did Scott start volunteering at the clinic?” Chris countered. “At what point in this story did Deaton realize that there was a once in a lifetime chance in his hands, that Scott would have the potential to be a True Alpha?”

“The way you think scares me,” John deflected, and Chris clapped his shoulder, smiling knowingly.

“You’re thinking it as well,” he replied. “Let’s get started on some lead bullets.”

Danny held up the pages, waving them off. “Go ahead,” he said, pointing to an image on the page. “I’m thinking this is personal for the Doppelganger, and Stiles may know where one of these is.”

John glanced at the drawing of a power receptacle, a rather ugly, grimacing, two headed pendant.
Allison dragged herself up out of bed, wincing at the tangled mess of hair on her head when she saw her own reflection in the mirror over her dresser, but it ached too fiercely for her to consider dragging her brush through it. She staggered out to the kitchen, and her dad, mouth soft with sympathy, directed her to a chair at the table and poured her a glass of agave juice.

“You just missed Danny and the Sheriff,” he told her, voice mercifully quiet. “Stiles had them bring this over, said it would help with the withdrawal.”

“Yeah, it helps,” she agreed, the edge from the pain slowly dulling as she sipped the juice.

“You should know, Stiles hasn’t been Stiles for almost two weeks,” Chris said, watching her thoughtfully. “He was replaced by a Doppelganger. So when he told you it was safe…”

“It was lying to me,” she concluded, sighing and resting her head in her head. “Still a dumb thing to do, he warned me it was bad, before he went missing.”

“Drink up, kiddo,” he told her. “You’re not going to be in shape to help with the fight if it comes this week, but I want to be able to leave you alone if it comes to it so I can help.”

“I can still fight,” she protested weakly, and her dad folded his arms, shaking his head.

“What did you tell me when I was drinking after your Mom died? Something about being no good to anyone dead?” he asked, and she sighed, knowing she would be defeated by her own words. “Clear mind and clear body before you get a weapon,” he said, kissing her forehead.

“I’m getting a shower,” she replied, rolling her eyes and taking her juice with her rather than admit defeat.

She closed the door behind her, groaning when she turned to the mirror and instead of her reflection found Kate and her Mom waiting for her. “Go away,” she whispered, and Kate laughed.

“Oh kiddo, look at you,” Kate mocked her, laughing harder. “You’re a mess, and without your
pretty drugs, you’re just asking for a mental breakdown. I’ll be glad to help you along to it, Allison. You’re weak, and the darkness will break you.”

Allison closed her eyes, feeling hot tears threatening, reaching for the resolve she’d promised her dad. No drugs, no giving in… Melissa’s words suddenly rose in her mind and she clung to them, able to draw a quick, deep breath and steel herself finally. “You have no power over me,” she said, voice surprisingly firm. “You have no power over me.”

“Yeah, keep telling yourself that,” Kate snorted as she vanished back into the mirror with a sarcastic thumbs up.

Her mom’s image lingered for a moment though, looking approving, nodding once, as Allison repeated again, “You have no power over me.”

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Stiles let Derek held him down off the ladder, pendant in hand, grinning triumphantly. “It’s a mess up there,” he confirmed. “He’s been looking, but it looks like the box I stuck this in was shielded. Thanks, Grandpa,” he added, shooting his fingers skyward.

“Come on,” Derek tugged his hand lightly, back toward his bedroom. “You sure there’s no way I can do this?” he asked, looking pained.

“I can handle this,” Stiles insisted, trying not to scowl.

“I know,” Derek replied, frowning back. “But I want to…”

“Your protective urges tend to make me think you think I’m a weak human, that I need a protector,” Stiles complained, sitting on his bed with a huff.

“I think you’re capable, and it has nothing to do with human or wolf,” Derek replied, frown deepening. “I’ve felt protective of you since the first time I saw you in that clearing with Scott.”

“That makes no sense,” Stiles breathed, looking at Derek for a long minute. “Dude, you shoved my
head into my steering wheel. Please tell me that wasn’t pig tail pulling.”

“That was pack behavior, I would forget you couldn’t take the same force as everyone else,” Derek replied quietly, shrugging. “I… you always felt more like pack than Scott. It irritated me.”

“Because he was the wolf, he should have been pack,” Stiles remarked dryly. “And here I was, skinny, annoying little human, and you, what? Thought of me like your kid brother or something?”

“You are nothing like Alex, Brenna, or Cora,” Derek said. “You do remind me of Laura. But I definitely don’t think about you in a familial way, Stiles,” he added, stopping his work for a moment to cup Stiles’ face and plant a soft, searching kiss on Stiles’ lips. “I trust you, remember? And that’s not something I do, for anyone. Not even my betas felt that instinctive and immediate. It took time.”

“So... when you said you didn’t trust me at the pool?” Stiles asked, narrowing his eyes as Derek picked up his hammer again and drove another nail into the wall quickly.

“You had a temper tantrum for no reason?” Derek suggested with a quick flash of a grin which irritated Stiles before it took his breath away.

“Fuck you, dude,” he scoffed, picking up his paintbrush and finishing the last of the runes he’d been working on before Danny had called. “Here, that’s the last one,” he said, handing it to Derek, who hung the mirror up, runes facing the wall and the reflective surface gazing out. “This is freaky,” Stiles said, looking around at the ridiculous array of cheap mirrors they’d hung on every surface of the room they could manage. The finished effect was a complete, though awkward ring of mirror, encircling the room. They’d looped up over the door to leave it open, but went straight over the windows, once it looked like they might not have found enough in the thrift stores and hardware depot to close the circle.

“Effective?” Derek asked, offering Stiles a hand up.

“Hopefully enough to stop a doppelganger in his tracks and contain him,” Stiles agreed. “Now we wait.”

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Timing was critical, and John had already missed his mark, scrambling to catch up. “Stiles,” he
called out, lengthening his stride to catch the doppelganger as it unlocked the door.

“Hey, Dad,” it greeted him, then grinned. “Ooh, smoothie!”

“Yeah, picked one up for you when I got my coffee,” John agreed, handing it over. “It’s a bribe, so you’ll overlook me missing dinner again tonight,” he said.

“Dad,” the doppelganger whined, so like Stiles it took John aback for a moment.

“Sorry, kiddo,” he said, hoping like hell he didn’t seem suspicious. “Got a lead on that John Doe that turned up Thursday, a woman in the next county thinks she might be able to ID him, so I have to head over to the county morgue for that.”

“Fine,” the doppelganger grumbled, drinking the smoothie, making a slight face. “Hmm, tastes off,” he remarked.

“I think I forgot to tell them extra agave,” John lied. Chris had said the St. John’s Wort would weaken the doppelganger slowly, not so noticeably or quickly as wolfsbane or wormwood.

“Huh,” the doppelganger took another drink, shrugging. “Guess it’s okay,” he said, and John sighed, heading for the stairs.

“There might be some agave in the fridge, I picked some up the other day,” he called over his shoulder, knowing he was breaking plan, but the gun with the lead bullets was still on his hip, not in Stiles’ hand.

“Thanks,” the doppelganger called back, and John slipped his gun belt off, handing it to Derek, who had slid into the hall, looking a little wide eyed with alarm. He took the gun, nodding before silently vanishing back into the maze of mirrors that covered Stiles’ walls.

John headed back downstairs, pausing in the kitchen door to watch the doppelganger mix in some extra agave juice, drinking thoughtfully. “Must have been a new barista,” the doppelganger shrugged, moving past John.
“How’d shopping with Lydia go?” John asked, hoping to get a little more of the smoothie into the doppelganger before it went upstairs.

“It’s Lydia,” the doppelganger sighed, grinning dopily and chewing on the straw of the smoothie. “Her mom made her come home early though, kinda sucked.”

“Sorry, kiddo,” John said, turning to shuffle through the mail on the entryway table. The doppelganger headed upstairs, toward his room, and John breathed out shakily, waiting for a sign to follow once the trap was sprung.

He wasn’t expecting the enraged, banshee-like screech that came from the doppelganger when it stepped into the room. He sprinted up the stairs, finding the doppelganger on its knees, a bright crackle of indigo colored lightning arcing up between the doppelganger and his Stiles, holding a two headed pendant aloft, the energy gathering around the heads, which were open as though screaming as they sucked in the lightning.

Desperate, the doppelganger fell back, stretching a hand out toward John. “Dad, help, you’ve got to stop them!” it pleaded, and John hesitated, for a moment uncertain. How could Derek really know he hadn’t been duped, that this wasn’t his son, about to be killed?

“Derek,” Stiles barked, and the werewolf raised the gun, just as the shape shifter reared around, grasping for Derek. “Either you stay still, and we take your magic, or we will shoot you,” he informed his look alike coldly. “The Argents were kind enough to supply us with lead bullets, and Dad dosed you with St. Johns Wort.”

Another large arc of lightning passed between the pendant and the doppelganger, and the creature lost its hold on Stiles’ form, claws, feathers, fur all rippling in sickening waves over his body as he collapsed. “Finish it,” the doppelganger said weakly, and the lightning doubled in width, a rush of power spilling out and then stopping abruptly, the lips of both heads on the pendant closing.

On the floor, a sickly looking older gentleman stirred weakly, blinking up at the sheriff. His hair hung in lank, graying mats, around the too pale skin of his face, which was resting on hands that were still more claws than hands. His teeth were all filed into sharp points. John wondered if this was the creature’s true form or if he’d been warped over time by all the shifting.

“Colin, is that your real name?” Stiles asked, pocketing the pendant.
“It’s close enough,” the doppelganger groaned. “Please, kill me quickly.”

“If he’s harmless now, you’re not killing him,” John said firmly, giving his son and Derek a hard look. He hoped, rather than believed, it was an unnecessary warning.

“You’re going to have to lock him up, till it’s all over,” Stiles told his dad, shrugging. “He owes having any power at all to Peter, isn’t that right?” he asked, and the doppelganger nodded tiredly. “Grandpa stripped it from him a long time ago. He was here to get it back if he could, as well as repay a debt to Peter. He’ll go to him the second we give him a chance, to try to clear the books again.”

“He’d give me a chance to rip your throat out,” the doppelganger hissed at Stiles, baring his teeth in a semblance of a growl. “Bring down the last of the Volkovs, it’d be justice for how many of my kind your kin have stripped of our powers.”

“Maybe if your kind weren’t prone to abusing your power, you’d survive longer,” Derek rumbled menacingly, nodding to the Sheriff. “You can arrest him for impersonation, right? Or maybe a B&E?”

“Be hard to make it stick, but I can bury him so no one finds him for a week or two,” John decided, reaching toward the desk and his handcuffs.

“What the hell is going on? I heard screaming—”

Scott had slid Stile’s window open and was looking in confusion at the circle of mirrors in the room, a circle he’d just broken by raising the window.

“Shut the window!” Stiles shouted, but it was too late. With a snarl, the doppelganger rushed at Scott, knocking him to the ground as he dove out the window, claws tearing into Scott as he hauled the Alpha to his feet, using the werewolf as a shield with a surprising amount of strength.

“I thought you stripped it of all its power,” Derek complained as he tried to find a shot, through the window.

“Natural strength and form,” was all Stiles’ muttered, racing for his shelves, grabbing a vial of dried leaves and launching himself toward the stairs.
John grabbed his backup weapon from his ankle holster, also loaded for doppelganger thanks to Chris, and sprinted out after his son, the doppelganger having dragged Scott to the back yard gate. Scott, to his credit, was clawing and struggling fiercely, but the doppelganger had a handful of claws driven into Scott’s neck around his spine, keeping Scott pinned tightly in front of him, making it just as hard for John to find a clean shot.

“Dad, shoot Scott,” Stiles commanded in a low voice.

“Stiles…” John said, hard pressed to fire on the kid in front of him.

“It won’t hurt me, right?” Scott gurgled, blood starting to foam up into his mouth, choking him.

“Derek,” Stiles called up, and that decided John, bringing his gun up and firing. He didn’t hear a second shot, and hoped for a moment that Derek hadn’t fired, even if the bullet wasn’t going to kill Scott. The other man had enough damaging images in his mind, John was certain.

The bullet tore through Scott’s abdomen neatly and lodged itself between the doppleganger’s ribs. Scott fell forward to the ground while the doppelganger fell backward, its grip on Scott’s neck going slack.

Stiles sprinted to Scott, checking his neck and stomach rapidly while Derek jumped down from the second floor to join John checking the doppelganger. It shuddered once, then the eyes were vacant, unseeing and still. The body began to curl in on itself, warping and disintegrating before their eyes.

“He’s healing,” Stiles said, and John could see him helping the Alpha sit up. “What about…?”

“Dead, and rapidly decaying, must have been really old,” Derek confirmed, looking over to Scott, then inspecting Stiles. “You okay?”

“Is he okay?” Scott rasped around his clawed up throat. “What the hell was that?”

“That was the thing that’s been pretending to be me for the past two weeks,” Stiles replied, and might have said more, but Derek had tensed, a car pulling out across the street and driving away quickly.
“What?” Stiles asked, as Derek scented the air.

“Sea water,” he replied. “I think the Siren saw everything.”

“No, it was Ms. Kelly,” Scott said, wincing around his healing wounds and struggling to his feet. “I recognized her car when I came in. Seriously, what the hell is going on, Stiles?”

“We need to get him inside,” John said, taking the gun from Derek gently, nodding to the werewolf as he did. “Is this going to continue to clean itself up? Because it doesn’t look like any of the neighbors have heard anything.”

“It’s social weekend over at the Kiwanis,” Scott supplied helpfully, looking around. “And you’re lucky no one lives very close out here. I think we’re in the clear.”

“Hardly,” Derek muttered, and Stiles nodded grimly.

“Peter knows I’m back in play,” Stiles agreed. “Call the twins, have them back to school on Monday. We need full ranks on the board and a show of strength or Peter might panic and come at us too soon.”

“That thing was pretending to be you?” Scott was poking at the remains with a stick, the oozing tissues enough to turn John’s stomach, so he wasn’t sure how Derek and Scott were managing it.

“For about two weeks now,” Stiles confirmed, a little anger turning down the corners of his mouth, John noticed, wondering what it would be like to know that your best friend hadn’t been among those to realize something was wrong.

“I should have…” Scott looked up at Derek, suddenly scowling. “That’s why you’re back?”

“Stiles’ magic was sending me SOS messages, so I came back to find him,” Derek replied, as he hung up his phone. “Aiden and Ethan will be back on Monday,” he told Stiles, before turning back to Scott, then looking over at John. “Maybe we should move this inside, just in case?”
“Good idea,” he agreed, gesturing Scott to the door. “You need to call Danny,” he added, remembering the younger man’s insistence when he’d dropped him off at home.

Stiles looked to Derek, who automatically began dialing.

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Scott’s head was reeling. His darkness was snapping angrily, making his wolf pace and mutter in frustration. Derek and Stiles were so in sync, moving like a pair, and he couldn’t get to the part of himself that was happy his friend was back, was safe.

He followed them inside, growling slightly and flashing his eyes when Derek came too close. Derek was back in his face a moment later, blue eyes flaring. “Anchor it, Scott,” he commanded, and Scott reached out, instinctively more than obediently, and found his bond to Allison and Isaac, breathing out slowly until everything inside him slowed to a simmer instead of about to boil over. He breathed in again, opening his human eyes to see Derek, eyes still blue, watching him closely.

“I’ve got control,” he said, continuing to breathe slowly. Derek watched him for a moment longer, body still deliberately tense and poised between Scott and Stiles, which made his wolf coil inward, suddenly sad. Derek’s eyes flickered for an instant, and Scott frowned, wondering why they’d blinked red if Derek had given up his Alpha powers. Before he could think on it too hard, Derek had eased down, human and settling on the arm of the couch next to Stiles, still looking rather protective.

“So, Danny knew too,” Scott said, slumping into a chair finally, his head still reeling.

“He figures it was because he only really got to know me after the darkness,” Stiles said, but Scott could tell from the look on Derek’s face, the werewolf didn’t agree. “You knew me before, and since the Doppelganger couldn’t imitate my darkness, it tried to imitate the old Stiles as close as possible.”

“I just thought you and Allison had it better under control,” Scott admitted, and there was a flicker, a look between Stiles and Derek that set the hair on the back of his neck crawling. “Allison?”

“Relax, she’s still Allison,” Stiles snapped, rolling his eyes slightly. “She’s just been dropping wormwood to keep her control. Chris has her on lock down till she detoxes.”
“But you said the microdots were…” Scott trailed off. “It told her the microdots were safe. It was trying to hurt her.”

“He was working for Peter,” Derek put in, looking up from the texting he was doing on his phone. “Peter’s trying to take us down, one by one, get us weak enough that when he makes his move, your allies crumble around you,” he explained to Scott. “Stiles was first, because he was catching on, seeing too much of how the plan was forming. Allison, because he’s afraid of her and had an easily accessible weakness, was next. Then the twins, that was a Golem that poisoned Aiden, not another Alpha. Then Deaton.”

“He’s been missing, no check ins for days,” Scott said, biting his lip.

“I don’t think he’s dead,” Stiles said, shrugging when they all looked at him. “Peter’s witch has a lot of power, or Deaton would have easily held his ground. If she was done with Deaton, she’d be on to the next target.”

“Cheerful,” the Sheriff remarked, making a face, but obviously in agreement. “What else should we be worried about?”

“We fairly certain he’s got a couple more wolves, omegas, a were-tiger, and a Siren,” Derek replied. “A vampire maybe, though Lydia thinks it’s an incubus, not a vampire. The Golem was the witch’s handiwork, and we haven’t seen many other magical traps outside of her fight with Deaton, which is good because it means there’s probably only one of her.”

“You think he’s going to make his move soon,” Scott didn’t make it a question. Stiles and Derek were marking out moves like they were ready for an attack.

“I’d bet on it being before the week is out,” Stiles agreed, humming thoughtfully. “Derek, can you…?”

“Yeah,” Derek replied, returning to the texts, and Scott frowned, not liking how close they seemed.

“Are you two…” he trailed off, not sure he wanted to ask, especially when Stiles smiled a little dreamily as he looked at Derek.

“Your dad is right there,” Derek said, without looking up from his phone. “Danny says he’ll come
over after he drops the St. Johns Wort back at the clinic.”

“Your boyfriend promised to keep your virtue in tact till you’re eighteen,” the sheriff remarked dryly, giving Stiles a pointed look. “You wouldn’t want to make me doubt that, would you?”

“I… you’re no fun,” Stiles sulked. Scott looked to Derek, completely taken aback. He really hadn’t believed Isaac when he’d said Derek had feelings for Stiles, let alone Stiles having returned them, but for them to have worked out rules for dating with the sheriff already… he stood up, pacing a little while he got his thoughts back in order, shoving down the unimportant and trying to focus in on the critical questions.

“Why didn’t you tell me about Peter once Derek got you back?” he finally asked, turning back to Stiles, who winced.

“Look… I needed time to heal, to recover and get parts of the plan in place. If I’d told you… Scott, you haven’t been listening to me much lately. I couldn’t take a risk you’d jump the gun and go after Peter.”


“Oh yeah?” Stiles asked, lifting an eyebrow. “Tell me what Ms. Kelly is then.”

“A Selkie,” Scott said, baffled. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

“She’s a Siren,” Derek put in quietly. “Stiles tried to warn you, but when you wouldn’t listen, Deaton told him not to tell you, to have you learn that lesson on your own.”

Scott couldn’t help scowling in Derek’s direction. “Is that what this really is? You’ve been telling him I don’t listen to him, so you could steal him away?”

“Scott, he doesn’t need to tell me anything!” Stiles shot back, looking furious. “Stop trying to always make Derek the bad guy. He didn’t bite you! He’s always tried to help you, to make you part of his pack. Have you even offered the same courtesy since he’s come back?”
“He’s not part of my pack!” Scott insisted, and Stiles slumped, the fight suddenly leaving him.

“And neither am I, then,” Stiles said softly. “I’m Derek’s emissary, not yours. My grandpa was his mother’s emissary before Deaton. You’d know about what was going on if you’d been paying attention, listening to me, but you didn’t even notice I had been replaced.”

Scott saw red, the darkness and his wolf flaring, urging him forward, the taste of blood filling his mouth and urging him to bite, to make Stiles his again. “Find your anchor,” Derek snapped, suddenly in his face, growling lowly at him. “You won’t get through me to him, and even if you bit him, he’d still be mine, Scott. Focus on your pack.”

Derek’s words barely filtered through the roaring darkness screaming in his mind, but the sudden scent of wolfsbane in the air and the click of a clip locking into place in a handgun brought him screeching back to a silent, tense reality. “Scott, you need to calm down,” John said, even as he tucked the gun into his holster. “Is there anything else pressing to discuss, or can I suggest we adjourn this meeting until tonight, when we can gather everyone… both packs and the adults… here to plan a strategy?”

Scott’s darkness growled, but he held to his anchor tightly, thinking of Isaac and Allison, and nodded tersely. “Go find Isaac, tell him about Allison,” Derek told him, voice distressingly understanding. “See if Chris will let you talk with her. Get your anchor in place, because while I understand what you’re going through, I won’t let you near Stiles if I think you’ll hurt him.”

“I wouldn’t…” Scott trailed off, looking over to see that Stiles had scrambled to put a couch between himself and Scott during the last attack on his control. He would hurt Stiles, he realized suddenly, his mind filled with how little Stiles wanted the bite. “Thanks,” he said softly to Derek, control locking in with resolve this time. "Tonight," he agreed with the sheriff, nodding to Stiles and slipping out before he could test his control any further.

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Danny pulled into the clinic, whistling cheerfully, even if Derek had implied the plan hadn’t gone perfectly. The Doppelganger was dead, and Stiles had his life back in his own hands. He climbed out of his Prius and had made it to the door he usually picked the lock on before he realized something was wrong.

The door was ajar, handprint streaks of blood marring the glass panes, as though someone had struggled with the door. He froze for a moment, debating moving forward and checking it out on his own or going back to text Derek and Stiles and wait for them. He split the difference, snagging his
phone out of the car and shooting off the text to get to the clinic fast, then tucked it in his pocket and slowly headed back up to the door, mapping out the trail of destruction and blood into the clinic.

Blood had pooled in small puddles he could see now, before drips moved about a meter more along the floor and a new pool had formed. Step, rest, step, rest, Danny calculated, able to imagine the staggered steps of someone badly wounded and dragging himself desperately to safety. The mountain ash panel on the counter had not been put into place to solidify the wards, but Danny had left it in place when he left the clinic earlier, so it wasn’t werewolves in the clinic.

Pushing open the door, he found the door stuck slightly, a heavy weight on the other side. A hard push, and a body suddenly slumped onto the floor, red-orange hair slowly turning dark as the curls soaked up the deeper red of the pool of blood he’d just knocked the body into. He reeled back momentarily, processing the vacant, glassy eyes, too pale skin and unmoving, rigid body of Fiona, the witch who had gone after Deaton. He recognized her vaguely from the bakery prior to her and Deaton vanishing.

With a hard push, the body slid back enough for Danny to step inside the clinic, spotting the blood trail heading back toward the exam room. The walls were covered in soot stains, like fire or explosions had charred the surfaces, and now that he was inside, Danny could see that the far end of the counter had been smashed apart, wood splinters littering the floor and embedded in the dry wall behind the counter.

A hand descended, grabbing the back of his neck, and Danny barely choked out a strangled yell before Derek clapped his other hand over Danny’s mouth, glaring fiercely at him. “We are all,” he swiftly included Stiles, who was slipping into the clinic behind him, in his scowl, “Going to have a very long discussion about survival instincts.”

“Can’t be taught,” Stiles replied in a cheerful whisper as he hopped around a blood pool and made his way behind the counter. Derek growled lowly, releasing his hold on Danny.

“Should we call your dad?” Danny asked, stepping around the body to follow Stiles. “Crime scene and all?”

“Let’s see what we’re dealing with first,” Stiles replied. “We’ve already had to ask him to clean up one body this month, I’d rather not have to do it for two or three.”

Derek gave Stiles a look of sympathy, and Danny swallowed hard, nodding. He couldn’t really imagine what having the kind of relationship Stiles and Derek had had with their parents was like, but it seemed like a lot of work. “Let me go first?” Derek complained when Stiles used his knuckles
to push open the door toward the rear of the clinic. There was a bloody handprint on the door about waist high.

“Don’t touch anything if you can help it,” Stiles sighed. “My prints can be here, it’s common knowledge I was studying with Deaton, but I don’t need you two delinquents getting Scott’s dad’s attention if someone finds your prints.”

“Whose fault is it they’re even in the system,” Derek grumbled, and Stiles grinned unrepentantly back at him.

“Uh, too late for me, I’ve been breaking in all week,” Danny reminded Stiles.

“We’ll have to clean up too then,” he decided, then opened the door for Derek to go through.

The exam room wasn’t trashed like the front, but there was a lot of blood and emergency supplies scattered everywhere, as though someone had come through, trying to do emergency first aid on themselves. “Deaton, you think?” Stiles whispered to Danny, who shrugged, while Derek nodded, perfectly able to overhear.

“Smells like him,” Derek whispered back, nodding toward the mostly closed door of the office. Blood coated the handle, and Stiles walked ahead, carefully opening the door with his knuckles.

“Derek,” Stiles said sharply, and Derek moved quickly, picking up an unconscious Deaton, who had slumped against his desk. There were so many criss-crossing cuts, lacing up and down his torso, arms and legs, still sluggishly bleeding, it made Danny feel vaguely ill.

“We have to get him to a hospital,” Danny said, but Stiles bit his lip, looking at the blood soaked bandages, which had done nothing to slow the bleeding.

“He reeks of magic, and the wounds aren’t healing at all,” Derek confirmed, laying the vet on the exam table for Stiles to examine him.

“Danny, from the herb closet, get comfrey and star anise, and see if there’s any Vitamin K in the medical supplies,” Stiles told him. “I don’t know if I can stop it…” he admitted, examining the arm closest to him, crying out in surprise when Deaton lurched suddenly, bloody hand wrapping around Stiles’ forearm.
“No,” he hissed, swallowing and struggling to form words. “The wounds are too deep, and you’ll need your magic at full strength.”

“I could help,” Stiles insisted, eyes suddenly suspiciously shiny, making Danny’s breath catch.

“You’d drain yourself, and here…” Deaton brought Stiles’ hand to his chest, near a particularly vicious cut. “It’s too late here. Too deep.”

“I…” Stiles broke off, shaking his head helplessly.

“I’m sorry,” Deaton breathed, eyes firmly on Stiles.

“You don’t owe me the apology,” Stiles replied, looking to Derek.

“It’s an apology to… your whole… pack,” Deaton was starting to struggle for breath, and Derek stepped up, taking his arm and leeching some pain away, veins turning sickly black. “Not… don’t.” Deaton said, shaking his head. “Took the witch out… I think. Peter… golems, tiger, Siren, Doppelganger, Omegas, Vampire,” he counted off, and Danny suddenly understood it was a report of Peter’s force, grabbing his phone and jotting it down quickly. “Something else too… something… never seen before.”

“Okay, we’ve got it,” Stiles reassured him, voice wobbling in worrisome manner.

“Tell Marin…” Deaton struggled for breath again, and Danny had to lean in to hear the next part. “Make oath… to pack… not to Scott. Save her… from herself… but still… help him. Tell Scott… I… so proud…”

He slumped then, the last of his energy evaporating suddenly, all his strings cut, and the body suddenly nothing more than an empty shell.

-6-
Chapter End Notes

Character death is Deaton, along with OFC bad guy.
Six Weeks Since... Monday

-6-

Stiles was wandering, the wood dark and deep. The path opened, the Nemeton in its clearing, silent and waiting. He turned, walking away, heading back up the path, only to have the path clear again and empty him at the roots of the massive tree stump once more.

He backed away, slowly, and bumped into a body behind him. Whirling, he barely managed to duck as Peter swung his claws out, aiming for his throat and a single slice of his longest claw opening a thin line of blood across his cheek.

“Come on, Stiles,” Peter taunted. “You’ve got Derek now, you know what it means. You’re destined to go evil, he’s never picked one who hasn’t.”

“I won’t do that to him,” Stiles shouted, stumbling back further, becoming tangled in the roots of the Nemeton.

“You’re in for it now,” Peter said, eyes flaring purple, as he faded back into the woods.

Everything was quiet, preternaturally still for a moment, then the Nemeton roots reached up, wrapping their way around his throat before one tendril reached up, capturing the blood as it dripped from his cheek.

The ground dropped away, the roots all dropping Stiles, and he fell, deep into the dark, landing roughly, legs falling unnaturally so that he found himself straddling something hard and cold, metal which felt smooth and formed beneath his fingertips as he explored, blind in the darkness.

A single torch flared on a wall hundreds of yards away. The flame danced, flickering in the darkness for one long, endless, moment, then torches on either side of it ignited. In quick succession, torches ignited in race down the wall, turning the corner and racing closer and closer toward Stiles. The walls lit on either side of him, then the torches continued, and he half turned, confirming the wall behind him was also being lit by apparently self-igniting torches.

His gaze caught as he turned back, golden metal chess pieces to his right hand side stretching out across most of the board. Checking quickly, he confirmed he was astride a golden unicorn on the king’s knight square. On the opposite side, the pieces were a gleaming silver-black metal, and the knight directly opposite him on the board was moving out to the board in the opening move.
“Even in Harry Potter’s WZizarding chess, white goes first,” Stiles called out, and his own piece moved toward the other knight in an L shape. The rider on the other unicorn was a dark haired woman, wearing a long, emerald green dress, and she looked as flesh and blood real as he did.

“Hello?” he called out, and her piece moved up to his, taking the square kitty-corner his. Drawing up even now, he recognized her – Jennifer Blake.

“Come and find me, Stiles, and come soon. Because if you don’t?” she said, giving him a wide grin before pulling a wickedly sharp rapier from her belt. “Checkmate,” she smiled nastily before thrusting the blade into his heart.

-Stiles woke up slowly, head aching fiercely and all too aware of the fact that he’d awoken both Derek and his dad with screaming nightmares more than once. “Shh, easy,” Derek murmured, and Stiles relaxed back for a moment into the older man’s embrace, drowsily rubbing his cheek into the soft skin over Derek’s shoulder.

He sat up again suddenly, groaning. “You’re here, why are you here?” he asked, trying to sort out his memories of the previous night.

“After you cleaned up the scene at Deaton’s and called it in to your dad, he insisted I stay with you until he got home,” Derek reminded him gently. “And when you were having nightmares about it when he got home, he decided to accept my offer to stay and help, since I’d been helping with the nightmares so far.”

“My dad is okay with you being here?” Stiles asked skeptically, and Derek flushed interestingly.

“He… may have introduced me to the collection of weapons Argent has given him,” Derek replied. “And explained in detail what he’d do with each if he thinks I do anything more than kiss you or share your bed for the sole purpose of sleeping before you’re eighteen.”

Stiles stared at Derek for a moment, before he laughed, suddenly unable to help himself. The sun had already risen into the sky, which made him groan as his brain woke up. “Monday. I should be at school.”
“After we discussed vivisection, your father and I discussed what you’ve been through in detail,” Derek replied, and Stiles hid his face in the pillow, groaning again. “He’s called you in sick for today, probably the rest of the week.”

“I’m recovered,” Stiles protested, and Derek linked their fingers, bringing them gently to him lips in a manner that lifted his wrist into his line of sight. The dark purple bruises in the shape of fingers hadn’t faded much yet. “I’m not saying I’m 100%, but I can handle school,” he protested. “Besides, catch up is already going to be a nightmare.”

“Lydia has a plan for that, apparently. And according to her, the Doppelganger kept your grades high.”

“Cumulative finals,” Stiles retorted, but he relaxed a little. Between Danny and Lydia, he was fairly certain he could catch up enough to maintain his rank as third in their class. He’d need it, for the kind of scholarships he’d need to amass to afford college abroad. “Okay, so what’s the plan for the day?”

“I called Scott first thing, suggested he should have the whole pack stand down, take a day of rest today,” Derek replied. “He… agreed.”

Something in the way Derek hesitated told Stiles there was more to it than that, but he let it go. “The Sheriff and Melissa told the school Scott had a party and someone undercooked the chicken, so you’re all out with food poisoning. If our hand is tipped to Peter, we might as well group up and start forming a cohesive plan.”

“You’ve been busy. Where and when?” Stiles asked, yawning as he tilted his head up at the alarm clock above his bed. It took some effort, but he finally transposed the upside down view of the numbers to read quarter till ten. “And who?”

“ Noon, here,” Derek replied. “Not Allison, but your Mom’s going to go be with her so Chris can come. Your dad, Scott, Isaac, Danny, Lydia, the twins.” He hesitated, shrugging as he added, “Cora. Jackson.”

“What?” Stiles sat up, barely able to stop himself from grinning. “Seriously?”

“Their flight lands in about half an hour, and Jackson’s already rented a car for them, so they’ll be
here at noon as well,” Derek grimaced, shrugging. “Cora called last night and Jackson had them booked for the next flight about halfway through me explaining what was happening.”

“Any word from Morrell?”

“If she got the voicemail or texts about her brother, she didn’t reply,” Derek said, lifting a hand to gently trace the curve of Stiles’ cheek. “You okay?”

“Wish he hadn’t taken all his secrets to the grave,” Stiles grumbled, to cover the softer sadness that kept welling up inside him. Derek gave him a knowing look, and he grimaced, shrugging. “I don’t know how to feel, it’s all a jumble of angry and sad and disappointed and…” he hesitated, stumbling over the next words. “I’m scared. I know you need me to step up now, to do what he should have been doing, and I’m scared I’ll fail or worse, I’ll go dark.”

“Your nightmares last night…?” Derek prompted him, and Stiles made a face.

“Not the nemeton, I don’t think, for most of it, but I’m not sure about the stuff right before I woke up just now,” he said. He shook it off. “One was that Peter ignored me and bit me when he offered. And a lot of other bizarre stuff before I woke up.” He bit his tongue on the part about Jennifer being there.

“Peter offered you the bite, you turned it down, and he just said okay? He told me he’d offered it to you, but since you’re still human, I figured he was lying,” Derek asked, sounding skeptical.

“Well, he bent my keys and left me to walk back to the fight,” Stiles replied dryly. “He’d been terrorizing me into helping him for the better part of an hour, maybe he was bored. I don’t know, dude.”

“Maybe he knew it was unlikely to work, like Lydia,” Derek said, and suddenly Stiles saw what Derek was getting at, all of Peter’s plans within plans and back-ups and contingencies. They needed to be prepared, and when it was done…

“We have to cremate his body this time,” Stiles concluded. “Sorry, I know that’s really sacrilegious to wolves and all, but…”

“No, I agree,” Derek said, kissing Stiles’ forehead gently. “Do you… do you wish you’d said yes?”
“I don’t want it,” Stiles said, shrugging. “I’m not sure I meant it when I told him, but now, I want what I am more.” He regarded Derek’s face for a moment, before asking, “Do you wish I had?”

“I like you human,” Derek replied simply. When Stiles scoffed, he tightened his grip a little. “I’ve always felt like you were perfect for the pack the way you are. I’d have offered you the bite, you’re smart and you’re amazing, but it always seemed… wrong. Maybe part of me, my wolf instincts, knew about the emissary part of you.”

Stiles pushed Derek away a little, wiggling till he managed to get his legs out of bed. Derek made a little noise of protest, managing to loop his arm around Stiles again, and he smiled.

“I’m not going far,” Stiles reassured him. “Bathroom, and to brush my teeth. Then I say we kill some time making out till we have to get up for the others.”

“Oh. Okay,” Derek said, face flushing, apparently figuring out that his all too wonderful answer had made Stiles want to jump him. He leaned back into the headboard, watching Stiles squirm free of the blankets and walk to the bathroom.

It wasn’t until he closed the bathroom door behind him that he realized he was only wearing a pair of pajama pants, slung low and just clinging to his hipbones. He quickly brushed his teeth, then padded back out of the bathroom, taking in Derek’s worn black T-shirt, which he knew would be soft and threadbare beneath his fingers, which had ridden up slightly above his painted on jeans.

“Hi,” he said softly, suddenly unaccountably shy, wondering what on earth Derek, gorgeous, wolf-perfect Derek, was doing with him. He stepped in further, and lightning quick, Derek had a hold of him and tumbled him to the mattress, rolling them so he was on top, gazing fondly down at Stiles.

“Get out of your head,” Derek murmured, lowering his mouth to Stiles’, kissing him with more gentleness than his pounce had promised. “I want you, like you.”

“Hmm,” Stiles hummed swallowing as Derek’s stubbled rasped against his throat as Derek’s lips wandered down his jaw. “It’s just… I know they were super evil, but you exes were super hot, and I’m… well, not.”

“Are,” Derek muttered, closing blunt human teeth on Stiles’ earlobe, making him shudder pleasantly. “So much more than them.”
“Ugh, you don’t have to flatter me, I want to make out, remember,” Stiles joked, surprised when Derek gently but firmly pinned his shoulders to the mattress a moment later.

“Let me make something very clear to you,” Derek growled, eyes flashing for a moment. “All of me, every part, looks at you and thinks you’re gorgeous. That you’re mine. No one else has ever been that way for me. You’re not just here because I’m an attractive body, right?”

“Face too,” Stiles quipped, even as he nodded. “Brain, personality, even the growly bits. I like it all,” he agreed quickly, not letting Derek have time to react to the poor joke.

“Okay,” Derek eased his hold, and Stiles moved quickly, latching his arms around Derek’s neck and pulling himself up to press his lips to Derek’s. Derek wrapped one arm around his back, bracing with the other as he slowly rolled them back down to the bed, kiss never breaking.

Both of Derek’s hands then slid down the sides of Stiles’ rib cage, large and warm and spanning his skin in a way that made Stiles groan appreciatively even as he opened his mouth to Derek’s gently pleading tongue.

Derek’s hands slid together, side by side spanning the width of Stiles stomach, fingertips dragging into the slight dips between the plains of his muscles. Stile sucked in a quick breath, but Derek’s hands didn’t slide lower, sliding back up his torso instead. His breath hitched again when Derek found his nipples and gave each an experimental tweak, which Stiles found his hips arching upward into the touch eagerly. It never felt like that when he had played with his own nipples, but somehow, Derek’s hands on him, Derek’s teeth… oh god, teeth scraping his skin… Stiles squirmed, a harsh groan escaping his throat. His body lit up like a live wire anywhere Derek touched.

“Oh god,” Stiles shuddered, relaxing back when Derek eased back a little, grinning wolfishly.

“You respond so prettily,” Derek commented, idly tracing the blunt edge of a nail in an arc that came across Stiles’ pec but just skimmed the line between pale skin and the darker edge of his nipple.

“You like to tease,” Stiles accused the werewolf, who only grinned wider.

“I like teasing you,” Derek agreed, nails now tracing an arc the opposite way. “We’ve got about five months till you turn eighteen, so I’m thinking you’re going to have to get used to it.”
“Not fair,” Stiles muttered, sighing. “Could be worse, I suppose, if you wanted to wait till I graduated or something absurd.”

“I should want to wait, make you have a normal high school experience,” Derek pressed a finger to Stiles lips when he scowled. “I know, normal is for other people.”

“I’ve been thinking about what Colin said the other day,” Stiles blurted out, surprising himself. Derek obligingly shifted a little, propping himself up on his elbow and studying Stiles’ face. “He called me the last Volkov. I know he’s wrong, but now I’m wondering if it’s close to that bad.”

“Deaton wasn’t a Volkov, and he became the Hale emissary,” Derek said, sounding thoughtful. “I don’t know if I’m reading into it too much, but why wouldn’t the Volkovs have sent someone from your family to replace your grandfather?”

“Unless there wasn’t anyone to send, the family had thinned too far,” Stiles concluded, nodding. “Yeah, I was thinking it too. My mom’s sister is in Vancouver, last she emailed me, and Morrell dropped a hint I should contact her, so I’m thinking she’s part of a pack or a coven or something.”

“She might know more about it,” Derek said. His fingers were now tracing gently circles over Stiles’ stomach, gesture soothing and soft, not teasing.

“So what’s weighing on your mind?” Stiles asked, reading the heavy tilt of Derek’s eyebrows easily, for all his face was neutral. “I told you mine, you should tell me yours.”

“Deaton’s force report, as Danny’s calling it,” Derek admitted. “Something he couldn’t ID?”

“Something rare. Doesn’t mean it’s dangerous, could be a were-kitten,” Stiles suggested, earning a quick eye roll from the older man. “Look, Deaton wasn’t so good with faery folk. I usually hit up Devine for sources when I start digging around the Sidhe. Smart money is on something from their lines.” Stiles leaned up a little. “Off the top of your head, craziest tall tale Peter ever told you about his travels?”

“Dragon,” Derek replied immediately, making Stiles gape.
Derek shrugged. “He spent some time in Asia, retold a bunch of Chinese and Japanese myths. Anyway, Laura and I both laughed it off right away, but he’d also told Brenda and Cora about it, and they spent a week making both of us pretend to breathe fire and chase them around, so they could slay us. Stuck with me.”

Derek’s eyes had gone oddly soft, and Stiles linked his fingers with Derek’s, squeezing gently. “I’m sorry I keep asking you to dig around in your memories,” Stiles said. “It’s not fair.”

Derek shook his head, lips tilting up at the corners slightly. “Don’t apologize,” he replied. “It’s… it’s for the worst reasons, knowing I’ll have to kill my uncle again, but… I feel like I can use my memories, like it’s not useless to dwell in them, for once.”

“I get that,” Stiles agreed. “Thinking about my mom is usually just… dwelling’s a good word, grieving, maybe, but digging into my family… I sort of feel like I’m actually getting to know her a bit more, and Grandpa too. Even if he died before I was born, I’m actually starting to feel… connected to him, you know?”

They were silent for a long moment, just watching each other. “Good day for you?” Derek asked, trailing his fingers through the hair at Stiles’ temple.

Stiles took stock, and his mind was firing around pretty randomly, his anger was held down, and he felt absolutely unfocused. “Yeah, sort of,” he agreed, chuckling softly. “First time I’ve really seen how good is bad, and bad is good, and how it’s sort of backwards for me, but today good is good and with you it’s better.”

“Thanks, I think,” Derek replied, eyes crinkling a little with confusion. “I think you said I make good things good, but it was Stiles’ babble and I’m not fluent yet.”

Stile swatted at Derek, who grabbed his fingers easily, using the opening to roll himself up, planting his knees on either side of Stiles’ hips and pinning his wrists to the bed easily. “Mine,” Derek growled softly as he nuzzled into Stiles’ neck, tongue flicking out to taste and lazily trace his throat.

“Hmm, yeah,” Stiles agreed, yelping in surprise when Derek bit down, high on his throat, groaning as Derek began to suck, worrying a dark mark into his skin. “Oh you dick,” he complained, even as he tried to writhe his hips, trying and failing at not finding the way Derek could keep him still with
just some pressure from his knees to be ridiculously hot. “I’ll have to wear stupid hipster scarfs like freakin’ Isaac to cover that up.”

“That sounds horrible,” Derek said with a smirk. “You shouldn’t wear a scarf. Maybe just don’t cover up.”

“My dad, guns,” Stiles gasped, surprised Derek understood any of the words between his cries as Derek started licking and nipping at his chest. He just chuckled darkly though, so Stiles figured either he hadn’t understood or wasn’t that concerned.

Derek’s mouth wandered back up Stiles’ throat, teeth scraping gently over his Adam’s apple, before crushing together with his own. Derek’s hold on him eased, and Stiles took advantage, wrapping himself like a koala around every bit of Derek he could, hooking legs around his waist, arms around his neck and pushing further into the kiss and Derek rocked back, pulling Stiles upright and into his lap. “Uh uh, behave,” Derek chastised him when Stiles rocked his hips, grinding his erection into Derek’s stomach, desperate for friction.

“Can’t help it, love how you feel, can’t wait to ride you like this,” Stiles stammered, trying for cheeky, but it came out high and breathy, his need leaking into his voice.

“Okay, gonna stop,” Derek said, even though he continued mouthing at the mark on Stiles’ neck, hands tight and showing no signs of letting Stiles off his lap any time soon.

“Sure thing,” Stiles agreed, recapturing Derek’s mouth and swallowing any further protests. He loved the way Derek’s tongue was chasing his, sweeping into his mouth and tasting, taking, possessing Stiles fiercely.

After several long moments, Derek tipped them both sideways, sending them sprawling out onto the bed, the kisses slowing, gentling. Derek brought his hands up, cradling Stiles’ face and just watching him for a long moment, their breathing shallow and in sync. Whatever he was looking for, he seemed to find it and pressed one soft, lingering last kiss, chaste but intimate in a way that rocked Stiles to his core. He unlinked his ankles and let his legs slide down to tangle with Derek’s, let his breathing slow as Derek gathered him in, holding him quietly for a while.

Eventually, Derek stirred, kissing away Stiles’ questioning hum. “You should shower, get dressed,” he told Stiles. “We’re going to have visitors shortly.”
Melissa had offered to call him in sick to school, but Isaac had a test in his third period algebra class, so he decided to at least go for the morning. He wasn’t alone; Ethan and Aiden had also decided to hit their morning classes, make their presence known again, part of the plan to keep Peter from making any impulsive moves they weren’t ready for. Scott had liked the idea, as well as seeming more at ease with the idea of Isaac going in, since he’d have backup. He’d seen the look on Ms. Kelly’s face when the twins walked in, which was the only thing that completely sold him on Stiles and Derek’s assertions that she was on Peter’s side.

Scott had filled him in on everything the night before. Well, he hoped it was everything, because the way Scott was shaken by Stiles’ actions, by not realizing his friend had been replaced, by Deaton’s death… well, anything more was going to do more damage than they could afford. The only positive note had been that Chris Argent had actually let them talk to Allison, who had broken down crying for the first half of the call, telling them how sorry she was about the wormwood.

After they’d gotten off the phone with Allison, Scott had filled Chris in about the Doppelganger and the meeting at Stiles’ house at noon, but Isaac didn’t think the older man had seemed nearly surprised enough to hear about it. “Everyone knew but me,” Scott had whispered when he hung up the phone, and Isaac had hugged him tightly.

“You wanted to see your best friend, believe he had control, and you did,” Isaac had said. “No shame in that.”

Scott had seemed shrinked in and worried, but Isaac hoped it might have more to do with Deaton’s death than Stiles apparently being Derek’s emissary and not Scott’s. Isaac wasn’t Stiles’ biggest fan, so personally, he sort of thought maybe Derek was getting the short end of the stick, and given that Isaac hadn’t found him to be half the Alpha Scott had the potential to be, it was maybe exactly what Derek deserved. Scott needed an emissary who was the highest caliber, not a hyperactive teenager Deaton hadn’t wanted to train.

The only flaw in his plan to get through to the morning and go home at lunch was that after he’d handed in his test, he had fourth period chemistry with the vampire, Mr. Hinson. If Ms. Kelly had gone dark side, the chem teacher definitely had too. He was going to duck out, but Hinson was standing in the hall, dark eyes watching Isaac as he gestured students toward his classroom. The bell sounded above Isaac when he hesitated, and the vampire’s eyes lit up with amusement.

“Mr. Lahey, you’re now tardy,” he observed, pointing to the classroom. “Let’s not make it worse that just lunch detention, shall we?”
Isaac barely shoved down his groan, slumping into his desk and when he got the opportunity, texting Scott to let him know he’d be late.


Cora had planned to go to the loft first, drop off her and Jackson’s belongings, but once they reached the town limits, she pointed Jackson down an early turn, stopping at a hole in the wall bakery she’d discovered shortly after Derek had rescued her from Deucalion. Mindful of what Derek had told her about the pending pack meeting, she picked up three baker’s dozen boxes of mixed donuts in addition to four pan de chocolats for herself and Jackson.

“Here, loser,” she snarked, tossing him their bag and returning the credit card she’d picked from his wallet earlier in their trip as she secured the boxes in the backseat.

“You know, I used to beg my parents for a little sister or a puppy and now that I have both, I really get the whole ‘be careful what you wish for’ cliché,” Jackson sneered, putting the car into gear before she’d hopped completely into the front seat. Cora grinned wildly as she slid in easily, slamming the door.

“You drive like a fuckin’ British grandma,” she informed him. “Six months and you’re already brainwashed.”

“Bite me, Brain,” Jackson retorted, and Cora snorted, all too used to Jackson’s lame comebacks after only a week. He’d loaned her all his books from the first trimester, her intelligence surprising Jackson for all of ten minutes, and she was actually looking forward to starting school next week. If her crazy Uncle didn’t kill them all this week.

“Just drive, Pinky, and leave the hard thinking to me, huh?” she replied, sighing as Beacon Hills rushed past the window.

“We’ll get through this,” Jackson said, and Cora snorted.

“God, you trying to be comforting is nearly as terrifying as Derek trying it,” she informed him. “One more stop to make before Stiles’ house, okay?”
Ethan scowled at Isaac from the doorway to the lab, while Aiden just looked annoyed. Isaac looked a little surprised they’d even waited for him. He shrugged helplessly, mouthing ‘detention’ at them.

“Move along, gentlemen,” Hinson directed them, and Ethan paused, not really wanting to leave the other werewolf alone with the vampire.

Aiden hit his arm, scowling. “Dude, he can take care of himself,” he said quietly, jerking his head to the left toward the parking lot.

Ethan followed reluctantly, the nervous, edgy feeling growing worse as Hinson closed the door behind them. “I don’t think he’s supposed to close the door when he’s alone with a student,” Ethan pointed out, and Aiden shrugged, but stopped walking toward the exit. The halls had emptied, most students in class or at lunch, so Aiden slumped against a bank of lockers.

“What do you want to do, charge in and rescue him from detention? Smash out the windows and make a dramatic exit that gets us expelled?”

“Who cares, we’re leaving, right?” Ethan snarked back, about to add something else when a familiar scent caught his attention. “Son of a bitch,” he swore, surprised.

Aiden blinked, straightening up. “Is that—”

“Hey, jerkoffs,” a familiar voice called out, Cora Hale walking down the hall, hands on her hips. “Give me one good reason I shouldn’t have my buddy here kick the crap out of you?”

Ethan looked at the unfamiliar blonde, who was looking just as disdainfully back at them. “Why would I kick their asses?” he asked Cora, looking impatient.

“Other than because I said so?” Cora asked, a smug smile curving her lips. “One, they killed Boyd. Two,” she pointed to Ethan. “He screwed around with Danny on his Alpha’s orders, while that one,” she turned to Aiden, the smirk growing truly evil. “He’s been fucking Lydia.”

The betas eyes glowed blue, fangs flashing at them. “That’s some really good reasons,” the new beta informed them, murderous intent clear.
“Oh please, pup, I was an Alpha,” Aiden retorted, extending his claws and dropping into a fighting stance.

“Yeah? I was a Kanima,” the beta replied, and Ethan’s memory clicked over. He was Jackson, Lydia’s ex. His claws came out, too curved and shiny in an odd way that took Ethan aback. “I’ve still got some of those talents, how about you, Omega?”

Aiden growled, stepping closer at Jackson’s insult. Ethan decided he wouldn’t mind smacking Jackson down, but not in the school hall.

“Uh, guys,” he started to say, but broke off when a loud thud from the chemistry lab echoed in the otherwise quiet hall. He took off, aware of Cora and Jackson fast on his heels, Aiden not far behind.

He tore the door open, finding Isaac pinned and struggling between the blackboard and Hinson. Hinson had grabbed the werewolf by the throat with one hand and was holding him easily in place, fangs sunk deep into one side of Isaac’s neck, blood coating half of Isaac’s grey shirt, dripping onto the floor. Isaac was losing strength fast, his arms and legs jerking slower as his blood spilled.

With a snarl, he threw himself at the vampire, managing to score his claws across one cheek before the vampire’s free hand sent him flying across the room, a lab station crunching under the impact of his fall. Cora had taken the next run, but the vampire had shoved Isaac into her, using the dead weight of the injured werewolf to send Cora crashing into the glass plated supply cupboard, chemicals and glass shattering over them.

Aiden managed to tackle the vampire back as Ethan got his feet under him again, about to run forward when Jackson came up from behind the vampire, weirdly iridescent claws slashing out and grazing the back of the chemistry teacher’s neck before flinging the vampire away from Aiden.

“What the hell?” Aiden shouted at Jackson. “You should have ripped his throat out!”

“He’s a vampire, it would heal!” Jackson countered calmly, walking over to where the chemistry teacher was still crumpled, motionless on the floor. Ethan spent a moment puzzling over why the vampire wasn’t moving, before spotting Isaac, still bleeding but sitting up woozily. “Cora, I need wood and silver.”

Cora nodded to Jackson, her clawed hand reaching out for the ruined supply cupboard and wrenching a ragged piece free. “Should be silver nitrate in the front cupboard,” Ethan told her,
picking up Isaac’s scarf from where it had fallen near his desk. He used the length to wrap and put pressure on the still bleeding bite. It was healing, he thought, but slow, even slower than an Alpha’s wound if it was. More worrying still were the blackish lines starting to discolor the skin of Isaac’s neck around the bite.

“We need to get him to Stiles,” Ethan said, and Isaac nodded, wincing when his neck moved.

“I don’t… can’t feel much,” he said faintly. “Everything’s… buzzing, but numb. Like my foot went to sleep… but everywhere.”

“Oh, okay,” Ethan said, trying to sound confident when he felt anything but. “You’ll be okay, Stiles will know what to do.”

“Why isn’t he moving?” Aiden asked as Jackson helped Cora soak the wooden stake in the silver nitrate.

“My claws have a paralytic agent,” Jackson explained. “Left over from being a kanima. Can only use it once or twice before I go back to having regular claws and it takes a couple weeks to build back up.”

“Let’s find out if this works,” Cora said, the lance in her hand now dripping with the silver nitrate.

The vampire laughed weakly, still frozen by Jackson’s toxins. “No point in even trying, she-wolf,” he sneered. “Only pure silver and only pure oak wood will work on a vampire as ancient as I am.”

“Here’s the thing,” Cora replied, twirling the stake and bringing the ragged point to rest just over Hinson’s heart. “I don’t think you’re that old.”

She thrust down, the stake slicing through the vampire as easily as a knife in butter. Hinson gasped, black lines like those on Isaac’s neck radiating out from the wound, moving rapidly over every visible part of his skin, pale becoming a sickly blackish red, his body starting to quiver oddly, like the bones had been suddenly removed.

“Move back,” Ethan said suddenly, scooping up Isaac in his arms. “Shit, go, clear out,” he called out, the werewolves scrambling to the hall behind him. He turned back when they reached the hall, just in time to see the last of the skin liquefy, the black, toxic blood bursting into a rapidly expanding
puddle, covering the classroom tiles.

“Less dramatic than I expected,” Cora muttered, and Ethan snorted.

“Pretty sure it’s toxic to wolves,” he told her, tilting Isaac so she could see his throat.

“Get him to Stiles,” she said, grabbing onto Jackson’s arm. “Come on, we’re going to get the stuff I stashed here and we’ll meet you there.”

Ethan hurried to comply, ignoring his brother as he continued to scowl after Cora.

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Stiles opened the door, eyes wide as he took in Isaac’s wound. “Was it the vampire?” he demanded of Ethan and Aiden as they shuffled inside. The couch was cleared, and Derek grabbed onto Scott, who made a low whining noise in his throat. Stiles spared half a grateful smile at Derek’s intervention as he crouched down next to the couch they’d just set Isaac on.

“Yeah, he cornered Isaac in lunch detention,” Ethan confirmed, and Stiles tipped Isaac’s head back, sighing slightly as he inspected the wound.

“How much blood did he lose?” he asked quietly, looking to Ethan.

“A lot, it was all over,” Ethan confirmed. “What is it, poison?”

“In a way,” Stiles agreed, shaking his head as he unwrapped the scarf and started undoing the buttons of Isaac’s shirt, finding dark red-black lines weaving down Isaac’s chest. They circled and clustered around his heart, starting to worm inward from there. “Vampires change people the same way as werewolves do, a bite. A vampire bite shouldn’t supplant the bite of an Alpha but in rare cases...”

He bit his lip, mind racing. “Scott needs to bite him,” he decided, uncertain but unable to come up with another answer.
“That will fix him?” Scott asked, fangs already starting to protrude at the mention of it.

“I don’t know,” Stiles admitted, rocking back on his heels. “It’s all I can think of, trying to re-establish the werewolf part of Isaac. It’s that, or we wait and see if he survives the bite and transforms into a vampire.”

“That can happen?” Aiden asked, sounding shocked.

“It’s rare, but possible,” Lydia spoke up from the back of the room. “I think Stiles is right, the best bet we have on keeping Isaac from turning or dying is for his Alpha to bite him.”

“Right over where the vampire bit, you have to make a claim as his Alpha, hold him here,” Stiles told Scott, standing and walking over to look his friend in the eye. “If this works like I think it will, it’s going to bleed. A lot. And you can’t stop, you have to keep his throat open until you feel it start healing, do you understand?”

“I’ve got it,” Scott agreed, taking a deep steadying breath, eyes flaring red. “I can do it.”

“Okay,” Stiles nodded to Derek, who let go of Scott, only to loop the now free arm around Stiles’ drawing him in slightly.

“Keep them from listening in,” Derek murmured lowly in Stiles’ ear, and Stiles nodded, reaching into the pouch in his pocket for a pinch of mountain ash, muttering the spell quickly before blowing it off his fingertips to linger in the air. Derek still spoke in a low murmur right in Stiles’ ear, as the spell wouldn’t stop Danny or Lydia’s hearing. “Isaac is half of Scott’s anchor. If this goes wrong, don’t wait. Take Danny and Lydia and run.”

Stiles nodded once in understanding, then jerked his chin at Lydia, indicating she needed to go join Danny in the dining room area. Scott had knelt down next to the couch and Ethan was helpfully holding on to Isaac’s shoulders, to make sure he didn’t move. Isaac was fading quickly, but blinking at Scott, nodding his understanding.

“Stay with me,” Scott growled, one clawed hand reaching out to cup and hold Isaac’s chin in place, head tilted so their eyes met. “Mine,” he added harshly, then his teeth locked into place right over the vampire’s bite, precision perfect as far as Stiles could tell.
Immediately, reddish black ooze began pouring out of the wound, and Scott jerked but held on, his face betraying just how vile the taste of the poisoned blood must have been. Stiles stepped closer, aware of Derek keeping his hands on Stiles’ waist, poised to spring aware and grab Stiles out of harm’s way. He carefully peeked over Scott’s shoulder, pretending the way Derek’s hands tightened at his movement wasn’t comforting, and spotted the poison marks starting to retreat as the poison was bled out.

“I think it’s working,” he whispered, letting himself relax back a little, if only to allow Derek a chance to ease down from his high alert. Derek didn’t though, his grip remaining tight on Stiles.
“What’s wrong?”

“Feels like for every one of Peter’s allies we take out, one of ours is taken out. The doppelganger and Allison, the witch and Deaton, the vampire and Isaac…”

“You forgot the omega deputy,” Stiles pointed out, though he had caught Derek’s point. “Look, it won’t come down to a battle of numbers, we can beat him.”

Derek was silent, and Stiles could feel him brooding at his back, too quiet and worried. “It’s fading,” Ethan reported to them, and Stiles leaned in again to watch. The black veins had retreated up Isaac’s torso, and were starting to fade back out of his neck.

“Just a little longer,” Stiles encouraged Scott, feeling relieved. Isaac would be weak, but decidedly not undead, so he figured they could spin it as a win, as soon as he talked Derek down from his fatalistic ledge.

Isaac sputtered and coughed as the last of the ichor seeped from Scott’s bite, the motion jarring Scott’s hold, but Stiles could see the wound healing cleanly now. Isaac collapsed back, struggling to breathe. His eyes flared beta gold, fangs and claws extending reflexively as the healing process jump started, then slowly retracted as Isaac breathed to regain control. “You with us, Isaac?” Stiles asked, and Isaac nodded, coughing again.

“I can feel my legs and arms again, I think I’m healing,” Isaac confirmed wearily, folding over in what would have left him crumpled on the floor if Scott hadn’t moved quickly and scooped him up into his lap, helping support Isaac.

“Thank you,” Scott said to Stiles. Isaac looked less scowly, but didn’t say anything, which didn’t surprise Stiles much. They weren’t friends, and he suspected now that he was with Derek, there was
even less chance of it happening than before. Danny and Lydia eased down from alert in the dining room, but Stiles decided he didn’t feel like pulling away from Derek, even if the way he was tucked into the older man’s embrace was drawing weird side-eye glances from Scott.

Cora slipped in the front door a few moments later, lightning quick and ninja silent, dropping donuts on the table and then suddenly wrapping around Stiles, and by extension, Derek, like a creeping vine, holding them tightly. “I knew something was wrong,” she informed him, sniffing at his neck. “So we’re even now. You saved my life with the CPR, and I sent Derek for you.”

“Oh, Derek still owed me from the pool,” Stiles tried, and failed, not to grin at Cora’s absurd logic.

Jackson had stepped just inside the door behind Cora, hesitant and looking uncertain of his welcome. Strangely, Stiles noticed, he wasn’t looking to Lydia, he was looking to Stiles and Danny, and it hit Stiles suddenly that Jackson had picked his pack and was aware somehow that both Stiles and Danny outranked him. He’d never seen any of the wolves respond to pack dynamics quite so well as Jackson was doing now, except for maybe Boyd. He set a spatter darkened shaft of wood, carefully wrapped in some plastic, and a duffle bag down just inside the door.

“Get in here, butthead,” he ordered Jackson, who visibly relaxed in relief. Danny was up out of his seat quickly, wrapping Jackson in a hug before he could get very far, and Lydia cleared her throat, pulling Jackson into a hug as soon as Danny let go.

“Missed you,” Jackson told Lydia softly, reaching up and gently tucking a piece of her red hair behind her ear with a surprising amount of care.

“I was too busy to miss you,” Lydia replied, sniffing haughtily, which made Jackson roll his eyes. She punched his arm, then tugged him down into a kiss that made Stiles blink and turn away. Go Lydia, he decided mentally, pretending he wasn’t enjoying the scowl that hit both twins’ faces. Aiden’s jaw was set and eyes hard, looking angry but refusing to move, while Ethan turned his eyes firmly down to the carpet, pretending none of them existed.

“I… uh, you guys were the ones who took out the vampire, I take it?” Stiles asked Cora, who finally let go of her iron grip on them and nodded.

“Staked him, wood soaked in silver nitrate,” she explained, and Stiles couldn’t help his raised eyebrows. “Had Jackson wrap it up and bring it along, in case there were more of them.”
“Creative, and good thinking, good job,” he said, nodding to Jackson when he came up for air.
“Take that minion off the board, Danny.”

Danny had brought their maps and notes over, and with a bit of a satisfied flourish, he marked a big black X over the chemistry teacher on the map. Isaac had recovered enough to sit up on his own, so Scott got up, moving over to the map and studying it.

“We think all of them are working for Peter?” he asked, looking unpleasantly surprised.

“We’re sure on the Siren, the others are mostly speculative or dead,” Danny admitted. “But Deaton confirmed my count, plus said there was something else in town, something he’d never seen before. I don’t have a slot for it on the map, whatever it is.”

“Deaton knew about all of these,” Scott said, checking over the map. “I’d told him about everyone who’d passed through, supposedly on friendly terms.”

“That’s classic Peter,” Derek remarked.

“Narcissist,” Stiles muttered, and Derek nodded, agreeing.

“They all come see you, report in, but it’s Peter actually showing off. They’re the small guns though. The big ones, like the doppleganger, he keeps back, hidden.”

“So we’re missing someone very big,” Stiles concluded, and Danny nodded, tapping the capped sharpie against his lower lip as he surveyed the map.

“I can’t put my finger on it, but I’m pretty sure I should know where the missing piece is,” Danny scowled.

“You’ve done really well,” Scott said, at the same time as Derek said with easy confidence, “If you should, you’ll figure it out.”

Scott didn’t look happy when Danny nodded to Derek, looking even more resolved if possible. “I’m not sure where you’d be missing it, Danny, but I’ve been out of play too long,” Stiles interjected,
trying to avoid any tension. “But I do have a suggestion, and I’m pretty sure everyone’s going to hate it.”

“Oh boy,” Lydia murmured, giving Stiles an all too knowing look as she sat back down at the table.

“I need to go back to the Nemeton,” Stiles continued, falling silent when the room erupted into a lot of shouting, but not from the voices Stiles was listening for.

“Quiet!” he shouted, putting his fingers in his mouth and following it up with an ear piercing whistle. The room came to a halt, looking shocked. Stiles waited a moment, then turned, looking at Derek.

“You think it’s the only way?” Derek asked.

“I have knowledge I need to unlock,” Stiles admitted. “I’m pretty sure it gave me a way to end Peter, but I can’t unlock it without the Nemeton’s help. Pretty sure it’s going to want something in exchange.”

“You don’t go alone, and you don’t make the deal without talking it over with me first,” Derek growled lowly, and Scott gaped, outraged.

“You can’t seriously—”

“Danny?” Stiles asked, cutting Scott off.

Danny was quiet looking thoughtful. “I’m coming with you as well,” he said finally. “I’d say our whole pack should go, except that’d be a convenient target for Peter.”

“Lydia,” Stiles said, and she smirked, shaking her head.

“I already knew you’d be going back, I’m just impressed you aren’t a big enough idiot to decide to sneak out there on your own,” she remarked dryly. “I agree with Danny. It’s dangerous, but we need to split the pack while you do it or Peter will take the chance to strike. If he can get us out of the way, he’s got less obstacles to Scott.”
“Obstacles to Scott?” John Stilinski broke in, having stepped in the front door with Chris Argent at some point. Stiles had a brief flicker of hope it had been after he’d floated his Nemeton plan, but from the narrowed eyes his father was aiming him, he was pretty sure that was hope in vain. “I have to disagree. I don’t think Scott’s his next target.”

“You said Peter can’t transition back to an Alpha. He’s grabbed up plenty of power, but something’s gone wrong,” Argent said to Stiles, who nodded. “Who’s he going to blame for that? Where’s his mind going to turn for a solution?”

“Me,” Derek agreed softly. “I killed him and took the power the first time.”

“And if killing you restores that piece of himself he’s lost, then he’ll turn to Scott,” Argent concluded.

“Wednesday,” Danny put in helpfully. “The dark of the moon. We’re pretty sure that’s what he’ll be aiming for. If he’s after Derek, it’d make sense. As a beta, Derek’s weakest then, doesn’t have the same Alpha reserve to pull on.”

“I thought with a pack, not to mention an emissary, you’d be basically an Alpha again,” Argent said, and the sheriff cleared his throat.

“I’ve not understood most of what I’ve read in your grandfather’s things, but Stiles?”

“I can tip him into being an Alpha again,” Stiles replied calmly, despite how much his own inner voice wanted to rage about them trying to force the choice on Derek. “But only when it’s for the right reasons, when he’s ready.”

“But if—”

“No!” Stiles snapped firmly at Isaac, glaring. “You can’t force him, and you can’t force my hand on it either.”

Derek squeezed his arm gently, grateful, and added, “We’re too short on time anyway. Stiles’ power and mine could react in unpredictable ways. Stiles could be completely drained by forcing the
change, and there’s no guarantee I’d be completely in control in less than 48 hours.”

“Plus, if he is an Alpha and Peter kills him, isn’t it more likely his plan to restore himself will work?” Danny put in from where he was helping himself to donuts. “Then Scott is facing down an Alpha with not just the Darach and Deucalion’s powers, but the Hale and Volkov powers too. No offense, Scott, but true Alpha or not, I think you’d lose that fight.”

“So the goal has to be finding them first and surprising them.” Chris said. “If we can find their base of operations, we can hit them with everything we’ve got tomorrow night, not wait for them to come to us Wednesday.”

“Show me your map, Danny,” Stiles’ dad said, joining the teen at the table. He started to reach for a donut and Stiles loudly cleared his throat. Danny helpfully moved the boxes out of reach, and his dad glared at him. “A group like that can’t go unnoticed that long in this town. Maybe something’s come across my desk. I’d think better with a donut.”

Lydia picked the boxes up and moved them to the living room, while Danny grabbed a banana from the kitchen and offered it instead. His dad scowled, but settled in at the table. Stiles smiled as Danny started showing his dad their map and calculations. He didn’t like his dad being in the path of trouble, but he couldn’t deny he was an asset. “Mr. Argent, can you look through Danny’s list, get us armed for everything we know is coming our way? Cora brought a bag of toys, but I’m betting you can do more.”

Argent gave him an all too knowing look at his less than subtle attempt at flattery, then nodded. “I’ll start outlining plans as well,” he agreed, looking to Derek. “Danny? Lydia?”

“Final lines,” Derek replied quietly.

“I can fight,” Lydia protested, and Derek scowled.

“You also can handle Mountain Ash, lay down a circle so they can’t escape once we’re in,” Stiles replied. “And keep an eye on Danny, who isn’t coming into the fight either.”

“John, if I put you on the perimeter with Danny, Isaac and a couple of hunters and a lot of weapons, can you run point on them?” Chris suggested, and the sheriff nodded.
“Scott, your mom should stay with Allison, maybe have the two of them set up at the vet clinic for injuries after,” Danny suggested. “If you think Allison will be up for that?”

“I think she can handle that,” Chris agreed. “We’ll stock the clinic too, Allison can help protect your mom if anything goes wrong.”

“Thanks,” Scott said, looking relieved. He turned to Stiles, still looking worried. “Are you sure you have to go back to the Nemeton? It seems like too big a risk for you to take.”

“Has to be me,” Stiles replied. “When I was down there, I… it taught me things, opened my power up. It’s got its own motives, I know, but it’s also the only answers we can get now that Deaton’s gone.”

“And what if it’s just something worse than Peter, waiting for its chance?” Scott suggested.

“Then we take that on next,” Stiles replied stubbornly. “We’ve got two packs here, never gonna be a better shot at it anyway.”

“I still don’t get why we can’t be pack,” Scott said, sighing. “Why Derek?”

“Part destiny, part choice,” Stiles replied, shrugging. “He’s mine, I’m his. Deaton warned me that I couldn’t be your emissary when I started, Scott. And he was right. We’re brothers, but that isn’t going to be enough. You need a Plan A kind of emissary, and on my best day, I’m the guy with Plan B to you. Derek needs me for Plan A.”

“That makes no sense,” Scott replied, scowling. “But I guess I get it. Family, not pack, right, Derek?”

“I didn’t want to steal him from you,” Derek said, smirking when Stiles elbowed him. “But he’s been pack to me since the day I met you both. Maybe more than I even wanted you to be.”

“Keep him anchored tomorrow, okay?” Scott ordered Derek, who lifted an eyebrow, but nodded.
Danny collapsed wearily at his dining room table, trying not to yawn. It’d been a fight to convince Derek and Stiles to let him go home, but with Cora and Jackson in the loft and John firm on Derek staying in the guest room, they’d caved instead of making him sleep on the couch.

“Long day?” Delia asked, peeking up from her homework. She hadn’t changed from school, Danny noticed, which was unusual. Usually she couldn’t wait to trade in skin tight dresses for a set of pajamas. “I covered for you at school, b-t-dubs,” she said. “I put your homework in your room.”

“I can’t decide if you’re awesome, or I hate you,” Danny informed her. “Cover for me a couple more days? I’ve got some stuff going on I have to deal with.”

“Are you okay?” she asked, looking a little worried now. “You’ve been weirder than usual lately.”

“Maybe ask me another time,” Danny replied. “And maybe if you’re old enough, I’ll tell you.”

“Danny!” she protested, and Danny chuckled, hearing footsteps coming down the hall. “Hey, David’s home?”

“Nah, he’ll be at his friend Mike’s house till Mom is back on Thursday,” she told him. “Mike’s mom is dead set that he not be left home alone with us, she thinks it’s unfair to us or something. He’s twelve, he’s totally old enough to endure being a latchkey kid with us.”

“So who’s—”

“Oh, my girlfriend, Sasha,” Delia replied brightly, and Danny nodded, his sister’s clothing suddenly making sense. She’s told him about the girl taking her to the winter formal, the doppelganger’s niece.

A moment later, the other pin dropped, everything clicking together in his mind just in time for him to scramble to his feet and turn, catching a glimpse of something sharp and silvery arcing toward him before everything went black.
Derek frowned as he hung up his phone, and Stiles waited, giving him an expectant look. “Still not answering,” Derek replied.

“Okay, send Jackson and Cora to check on him?” Stiles suggested, chewing on a hangnail on his thumb as he thought. “Maybe he decided to go to school, or maybe his parents got back into town and he’s just not able to get away,” he added, but he knew from the look on Derek’s face, the werewolf wasn’t buying it.

“We need to go now,” John reported back, tucking his own phone away. “Chris and his team have got eyes on Peter and most of the major players we’re sure about, never going to be a better time to get out to that tree.”

Stiles bit down a little too hard, drawing a bit of blood, and Derek gently pulled his hand away from his mouth, linking their fingers. “You don’t have to go through with this,” he reminded Stiles, who made a face in reply.

“I need to do this, find out what our options with the Nemeton are,” he reminded Derek. “What I felt down there, once, before things went sideways, I think it was a very good thing. Maybe we can make it that way again.”

“You sound like Scott,” Derek grumbled, and Stiles rolled his eyes.

“This isn’t like giving Deucalion the crazy mass murdering psychopath or the deranged frick and frack twins a second chance,” Stiles shot back, unable to help sounding a little irritated. “It’s a force of nature, and it had bad magic and sacrifices forced on it, polluting it. It should be able to be swayed back the same way.”

“I meant you sound optimistic, not that I didn’t agree,” Derek replied. John looked at them, lifting an eyebrow.
“Decision time, kids,” he said, and Stiles sighed.

“I hate to panic, but...” he chewed his lip for a moment, then looked to his dad. “I have a bad feeling. Did you guys come up with anything last night?”

“A short list,” his dad confirmed. “After we’re done, I can do a cruise by on the places in an unmarked car. I doubt Danny decided to check them out on his own, but you never know.”

“Okay,” Stiles agreed. He’d have tried to start chewing his hangnail again but Derek’s hand held his firmly, giving him a warning look. Just for that, Stiles tugged their joined hands up anyway and bit playfully at Derek’s fingers. “Let’s go, before Derek gets too nervous.”

Derek made a disbelieving chuffing sound but followed Stiles toward the SUV, sliding into the front seat when John waved him toward it. Stiles’ dad was in street clothes, but was packing at least three guns that Stiles had spotted so far that morning. He was more than a little amused that his dad had dug out his old black leather jacket and looked like a match to Derek. “Guess kids really do date their parents,” Stiles had quipped, earning a slap upside the head from both of them that morning.

“So what’s the plan when you’re down there?” his dad asked.

“I’m just going to talk to it, nothing major,” Stiles told him. “If I’m under for more than half an hour, Derek will come pull me back out. Mainly I need you both up top, in case Peter left anything nasty behind.”

The drive and the walk to the Nemeton were quiet, broken only by his dad drawing his sidearm about 100 meters out from the clearing, betraying his worry over the situation. The clearing was still and empty, the air tense as though waiting, and Stiles let out a shaky breath as he pulled up the trapdoor. Derek slid past him, jumping down easily and confirming the space was empty before he helped Stiles down the ladder.

“It’ll be fine,” Stiles told him, and Derek cupped his cheek and pulled him into a gentle kiss.

“No unnecessary risks,” he reminded Stiles, who nodded, watching the older man scale the ladder with an enviable grace and ease, then the trapdoor swung shut, leaving the root cellar dim and dusty with the meager morning light that filtered down through the roots.
“So, let’s chat,” Stiles said, wincing at his too clear false bravado. He nudged the remains of the crystal circle with his toes, then stepped sideways away from the remains of the spell that had held him captive, not willing to slide back into the small hollow where he’d been held captive for nearly two weeks. Instead, he reached up, wrapping his hand into the roots of the tree, letting the branches encircle his wrist. Taking a steadying deep breath, he opened his mind.

He was falling, landing, once again astride the unicorn chess piece. Jennifer was still kitty-corner his piece, her sword dripping with his blood. “Knights can’t take pieces by moving one diagonal space,” he informed her, hopping down off the unicorn. She followed his lead, with a much more graceful motion, smiling at him as she planted the sword into the chess board.

“Shall we dispense with the game then?” she asked.

“No offense, Ms. Blake was a pretty gorgeous girl and all, but don’t you have another face you could wear?” Stiles asked. “That one gives me the creeps.”

“I have one other,” the Nemeton agreed, and the form wavered, shrinking down a little shorter than Stiles. The woman now had dark curls and pale skin, brown eyes brown with innocent mischief instead of the malicious intent that the Darach’s had held. “Is this better?” she asked, voice soft and musical.

“Is this Paige?” Stiles couldn’t help asking, breath catching at the young and beautiful girl in front of him. Her dress was a simple white shift, and in the flickering torchlight, she looked luminescent.

“It was her name,” the Nemeton agreed. “The first tainted sacrifice after Gerard cut me down, culled my powers back to a point I could not stop the darkness that began to seep in.”

“I don’t understand, she was an innocent,” Stiles said, and the Nemeton smiled.

“She was a plan, a machination,” the Nemeton replied. “But yes, an innocent.”

“You can’t predict a bad bite,” Stiles started, then paused, mind whirling. Some of the Hales could.

“You’re starting to see just how long Peter has been grasping for the power he feels he deserves, that he felt his sister, his niece, his nephew… that they have all stolen from him,” the Nemeton said.
“Laura was never an accident, was she?” Stiles murmured, horrified. “That power came close…”

“And he reached out and grabbed it,” the Nemeton confirmed. “And his mind turned to revenge.”

“I think you better start from the beginning,” Stiles suggested and the apparition of Paige waved a hand, showing Stiles a young Derek and a young Peter discussing Paige, Derek’s new crush.

“Perhaps not the true beginning,” the Nemeton said. “But I dislike visiting the moment Gerard Argent cut me down. That opened the potential for anyone to control me, left me disconnected from the land and the mages who cared for the territory. The emissary, Deaton, didn’t have enough power to reestablish the connection or do much more than keep the small flickers of my essence in place, not on his own, not like Gennadiy or Joseph before him would have been able to do. But Peter’s plan started here, with Paige and Derek.”

“Peter told me about this, about what happened to her,” Stiles told her, and the apparition smiled.

“And you believed it to be the whole truth?”

“No,” Stiles replied. The school bell rang, and Peter hung back when Derek went into the building. In a moment of staged clumsiness, he bumped into Paige, righting her with a polite smile as his hands brushed her back. She forced a smile, obviously a little uncomfortable with his usual Peter level of creepiness, before joining the throng of students making their way back into the school. Peter examined his hands, a few strands of dark hair tangled in them, smiling an all too familiar, twisted smile.

“It wasn’t the fire that made him crazy, he’s always been crazy,” Stiles observed. “How did he get Mira to test the samples?”

“That happened beyond my territory, out of my sight, but I believe they were presented to her as a friend of another pack, looking to take the bite,” the Nemeton replied. “But the results were clear, the girl would not survive, and Peter knew it when he began to campaign Derek to ask one of the visiting Alphas to give her the bite.”

“I don’t understand,” Stiles said. “What was he hoping to get out of it?”
The Nemeton waved her hand again, and the image resolved on Derek, holding a weak and badly bitten Paige in the halls of the school. Peter had joined them, looking grim. “Take her to the root cellar,” the image of the younger Peter urged him. “I’ll get Talia, maybe she can help, and we’ll meet you there.”

The image wavered, and Stiles saw both above and below ground, vision long and tunneled, and for a moment, understood how much the Nemeton was aware of the whole world around it. Below the tree stump, Paige’s blood dripped into the roots, and the magic was rippling into the tree, nearly dead but now reviving, gaining the strength to survive. Above, Peter was crouched on top of the stump, claws extended into the surface, trying to connect to that re-awakening magic. Peter hadn’t lied, Stiles saw, when it came to the moment Derek finally stopped taking Paige’s pain and instead, took her life.

The power as the last living blood fell from Paige was immense, sacrifice, Stiles comprehended, but at the same moment, Talia Hale stepped into the clearing, the power of the Alpha forcing the power of the sacrifice into the Nemeton itself as she acted swiftly. “What were you thinking?” Talia asked, lighting fast as she moved, claws sinking into Peter’s neck and piercing deep. Paige slumped lifeless below the tree at that same moment, the path complete from tree to Alpha through Peter.

“She took his memory of this place, but she could not erase the knowledge of the spell or his failure to seize the power,” the Nemeton explained to Stiles. “So he turned his mind back toward erasing the line of succession to her power.”

The image rippled, and Stiles felt his stomach turn as he saw Peter and a younger Kate Argent watching a young, clearly heartbroken, Derek on the lacrosse pitch, shooting goals lazily. “Talia doesn’t trust me anymore, but that doesn’t matter,” Peter told Kate. “He’s just waiting for the right rebound. He’ll spill his broken little heart right out to you and give you everything you need to take down the Hales. If you play your cards right.”

“I’m still not sure I should be trusting a human who runs with the wolf pack,” Kate replied, but her eyes were pinned on Derek, watching him hungrily in a way that turned Stiles’ stomach.

“I don’t want to run with them anymore, but I have no way out,” Peter said, as though reminding her. “And I don’t want the bite, but the Alpha says she’ll force it on me at the January full moon. I wouldn’t come to hunters for help otherwise.”

“She turned on him,” Stiles observed, turning away from the images and fighting a wave of nausea. “Did she figure out he was actually one of the Hales before or after the fire?”
“Before,” the Nemeton confirmed. “It’s why Derek and Laura survived, because she acted during the day instead of waiting for that night as they had planned together.” The Nemeton reached for him, not touching, but clearly demanding he turn back to the image.

Hale house was engulfed in flames. He could feel heat pouring out of the magical image, smell the smoke. Kate Argent was in the trees, waiting with a sniper rifle. Cora, barely recognizable in her soft pink dress and perfect bouncing curls, face streaked with tears, was the first to appear, and Kate fired, the bullet grazing a burning line over Cora’s right arm. Wolfsbane, Stiles deduced, as Cora took off, in beta form, running for the woods in terror. Cora would have been near delusional from pain and poison and terror, that if she had ever made it back to the house, it would have been long after Derek and Laura had fled, Stiles surmised, the story the girl had never been willing to tell finally fitting in his mind. Kate was lining up another shot when sirens broke over the raging sounds of the inferno.

A moment later, a deputy’s cruiser pulled into the clearing, tires breaking the line of mountain ash around the outside of the house as it tore in. Stiles gasped as his dad climbed out of the cruiser, barking into his radio as he looked around.

Kate cursed, tucking the rifle away and moving quickly and silently away. Stiles watched his dad circling from outside the fire, which was raging too high and too fast for him to try entering the house. He was circling back to the car when he stopped, clearly spotting or hearing something as he darted in closer to the fire.

Stiles blinked hard, trying to see, but the flame were too bright and there was too much smoke. “What’s he…” Stiles started to ask, but then he spotted his father, half dragging someone free of the burning house. “My dad is the reason Peter survived?” he asked, but the Nemeton didn’t bother answering.

Laura and Derek were tearing into the clearing now, and Stiles’ dad jumped up, managing to grab a hold of them, just as a fire truck and several more police vehicles and an ambulance screamed into the clearing. Derek stood, paralyzed, watching in wide eyed horror, while Laura was sobbing and clinging to his dad.

“Why was he there?” Stiles asked, frowning. “So quickly?”

“He was already on his way there when the fire started,” the Nemeton rotated her hand at the image and it resolved on the front seat of his cruiser, a small box of books, including Talia’s bestiary, were on the passenger seat. “Your mother had asked him to return the books, and to ask Talia to come by after the full moon. She intended to take the bite.”
“Would she have…” Stiles blinked back tears. Maybe he didn’t want to know if she would have survived it.

“I show you this only to show you what you are facing, not for might have beens,” the Nemeton closed her fist, the image blinking out of existence. “Peter holds the tethers on my power now, the power of Jennifer’s sacrifices, but he cannot access it enough to tip himself into becoming an Alpha again. Something blocks it.” She was watching Stiles closely, too closely, eyes hungry and hopefully, all Nemeton and nothing of Paige there.

“Another connection, an emissary,” Stiles finished her thought, and the Nemeton nodded gracefully.

“Once, long ago, I was the one who selected my own champion, the one who held the connection to this territory’s magic. I want that freedom back,” she told him. “In exchange, I will give you what you need to defeat Peter, though it comes with no guarantees for your victory.”

“What do you need?” Stiles asked, and the Nemeton smiled, looking particularly nasty and bloodthirsty.

“The ashes of Peter Hale and Gerard Argent, sealed into my roots by both blood and magic from you, Volkov,” she replied, tilting her chin up when Stiles hesitated. “I will not let you consult the wolf, Mage. This is a deal between you and me only, and I make it only now, in this moment.”

“The ashes of Peter Hale are not the issue,” Stiles replied, hoping fervently Derek would forgive him for breaking his promise. “Gerard Argent is a hunter, and under the domain of their matriarch, Allison Argent. I cannot speak for her, and she isn’t going to give me permission to kill her grandfather, not when he’s suffering and helpless in a wheelchair. She’s probably not inclined toward giving him a quick death, to be honest.”

“Gerard will not survive past the stroke of midnight tonight,” the Nemeton replied carelessly. She waved a hand, showing Stiles the nursing home, where Gerard had apparently slipped into a coma, machines supporting his body. “There will be no need to kill him, and if the Argents will give me his ashes, I will release my hold on their matriarch.”

Stiles let out a shaky breath, knowing that would probably settle Allison in favor of it. “All I need is your word that you will provide every effort to this cause, and I will give you what you need,” she urged him.
“I need information on Danny, too,” Stiles said, and the Nemeton smiled her cold little smile as she opened an image again and showed him a building.

“I had given you your clue to his captor already,” she replied before a sharp gesture sent the building out of existence. “Your missing piece is right in front of you. Do we have a deal?”

Stiles closed his eyes, hating what he was about to do, but not seeing another way. “Agreed,” he said, and the Nemeton darted forward, grabbing hold of both of his forearms, searing pain lacing over his skin making him black out.

He awoke suddenly, on the ground and staring up into the roots of the Nemeton, his forearms still throbbing painfully. He struggled back into sitting position, a flood of knowledge opening in his mind when he did, and making his head ache for a long moment while it all sorted into his mind. “Fucking magic,” he groaned, bringing a hand to his temple to try and rub away the pain, stopping suddenly as he saw his forearm.

Just below the rolled up cuff of his right sleeve was the dark black tattoo of a dagger, ornate hilt starting just below his elbow and the tip of the blade resting just above the pulse point in his wrist. It was made of thin and fine lines, looking wickedly sharp. An inspection of his left arm revealed a much more heavily lined tree design, roots entangled around his wrist while the leaves and branches reached well beyond the cuff of his flannel shirt.

“Subtle,” he informed the tree, rolling down his sleeves and buttoning the cuffs. Derek would freak out as soon as he spotted them, and Stiles was hoping to put off his panic until he could explain. He got to his feet, pain surprisingly starting to ebb away from his aching body and arms as he moved. He climbed back up the ladder, unsurprised when Derek had the trapdoor open before he reached the top. His dad helped him out onto the ground, looking worried.

“I’m not magic, but even I felt that, kid,” his dad informed him. “Derek looked like he was going to vibrate out of his skin.”

“Pretty sure that was all the tree, not me,” Stiles remarked, quirking a grin at them. “Hey, that rhymed, I’m a poet and I didn’t know it.”

Derek swung him around, backing him up against the tree with a growl. It didn’t have nearly the force behind it Stiles’ was accustomed to, but there was no mistaking the anger flashing in Derek’s eyes. “You smell like blood and mountain ash,” Derek snarled. “I thought I told you—”
“I had to take her offer,” Stiles shot back instantly. “It was a one-time offer, no second chances. If I’m going to be your emissary, you’ll have to trust me with the magic stuff occasionally.”

“I trusted you to keep your word,” Derek replied. “Show me.”

“Derek,” Stiles flashed a glance over at his dad, who looked just as firmly set in his disappointment as Derek. He sighed, tugging his flannel shirt off, jaw stubbornly set.

Derek said nothing, looking impassive, but his dad drew in a shaky breath. “Are those…”

“They’re burned in,” Derek confirmed, a surprisingly gentle fingertip running down the edge of the blade. Stiles shuddered, surprised when it didn’t hurt but instead produced a live wire current of sensation over his body.

“That will help us take Peter out,” Stiles told him quietly. “I’m sorry it went down this way, but she wasn’t interested in deals with the pack. She wanted my help.”

“And the tree?” Derek asked, fingers hovering over the design but not touching this time.

“The price I have to pay back for the help,” he said, catching Derek’s face with his hand before he could turn away. “She wants Peter’s ashes.”

Derek stared at him for a long moment, wary. “And that’s it?”

“Gerard’s as well,” Stiles replied. “And a spell to release her from their influence. It may not completely cleanse the damage, but it’ll bring the Nemeton back to being closer to neutral.”

“It sounds too good to be true,” his dad said, holstering his gun as they started walking, leaving the nemeton’s clearing quickly but slowing once they reached the path. “But I’m going to have to side with Stiles on this one, Derek. We weren’t there, and he was the one who had to make the call. The spell, those tattoos, they won’t hurt you?”

“Well, they hurt,” Stiles replied, wincing as he rotated his arms pointedly. “No, Dad, I’ll be fine,” he confirmed. “She’s even offered to let go of her connection to Allison if the Argents agree to give her
"Gerard’s ashes when he dies."

“That’s one hell of a carrot,” Derek observed, shoving his hands in pockets. “Allison will probably go for it.”

Stiles nodded, aware that Derek was watching him warily, all too aware that Stiles was holding back. “I know where Danny is, where Peter’s army is holed up, but I’m not sure what has him,” he said, nodding to his dad. “Was the abandoned building on 17th, you know, the one the JayCee’s turned into a haunted house last month on your list?”

“Yeah, that was one of them,” the sheriff confirmed. “But not high on the list, all the props and paraphernalia were left in place after Halloween, they won’t be torn down till after the new year. We figured that would make it less than ideal.”

“Might have appealed to Peter’s sense of irony, turning an amusement park haunted house into an actual house of horrors,” Derek explained. “The nemeton didn’t give you anything on what took Danny?”

“Nothing helpful,” Stiles said as they rounded the last corner of the path and the SUV came into sight. “It just said the answer was right in front of me. I’ve got dozens of ideas though, nothing that feels like what I’m missing.”

“What if it meant literally?” the sheriff suggested. “What was literally in front of you when it said that to you?”

Stiles thought carefully as they climbed into the car, mind drawing a blank. “We were on a giant chess board,” he said finally, sighing. “Like Harry Potter Wizard chess, huge freakin’ pieces. I was riding on one of the white side knights, and the Nemeton was on a black side knight.”

“So you were on a horse, maybe a Kelpie?” the sheriff suggested. Stiles took a moment to appreciate the absolute surreal moment of his dad ever so calmly suggesting magic water horses were kidnapping teenagers in Beacon Hills. What was his life even?

“It wasn’t a horse,” Stiles replied, eyes widening as he realized something. “It was a unicorn.”

“A Qilin,” Derek said quietly.
“You’re telling me your uncle has an actual unicorn on his side?” the sheriff asked, his tone clearly saying that might just be the last straw.

“They aren’t what you’re thinking, not at all,” Derek replied, grimacing slightly. “They don’t have a horn, they have long bony spurs, almost like swords, that they can project from their wrists. They’re vicious, ruthless and supposedly serve no one unless they are trapped and enchanted into service. Uh, but also, about 500 years extinct. Free Qilin were hunters, going after their enemies with absolute focus. From what I remember from the myths Peter told Cora and Brenna, they’ll chase quarry to the grave.”

“Leave it to Peter to find the last unicorn. There’s a red bull joke I could make somewhere in there too, but I’m too tired. Why would it take Danny?” Stiles asked. “Peter’d have to have some magic shackles on it.”

“He had a witch capable of it,” Derek put in.

“If you could undo that, would it turn on Peter?” his dad asked, and Stiles bit his lip, thinking.

“I think so, as long as it’s not pursuing someone from our pack,” he replied. “Isn’t there something about Unicorns and Serpents being natural enemies?”

“You think Peter promised it Jackson?” Derek asked, skeptical. “How would he plan on delivering, since Jackson wasn’t anywhere near here until yesterday?”

“Could be just the promise of a Kanima, if the hunters were spreading rumors, maybe it came on its own and fell in with Peter, and here we are?” Stiles suggested. “I didn’t read anything about Qilin in your mom’s journal, and if Deaton didn’t know what it was, his books won’t be helpful.”

“Argents?” Derek suggested quietly, and Stiles felt himself freeze for half a second, enough for Derek to catch on.

“Yeah, Argents,” Stiles said quietly, swallowing a lump in his throat. He stayed quiet while his dad and Derek talked strategy in low voices, as though they didn’t want to disturb the melancholy he had fallen into. Part of him didn’t want to tell Derek the rest, to let him know just how complicit Peter had been, because it would break Derek’s heart to know just how long his uncle had been plotting against their family. The other part knew Derek needed to know the whole story about Paige, Kate
Argent, and the fire, because the guilt of those moments didn’t rest on his shoulders either.

Once he reached the apartment building, he put the SUV in park, reaching out and looping his fingers closed around Derek’s wrist. “Dad, can you go ahead, fill Chris in?” he asked, keeping his eyes on where Derek was weaving his fingers through Stiles’, grip tightening briefly. “I need to talk with Derek alone for a minute.”

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Danny came to slowly, head aching fiercely and unable to move his arms forward and ease the aching stiffness. “Ugh, off,” he muttered, cracking his eyes and expecting he’d need to shove Ethan off of where he was sprawled over Danny again.

“Oh thank god,” Delia said, and Danny blinked, his eyes slowly focusing on his sister, realizing she was tied to a support beam with rough ropes. A quick glance down showed he must be similarly bound, ankles tied and next to her similarly tied legs.

“What the hell happened?” he asked his sister, and she blanched.

“My now ex-girlfriend is apparently some sort of crazy evil mutant X-man,” she blurted out, looking like she expected him not to believe her. “She’s got some sort of weird spiky things in her arms and she hit you over the head with one.”

She gulped and Danny blinked again, the slightly sticky feeling of dried blood on his face and clothes finally registering with him. He scanned his sister but she seemed to be unharmed. Unlike him, she’d probably had the sense to come quietly once the violence had been demonstrated. “I’m okay,” he told her, shaking his head gently to help clear it. “Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas…” he finished the rest of the states in his head, then added, “2014, Obama.”

“Did you just check yourself for a concussion?” she asked, and Danny grinned weakly.

“Did I pass?” he asked.

“How should I know?” she retorted, scowling. “Mutant X-man girlfriend kidnapped us, Danny! I’m sort of doubting the world in a wacky red pill way.”
“Any chance she told you what she is or what she wants?” Danny asked.

Delia bit her lip, exhaling in frustration. “You’re way too calm about this, so I’m guessing you already knew about the rabbit hole?” she demanded.

“Ethan’s a werewolf,” Danny replied, testing his ropes, barely any play at his wrists, not quite sure if it was enough to get himself free.

“Is he the reason we’re…”

“No, pretty sure not,” Danny replied. “Delia? What’d she say?”

“She kept talking about the cuckoo, like the bird,” Delia told him. “Said the only thing worse than a snake was a cuckoo, and that somebody named Peter had delivered on his promise that she’d have a chance at both here,” she repeated skeptically. “She called herself a Qilin, like the Asian unicorn, I think? Or maybe it’s a gang thing? I still think this could be a gang thing.”

“Okay,” Danny said, mind racing. “The snake I get, but I’m not really sure about the cuckoo.”

“Danny,” Delia said softly, forehead pinched with worry. “She was calling you the cuckoo.”

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Chris opened the door for the sheriff, surprised to see the other man alone. “Where’s…?” he started to ask, and John grimaced.

“They apparently needed to discuss something in private,” he explained. “I have yet to catch them making out, and I plan to keep it that way.”

“You’re not concerned about the fact that he’s a 24 year old werewolf making out with your underage son?”
“Well, it just sounds bad when you put it like that,” John retorted dryly, appreciating the quick quirking of Chris’s lips that told him the other man enjoyed his sarcasm. “I can’t come at it from that perspective,” he explained. “The darkness that’s gripped Stiles, the focus and exclusion… if he didn’t have Derek, he’d be alone. And that’s on me, because my kid had to be the one to save me. As long as Derek makes him happy and keeps him safe… it’s more than I could have hoped after the sacrifice.”

“And if he doesn’t, I hope you come to me for the wolfsbane bullets,” Chris replied, and John grinned the commiseration grin of parents of teens dating less than ideal partners. “I keep them on hand for Isaac.”

“And Scott,” John suggested, lifting an eyebrow at the look that crossed the Hunter’s face. “Are we still pretending not to know?”

“Melissa and I agreed that seemed like a better strategy than actually having to discuss it,” Chris replied, making John chuckle. “What’d Stiles get from the tree?”

John filled him in, helping the hunter remark his map around the abandoned haunted house and filling him about their suspicions regarding the Qilin. “I spent some time in China, when I was eighteen and taking a gap year before college,” Chris told him, heading for his office. “Mostly learning to fight, but some studying too.” He pulled down a few texts, forehead wrinkling as he thought. “I think Stiles is right about the serpents and unicorns myth, and I seem to remember they also hunted fae. I don’t know much about Qilin, I’m afraid, and what I do know is pretty convoluted.” He paused, looking over at the sheriff. “The person we should really consult is my father but we wouldn’t be able to trust anything he told us, if he could. I got a call from the nursing home last night, letting me know he’s slipped into a coma.”

“I’m sorry,” John said, but knew he had done a poor job of concealing his lack of surprise.

“You knew already?” Chris confirmed, and when John nodded, he asked reluctantly, “I don’t suppose you had the home call you?”

“No, the Nemeton told Stiles,” John said slowly, sounding out the words as he spoke. “I can’t believe that just came out of my mouth,” he admitted, grimacing.

“What’d it want with Gerard?” Chris asked.
“His ashes, when he passes,” John said uncomfortably. He wished Stiles had been there to float the offer, though Stiles probably wouldn’t have managed any sort of tact about it. “Since Gerard was the one who cut the tree down, it wants his ashes to… I don’t know, undo the psychic damage? Stiles said it would have to be you and Allison’s call but…”

“But it made us an offer, right?” Chris filled in, and John could practically see the gears turning in the Hunter’s mind. “Gerard’s ashes in exchange for letting go of its hold on Allison?”

“Yeah, that’s about the sum of it,” John said. “It wants Peter Hale too.”

“Well, at least Gerard won’t be alone,” Chris remarked acidly, shrugging. “There’s no love lost between my father and I, John. I have no problem agreeing to hand over his ashes as long as nothing worse comes from it.”

“That’s the shot in the dark, isn’t it?” John agreed, taking the book Chris offered him. “Trusting that thing to actually help our kids, when all it’s done so far is hurt them.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, settling down on the couch next to John, books spread out on the coffee table.

John was struggling through just skimming the ornate cursive script in the book in his hand, feeling his heart kick start in alarm when Chris cleared his throat uncomfortably. “I’m not sure I want to ask,” he said, looking over at Chris.

“I just figured, while the kids are elsewhere,” Chris started, pausing, then forging ahead. “You and Melissa?”

“No, never,” John replied. “I know her husband thought so, but… there’s just… too much history, I guess.”

“Your wife,” Chris filled in, making John’s jaw drop.

“She told you?” he asked, and Chris shook his head.

“When I figured out Stiles’ was part of the pack, I built a file on your family. I read between the
lines, but I put the pieces together. Your wife couldn’t have actually tampered with her morphine pump to allow an overdose by that point, even if that’s what the official report says. Melissa did it for her, but I’m guessing she was supposed to wait for you to come back?”

“I don’t blame Melissa,” John put in immediately. “I was angry, mostly at Claudia. But I couldn’t direct at her, and I never wanted Stiles to blame himself for being there when she did it, so I kept burying it.”

“And Melissa thinks you blame her?” Chris questioned, and John shrugged.

“We’ve never spoken about it, not once,” he said uncomfortably. “But if we dated… I think we’d have had to, and neither of us ever started the conversation.”

“Hmm,” Chris murmured.

“Like I said, history,” John told him, turning back to the book. “I’m glad she has you, but if you hurt her, you’ll never see Scott coming.”

“That’s vaguely terrifying,” Chris commented, smiling at John. John wasn’t sure what to make of the fond and amused look on the other man’s face, so he went back to reading.

Derek was silent, mind slowly sorting out what Stiles had told him. “Should I not have told you?” Stiles asked miserably, hunched rather small in his seat. Derek moved lightning quick, tugging Stiles across the front seat awkwardly and into his lap, hugging Stiles tightly to his chest. Stiles’ long legs stayed stretched into the driver’s seat, but he relaxed back into the embrace, sighing a little.

“I don’t ever want you to feel you have to keep things from me,” Derek said softly. “I’m… for now, I need to put it away though. Not deal with it. It doesn’t change much, if anything.”

“But—” Stiles started to protest, and Derek shook his head.

“I followed Peter, let him wiggle his way into my life. I was the weak point in my family, Stiles, or
felt like it. Mom was the Alpha. Dad and Mira were these staggeringly brilliant intellectuals. Alex was being scouted by the pros in two different sports. Laura was training to be the Alpha. Cora and Brenna were young, but even they made friends like it was as easy as breathing, running around and causing mischief, and then me.”

“Middle child syndrome,” Stiles muttered, and Derek chuffed a soft laugh as Stiles snuggled in more.

“Maybe,” he agreed. “But… Peter picked me, saw something he could manipulate. And I…”

“You were a freakin’ fifteen year old kid,” Stiles replied. “Dude, I can’t even tell you how much I wanted to kill Kate when the freakin’ Nemeton showed me what she did to you.”

“And am I any better,” Derek asked, tightening his arms a little at the rude noise Stiles made.

“I’m seventeen, almost eighteen,” Stiles objected. “I know it may not seem like that much but it is, Derek, it’s so different. You do know I’m in this, both eyes wide open? I’m not innocent, not like you were.”

Derek looked at Stiles, nodding slightly at the frightening depth of knowledge in the teenager’s eyes. “I can wish you hadn’t had to grow up so fast,” he suggested, and Stiles sighed.

“Dude, I went into the woods at night to look for a murder victim,” he reminded Derek. “I had issues long before you dropped into my life.”

“Wish that was different too,” Derek admitted, allowing himself a moment and pressing a kiss to Stiles’ temple. “We should go up.”

“Just… hold me a little bit longer?” Stiles asked, and Derek tightened his arms obligingly.

A few minutes passed in silence, then Stiles stirred, turning a little to meet Derek’s gaze. “Guess we should join them,” he said, offering a crooked smile. “Or climb into the backseat and make out, could be our last chance.”
“Upstairs,” Derek rolled his eyes, nudging Stiles back toward his own seat. Once they’d both climbed out of the car, Stiles clicking the automatic locks an unnecessary number of times and making the horn honk as a result, he added, “It’s won’t be our last chance.”

“Oh my god, you really are an optimist,” Stiles cackled, even as he let Derek link their fingers and moved with a little more energy now as they headed up to the Argents.

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Danny winced as he managed to slip another knuckle free of his knots. Between the throbbing in his head and the way he was practically disjointing his fingers to try to escape his bonds, he was about ready to welcome the idea of passing out again. He cussed his captors using rope again. If it had been handcuffs, he would have been free by now.

“Danny,” Delia said softly, and Danny jerked still hearing the clack of women’s shoes on cement drawing closer.

“It’s okay, Delia, it’s okay,” Danny muttered. “They don’t want you, I’m going to tell them to let you go.”

“Oh, but then she’ll run straight for the cops,” a voice sing-songed out of the darkness just before Peter swooped in, leaning down to examine the blood at Danny’s temple. “And besides, two hostages are better than one, right Sasha?” He reached out a finger, slipping it through the blood, then drawing it up to his mouth, smirking as he tasted it.

“As long as the cuckoo is mine,” the woman behind Peter was still mostly in the shadows, but Danny vaguely recognized the long, white blonde hair he’d seen around school, and a tall, lanky frame. Definitely Delia’s type. Her eyes weren’t human any longer though, milky white with pale flecks of blue and purple dancing in the iris, looking like one of the moonstones Danny had seen in Stiles’ collection. They were the eyes of something terrifyingly old and horrible. “You can do what you want with the girl.”

“So fucking broken up,” Delia remarked acidly, sounding braver than Danny was sure she felt.

“Little girl, you were just a means to an end,” Sasha commented, sliding out of the shadows and into the light. “I’m centuries older than you, and the only reason I’m here is for that creature you think is your brother.”
“He is my brother,” Delia replied, squirming back from the woman as much as her bindings would allow. “If I wasn’t really sure before, our same craptastic taste in partners confirms it.” Danny would have laughed, but the deadly aura pouring off the woman made it hard to breathe when her attention was focused on his sister.

“He’s a cuckoo, a perfect match, of course you think he’s your brother,” the woman leaned down, grasping Danny’s chin and tilting his head, examining him. “That’s what they do, assimilate, and everyone likes them. Humans can’t help it, cuckoos are designed to fit perfectly. And look at how you’ve assimilated to the pack, little bird. Everyone likes you, no one dislikes you, that’s not natural.”

Danny jerked his chin free of her grasp and Peter chuckled. “You’ve probably heard of it before, Danny, just by another name. She thinks you’re a changeling. A faery baby left in place of Delia’s actual human brother. I believe in the Philippines they call it an Aswang? Ringing any bells for you?”

“I’m human,” Danny replied, shaking his head. “I’d know if I wasn’t.”

“Actually, you wouldn’t,” Peter replied, maddeningly calm. “It’s the perfect camouflage, a ticking time bomb of faery magic just waiting to be released.”

“Prove it,” Delia burst out, drawing Peter’s attention. “You can’t just decide he’s popular and therefore must be something freaky like you.”

“Maybe you missed the part where you’re tied up and we aren’t, my dear. I don’t have to prove anything to you,” Peter replied, lowering his face down to hers and wolfing out suddenly, growling in her face. Delia yelped and cowered back, hiding her face behind her hair. “Well, that was fun,” he grinned, rocking back up into a standing position and stalking back over to Danny.

“So have you put it together yet? The perfect little trap I’m building for my nephew?” Peter asked him. “I’m sure they’ll find you, come straight to me. And we’ll be waiting.” He leaned down, whispering into Danny’s ear. “You think the druid had the count right? How many omegas did he tell you were here? Three? Seven? Fourteen?” Peter asked. “You took out one vampire, but they live in nests, whole kisses of vampires. You have no idea what’s waiting for your friends when they finally figure out where to find us.”

“A lot of talk,” Danny said grimly. “But you’re not the man a kiss of vampires follow. You get a
few omegas, outcasts, the desperate fringes. No one really follows you unless there’s no other choice.”

At least this time he saw the blow coming before he blacked out.

-6-

By the time it had grown fully dark, everyone had made it to Stiles’ house and was combing through weapons and books, all looking for whatever last bit of armament or knowledge would give them the edge they were worried they needed. Chris had even allowed Allison to join them, which seemed to be doing wonders not only for her recovery, but for Scott and Isaac, who were constantly checking on her and looking reassured by her presence. They made a good triad, Derek had to admit, though it was a little odd for it to be sexual. He wondered if it was because they were bitten wolves, and had never known how ridiculously intimate a family pack could be. He imagined the impulse could easily become sexual, for non-family feeling the bond.

Derek returned his focus to listening in idly while Stiles explained to Ethan and Aiden why he wouldn’t perform the curse to rejoin them. “Your Alpha strength kept it from pulling your life force into the merge, but you don’t have that now,” Stiles was telling them. “Besides, separate or together, your power and force will come out to the same impact now, but you can take on more and have greater agility when you’re separate. And if one of you is injured, the other can keep going. If I do this curse, what happens to one of you would happen to the other.”

“So when Morrell did it?” Ethan asked, and Stiles shrugged.

“I’m guessing she did some sort of patchwork, something temporary until took out your alpha while joined together. But that was then one wolf’s Alpha power between two of you, which is why you were never nearly as strong as Kali or Ennis and definitely not Deucalion.”

“Stiles, here,” Allison broke in, handing him a text which Stiles scanned, then sighed, shaking his head. “I know, it’s not how to kill her but…”

“I’ll think about it,” Stiles agreed, shrugging, and for a moment, Derek sat back, looking around the room. Isaac was helping Melissa pack medical supplies into bags while Melissa talked a pale but determined looking Allison through the supplies and how to use them. Near them, Lydia and Jackson are getting a tutorial from Chris and the sheriff about a set of specialty guns they’re being given- Lydia unsurprisingly looked like a natural as she tried the stance and hold Argent showed her. Stiles was debating with the twins, while Cora carefully measured a reddish liquid into small vials, following the recipe Lydia had provided her. He could see the cracks, where he longed to see
Erica and Boyd trading blows and keeping each other sharp or where he needed Danny and his strategies, but for a moment, he could see pack around him, and the potential for two, strong, allied packs.

Scott nudged his shoulder drawing him back to the map, and he started to add a blocked road that the sheriff intended to have the police department close to allow them better access to the building and creating a mountain ash circle. They were going to have to rely on Lydia, given the current gap the loss of Danny created, and the banshee was uncertain how the barrier might be affected by her flavor of magic. She was fidgeting, but Jackson kept directing her energy subtly back to the tasks around them, keeping her useful. “It works,” Scott observed, and Derek looked over, realizing the young Alpha wasn’t looking at the map.

The room was humming around them, everyone at work and in sync. “Two alphas sharing a territory usually doesn’t work,” Derek observed carefully.

“I had a thought about that,” Scott said, picking up a green highlighter and drawing a set of lines, overlapping over the Nemeton, through the Preserve then splitting to the outside of the town lines, before coming together again on the far side of town and continuing. “For formality purposes only,” Scott remarked, shrugging. “Responsibility for the town and Nemeton on both of us, and lines really only to appease tradition, maybe for establishing patrols, that sort of thing, but an open passage alliance for our packs.”

All of the formally owned Hale land was on Derek’s side of the line, and to his surprise, the sheriff’s house, which fell just outside the town boundaries and backed up to the Preserve, was also outside the line Scott had drawn. “You put some thought into this,” Derek stalled, and Scott nodded sheepishly.

“I started reading some of the books Deaton was always trying to give me,” Scott admitted. “It’s time I stopped pretending this is going to go away.”

“We’ll work on it, after Peter is dealt with, and make our decisions then,” Derek replied, looking over at Jackson and Cora. “My pack has some choices they’d have to make first.”

“Hey,” Stiles dropped into a chair across from them, wiggling his eyebrows. “Alphas only, or can regular schlubs join too?”

“You’re an emissary,” Scott pointed out, disbelievingly. “You really think there’s a table you don’t belong at around here?”
“Maybe the grownups table at Thanksgiving,” the sheriff put in sarcastically, making Stiles scowl. “Derek, can I borrow you for a moment?”

Derek followed the sheriff, keeping one ear on the conversation behind him. “I really am sorry I didn’t notice you were gone,” Scott said to Stiles softly.

“I’m sorry I didn’t warn you, about any of it, about not being your emissary, about Peter’s plans,” Stiles replied. “That’s not the type of emissary I want to be. Even if I’m not yours, I want you to know you can count on me.”

“I know I can,” Scott said easily. “You know you’re my family, even if we’re not pack, right?”

Derek turned back to the book the sheriff offered him when the pair embraced, exchanging a relieved smile with the older man.

Scott and Stiles drifted back over to them, everyone slowly making their way in to the dining room table. “All right,” Chris Argent said, accepting the map from Scott and spreading it out on the table. “Final run through before we go. The sheriff has his deputies doing drive-by’s on properties we know are far from our target, to create the illusion we’re still scattered and not ready to move…”

-D-6-

Danny feigned unconsciousness for several minutes, focusing in the loosening bonds around his wrists, and carefully taking in their surroundings before hissing lowly at his sister. “How long’s the sun been down?” he asked her.

Delia looked around, eyes flicking pointedly to spots behind Danny, indicating their guards to him. “It’s after ten, I heard the old church bell,” she told him. “But that was a while ago.”

“Nearly eleven, then,” Danny muttered, running through his plans in his mind. If Argent stuck to the plan they’d crafted together, and that was a big if, he’d use the bells at eleven for cover to move the vehicles inside the mountain ash barrier which should be well on its way to being complete.

“So… who all are werewolves in our school, anyway?” Delia asked, rolling her shoulders oddly,
and it took Danny a moment to realize she was showing him she’d worked her bonds loose too.

“Uh, Aiden, obviously,” Danny said.

“Siblings share all sorts of traits,” she smirked, and Danny made a note to stick a tranq gun in her hands if they made it to the Argent line and turn her back to the fight. She’d earned her spot beside him. “Who else? Lydia?”

“Nah, she’s a banshee,” Danny explained, half grinning in triumph as his index finger slipped through a loop just right and he had enough slack finally to hopefully finish the job.

“So many, many catty girl remarks about shrieking, so very little time,” Delia remarked. “Stiles?”

“Human, but a bit magical,” Danny explained poorly. “Dating my pack’s Alpha to be. We don’t have an Alpha yet.”

“Oh, sure you do,” Peter remarked, swinging down into the room, making Delia startle. Danny very deliberately held himself still, staring down the older man. “You’re a member of the Hale pack, and I am the Hale alpha now that Derek gave up the powers.”

“So why aren’t your eyes red?” Danny taunted him, rewarded by a flash of purple eyes before Peter landed a dizzying backhand to his already abused cheek. Danny clung to consciousness, spitting blood and smirking as the bells began to toll eleven.

-6-

The wall came down impressively, Lydia offering them a smug little smile and a quick dusting of her hands in triumph. “All yours,” she said sweetly, one moment of eerie stillness before the howling from beyond the chemically ruined wall started. “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed, nodding toward the black jeep where Chris Argent was waiting, gun in hand, looking just as alarmed as Lydia. “What was our count on the omegas?”

“Four,” she replied, hesitating. “Sure you don’t want me with you?”
“Get back to the jeep line,” Aiden growled. “There’s only four of them, they’re modulating their howls to sound like there’s more.”

“It’s called the Beau Geste effect,” Lydia sniffed, rolling her eyes. “And you can’t be sure.”

“Maybe I’m trying to be comforting,” Aiden retorted, and Lydia rolled her eyes.

“Don’t bother,” she replied. “I’m not that type of girl.”

Stiles bit back a laugh, looking to Derek, whose eyes had flared bright blue, fangs poking out slightly. “They aren’t coming out,” Derek observed, and Stiles nodded.

“Staying in there, in that maze, it’s home court advantage,” Stiles agreed. He drew in a deep breath, steadying himself. “We’ll have to go in. Lydia, get the mountain ash in place, we don’t need anyone getting out once we’re in.”

“Maybe time for you to level the field?” Derek suggested, quirking a non-existent eyebrow now that he was in beta form, and Stiles couldn’t resist darting in and stealing a quick kiss.

“For luck,” he quipped, enjoying how utterly gob-smacked Derek looked for a moment, before reaching deep and spinning outward with his magical spark, believing for all he was worth that every light bulb in the place would light up.

The warehouse glowed brightly to life, drawing snarls and a few yelps from inside. “All right,” Derek nodded to Scott who shot back a surprisingly reckless grin. “Let’s end this.”

Stiles stayed close to Derek as they darted into the warehouse. His goals were simple, get to Danny, disable any magical shackles on the Qilin if he could, throw down mountain ash rings to trap the bad guys if he saw a shot. Then get out. Or that’s what it said on paper. He fingered the dagger on his arm, knowing Derek wasn’t going to like much of how the rest of the night went down.

A wolf leapt down, claws fully extended for Stiles, not Derek, but Derek had a hold of her and slammed her into the far wall. “They aren’t aiming for me,” Derek observed in a low growl, and Stiles nodded, wincing as the omega took a hard swipe from Derek’s claws down her left arm.
“Peter probably warned them off you, wants to make sure he gets you himself,” Stiles remarked, wincing again when the omega got a little close and Derek tossed her up into the loft, crashing through a weak, wooden floor like it was nothing more than cardboard. His palm suddenly lit up, and Stiles grinned, opening his hand to reveal a glowing orange-red arrow, pointing to the door to his left.

“I've got a trace on Danny,” Stiles called out, and Derek shoved him toward the door, dodging the omega’s blow. Stiles stumbled forward, trusting Derek at his back and moving after the arrow.

His other hand tightened on his bat as he entered the next room, and he nearly brought it around in a swing before he processed what he was seeing. When the haunted house had been running, this must have been a clown room, he shuddered, taking in the wall to wall mannequins. At the same time, Aiden’s howl rose loud above the snarls followed by several quick gunshots.

Stiles whirled around automatically, heart racing. One of the omegas must have tried to make a run toward the ring of hunters and Aiden had alerted them to the break in the lines. Impressively, exactly what the wolf had been instructed to do. Stiles stopped backing away from the door he’d come through, realizing he’d crossed the room and had made it to the far wall of clowns.

“Come on, Derek,” he bit his lip, indecisively torn between waiting for the werewolf to finish off the omega or continuing deeper into the haunted house to follow his spell toward Danny. The trace would only hold for a few minutes at a time, and he’d have to start it again if it flickered out again and wait for it to find Danny again. He took a step toward the door the arrow was indicating.

A hand shot out, grabbing onto his shoulder and tossing him to the ground.

One of the clowns lurched free of the other mannequins, grinning obscenely.

-6-

Turning back to the fight after the first omega fled, Aiden landed a good hard swipe of his claws through the werewolf in front of him, and his hand smoked and hissed in reaction as he came away with a handful of clay and mistletoe. “Golems!” he shouted out loud and clear, determined to alert the other wolves. “Don’t bite down!”

Ethan whirled back into the fight from behind the golem, claws raking through what would have
been a spine and neck, and Aiden brought his own claws up to take a second swipe, blood and clay flying out as the head of the golem separated from the body.

The body flailed, claws still reaching and tearing as it continued to try to fight. “For fuck sake,” Isaac cursed, grabbing the shorn head and tearing into the mouth and jaw with his own claws. It turned to ashy clay around his hand as his claws snagged and tore into a scroll that had been hidden inside the golem’s mouth.

“Don’t you two listen to anything Stiles says?” he asked scornfully as they headed deeper into the haunted house. “Those are magic and the key that keeps them running will be under its tongue. Don’t make me tell you again.”

Aiden snarled at him, but followed his brother into the maze.

-6-

At the truck line, Chris lowered his gun, tilting his head before nodding at John. “Honestly not sure if that was your shot or mine that took him down,” the hunter remarked, meaning it as a compliment but the other man winced slightly, nodding. The werewolf, who had charged them rather than surrender when they’d called out for him to do so, had twin holes through his forehead for the decision.

“Feeling outside your comfort zone?” Chris asked, even as he continued to watch the perimeter.

“To put it mildly,” the sheriff agreed. “And for the life of me, I can’t figure out how Stiles and Derek convinced me to let my son go into the nightmare house while I stay out here.”

“This is your job,” Chris adjusted his sight, tensing for a moment as he spotted the flash of blue eyes in a window, then relaxing down when he recognized Aiden. “Stay at the line, defend the town. Stopping the supernatural threat, dealing with the magic, that’s your son’s job now.”

“I hate your logic,” the sheriff replied, adjusting his sight, and smiling a little grimly. “Lydia incoming.”

“Mountain Ash around the inside track of the trucks, surrounding the house,” Lydia reported, accepting the sheriff’s hand up onto the back of their jeep. Jackson stayed in the shadow of the jeep,
claws out and waiting just inside the ring of mountain ash. “Just make sure no one drives over it and they’re all trapped inside.”

“Spot anything?” John asked her, and she shook her head.

“Quiet around the back of the property, I spotted the lookout and took him out,” Jackson flexed shining claws pointedly. “He’s secure, sheriff, you or Argent can collect him later.”

“Good,” the sheriff said, and Chris nodded, still hesitating in disbelief a little over the thought of Jackson, the former Kanima with quite the body count, being squeamish about adding to that tally. He knew it wasn’t fair, but his instincts didn’t want to let go.

“Heads up,” the sheriff said, and Chris adjusted his rifle at the same time as he did, spotting the werewolf near window of the building.

Danny struggled, and with one terrific last wrench that certainly dislocated two of his fingers, his left hand slipped free. Now not holding two wrists, the ropes on his right hand loosened and left him free. He brought his hands around, starting on the knots at his ankles, slow and awkward on fingers that wouldn’t cooperate. He looked over at Delia, who was pale.

“Don’t watch this,” he told her, before grabbing hold of his fingers and wrenching, the resulting joint wracking pain and popping noises almost enough to make him cry out, if he hadn’t bit down on his lip preemptively.

“Jesus, Danny,” his sister half whispered, half sobbed. He resumed working on his knots, able to at least get some grip from his left hand now, though the pain was dizzying and enough to have him fighting the urge to vomit.

“Hang on, I’ll get yours next,” he promised her. The knot finally gave and Danny grinned triumphantly at Delia. It took some doing to get his mostly numb legs under him and holding him upright, but he staggered over to kneel behind her, starting to work on her wrists, which were also loosened. “You almost had it,” he praised her, and she flushed.

“No offense, but if you were wanting me to finish it the same way you did, you’d have a long wait
“coming,” she informed him, massaging her wrists when Danny got them free. He moved to start on her feet, and she stopped him, her gentle hands steadying his shaking and bruised ones. “I can get this, you find us weapons or something we can use.”

Danny nodded, struggling to his feet again. He stumbled to a stack of rebar, tugging at it till a reasonable length came free of the stack, heavy weight reassuring in his hand.

“Danny!” he heard Delia scream out, but it was all the warning he got.

As he turned back to check on Delia, and a small, deceptively strong hand caught him around the throat, lifting him off his feet and pinning him against one of the fiberglass trees that lined the room. Lifted up now, he recognized the room around them as the Halloween fun house that he and Ethan had come to just a few weeks ago, just before the world tilted into the supernatural. The stone sacrifice table smeared with fake blood didn’t seem funny now at all, especially with the Qilin strangling him easily with one hand. He tried to swing the rebar up at her, but her free hand easily ripped it out of his hands, her moonstone white eyes glittering dangerously as she squeezed his throat.

“Run,” he rasped at Delia. “Go, Delia!”

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Stiles kicked out, swinging his bat at the grinning clown golem’s face, aiming with all his strength for the thing’s jaw. The blow connected, solidly, and the golem’s jaw cracked ominously. The thing just kept grinning, reaching out its right arm and with an odd moment of elastic stretch, fingers stretched into claws. Stiles back peddled, feet frantic against the concrete floor, getting enough room to swing the bat again, following the same arc as the first blow. The bat this time took the clowns jaw completely off, but the scroll, tucked neatly under the golem’s tongue, was still encased in the clay mouth and intact.

Stiles dove forward, reaching out, but pulled up short when the gruesome clown grabbed onto his ankle. He kicked out, once, twice, desperate until the third kick connected, and he jerked free, scrambling forward over the cement floor and plunging his hand into the dismembered jaw, grabbing the scroll with a grimace. The clown golem made one last desperate lunge in his direction.

Stiles tore the scroll, the clown disintegrating into lumps of clay and dust that splatted with ugly noise all around him on the cold concrete floor. White mistletoe berries rolled free of the clay, catching Stiles’ eye as he struggled to catch his breath. A triumphant roar shattered the quiet around him, and a moment later, Derek ducked through the doorway, looking frantic.
“You all right?” he asked, offering Stiles a hand that he’d clearly just hastily rubbed free of the blood. Stiles wanted to be disgusted, but the gore of the golem on his own hands told an equally disturbing story, so he just accepted the help up with a soft sigh.

He held out his palm, and nodded when the arrow flickered back into being. “Still got my trace, let’s go,” he said, relieved when Derek didn’t ask any further.

-6-

The scent of Peter had led them upstairs to a catwalk above the haunted room displays, but Ethan’s skin was crawling with anxious energy, his intuition sparking madly. “I think we need to—” he started to say, but before his thought could escape, the wall behind him crashed outward, huge sections of drywall and concrete tumbling into Isaac. The plywood railing at Isaac’s hip broke easily, sending Isaac tumbling down into the dark ‘Hills Have Eyes’ room he faintly recognized from visiting the haunted house with Danny.

Isaac was groaning, partially impaled on jutting spikes fiberglass from the shattered set below which had slid through his left thigh and right shoulder. Ethan turned back to find Aiden had engaged the were-tiger behind him. The professor was half naked, tattered pants clinging around his waist and thighs, his back and chest covered in pelt that now wrapped up his body and concealed the previous bald head. Toe claws to rival Kali’s with sharp matching claws on his hands moved with deadly grace, much like Kali. Aiden though was fighting like Ethan would have expected him to go up against Ennis, like a weretiger traditionally would be. “Come on, it’s just like sparring with Kali,” he shouted at his brother, taking a swipe at the tiger’s exposed side.

“Are you saying he fights like a girl?” Aiden grinned, not quite ducking a kick that left a quick score of claw gashes down one cheek.

“Nah,” Ethan replied, landing a solid blow to the Tiger’s ribs with his knee. “Kali fought harder.”

Isaac, below, had gotten himself upright by breaking the fiberglass way, but he was still struggling with a large shard running through his thigh, keeping him from getting back on his feet. It was only sheer luck that Ethan took a blow that knocked him to the floor of the catwalk, his eyes falling naturally to the gaps between the boards and revealing Ms. Kelly, a wicked looking blade in hand, creeping up behind Isaac.

“Look out!” Ethan shouted down, and Isaac managed to spin his body dodging just enough
sideways that the blade impacted on the concrete with a fierce clang and sparks. Magical blade, Ethan realized, turning back to Aiden as he found his feet.

“Go,” Aiden shouted over to him, grinning as he and the were-tiger circled each other. “I’ve got him!”

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Scott and Cora had wound their way into the house through the maze of mirrors, down to the mummy pit, then back around through what had probably been the Friday the 13th summer camp at one point. “This isn’t right, it’s too quiet,” Cora observed in a hushed voice and Scott nodded in agreement.

“I’ve heard shots outside, and Aiden,” he agreed in a rough whisper. “But we’ve seen nothing?”


“We turn back, we could walk right into it,” he admitted. “This is too obvious, especially for Peter, like he wants to encourage us to turn back, and the last thing I want to do is become predictable.”

“Why else would you be here with me?” Cora rolled her eyes, nodding across the room. “Ladder up to the catwalks and access paths, would be easier.”

Scott analyzed it for a moment. The ladder was high on the wall, a difficult jump for them but not unreasonable. “Let’s do it,” he agreed, and Cora sprang forward, easily flipping herself up and grabbing on to the bottom rung then swinging upward, catching rung after rung, hand over hand, until her feet were also secure on the rungs. She grinned wickedly back down at Scott, who couldn’t help returning the grin.

“Siblings, definitely siblings,” he muttered to himself, unable to help thinking of Derek’s own penchant for acrobatics. He followed her lead, scrambling up the same way she had gone, quickly reaching the third and top space of the warehouse.

They eased down the catwalk, heading toward the center of the house, when Peter stepped out ahead of them suddenly, a swipe of heavy claws sending Scott sprawling onto a ceiling below, a greenhouse style mirrored roof. Scott couldn’t see through it, but the glass was creaking ominously
around his impact site.

“You were right, niece,” Peter agreed, crouching as she wolfed out and faced him high above Scott. “I’d say I’m sorry you got caught up in my trap, but I’m not.”

Cora snarled and charged at her uncle.

-6-

The Qilin snarled as she extended one bony horny from her wrist, the tip coming to rest at the hollow of Danny’s throat. “Better stay put, Delia,” she called behind her without looking at the girl. Her mistake, Danny thought grimly as Delia darted in, swinging a length of pipe hard and cracking it down on the horn, which broke, to Danny and the Qilin’s surprise.

The Qilin screamed, hands reaching to her wrist, but Danny was quicker, managing to wrap his hands around the horn then dropping like a stone and rolling away to his left, getting free of the unicorn. Delia dragged him to his feet, and once Danny was steady on his feet, he dragged his sister behind him, brandishing the horn between himself and the unicorn.

“Been a while since I was a kid and read fairy tales, but I seem to remember a unicorn’s horn is lethal, maybe even to the unicorn itself, right?” he snapped, tightening his grip. He’d heard howls and gunshots, he couldn’t have that much longer to hold on.

“I still have one,” she replied, extending the second horn. “And I’ve survived beyond the extinction of my kind. You think you can destroy me, little changeling?”

“I don’t think I’ll have to,” Danny replied, grinning in relief when the door behind the Qilin burst open, a body of a beaten and unconscious omega fell through, dropped from Derek’s claws.

“You all right?” Stiles asked, stepping in behind Derek, eyes skimming over Danny and Delia, deliberately ignoring the Qilin.

“A little worse for the wear, glad to see you,” Danny admitted, not lowering the horn. “If I stab her with this, will she die?”
“I think so.” Stiles turned his gaze on Sasha. His eyes were cool and assessing. “M’lady, are you under Peter’s compulsion? I will free you if you are, and stop him from trying to hurt you. But otherwise, stand down.”

“I’m here for the snake and the cuckoo,” she hissed, turning the point of her horn on Stiles. “You will not stop me, Emissary.”

“The kanima left Beacon Hills, Peter lied to you,” Stiles replied. “There’s nothing to hunt here.”

“The changeling boy,” Sasha started and Danny lunged, bringing the horn closer.

“I am human,” he insisted. “If I weren’t, the Emissary would know.”

The Qilin stared at him for a long moment, then turned her cool, assessing gaze on Stiles and Derek. “If I try to take him, you will help him, you will kill me?” she asked, and Stiles nodded once, jaw tight. “Even though you know someday the changeling may turn on you?”

“He’s human,” Stiles said softly. “And he is under the protection of the Hale pack.”

The Qilin nodded her head, almost a bow, then retracted her horn into her wrist. “On your head be it, Mage,” she informed him. “Hang on to my horn. You’ll need it when the fae come to reclaim him.”

Danny would have spoken up, but at that moment, the glass ceiling above them shattered. Scott and Cora came tumbling through to the floor at their feet, and Peter jumped down into the fray neatly behind them. He kicked Cora, sending her flying out of the way, then yanked Scott up, claws tearing into his shoulder and drawing blood before he tossed him along after Cora.

“Now it’s a party,” Peter remarked, grinning as he spotted Derek.

Outside the warehouse, a banshee screamed, and the echoes of Lydia’s scream rocked the room around them.
Chapter End Notes

The hints at the Chris/Sheriff/Melissa flirtation are totally being blamed on J.R. Bourne and his assertions at "Days of the Wolf" that Chris is totally horny. I rewrote it and edited it and it just kept veering that way.
Lydia’s scream faded from the room, and Peter only grinned wider. “She’s screaming your death knell, nephew,” Peter said, his slick confidence turning Stiles’ stomach.

“It could just as easily be a scream for you,” Derek snarled back, claws extended as they circled each other.

Stiles slipped to the side, checking on Danny and Delia carefully, keeping one eye on the Qilin. For the moment, she had stepped back, content to watch the fray rather than engage in it, but he had no doubt if she saw her chance at Danny, she’d take it. “You okay?” he asked in a low tone.

“I’m good,” Danny promised him, pulling Delia in closer, protectively. He winced as Peter and Derek traded rather vicious blows, opening gashes on each other than quickly faded, leaving only torn clothes and bloodstains behind as a testament to their presence.

“How about you, kid?” he asked her, surprised to see that she seemed to be holding up well to the battlefield stress around her.

“I was giving serious consideration to losing my virginity to a freakin’ unicorn, the irony is fucking worse than the pain,” she informed him, and Stiles grinned helplessly.

“You’ll get used to it,” he told her, relieved that the siblings seemed to be doing well enough given their ordeal. “We need to get you out of here, away from her and back to the lines outside.”

“I can take them,” Cora staggered over to them, rolling her spine and clearly setting right the damage her fall had done. “Path out?”
“Head through that door, through the clown room and then out the main blast point,” Stiles told her, nodding to Danny. Danny looked torn, clearly not wanting to leave, and Stiles tilted his head at Delia. “She’s your priority, I’ve got Derek,” he reassured Danny.

The Qilin stirred, watching as the trio left, but a look back at Stiles had her settling back again, hands raised in a gesture of peace. “I have a vested interest in the outcome, Emissary,” she informed him. “Nothing more.”

Stiles turned back in time to see Scott spring into the fray, just in time to stop Peter from landing a blow to Derek’s exposed throat. Scott’s claws ripping into Peter’s arm instead. Peter tore Scott off all too easily, swinging the Alpha away and sending him crashing into a fiberglass tree. “Wait your turn, True Alpha,” Peter snarled, turning back to Derek, who had recovered his feet and was readying himself for his next strike.

Stiles winced as Derek landed a blow but took a glancing graze of claws to his ribs, wondering where the twins and Isaac were. It looked like they could use the help.

-6-

Ethan grabbed the Siren’s blade arm, using his own momentum to send her flying toward the far wall and away from Isaac. His grip wasn’t well placed enough to loosen her grip on the knife, and it scored the skin of his arm, no deeper than a paper cut, but the pain was excruciating, burning into him, before the enchantment deadened his arm from the elbow down with alarming speed.

“Nice little present from our witch, don’t you think?” Ms. Kelly asked, scrambling to her feet. Ethan got to his as well, putting himself between her and Isaac, who he now could see was struggling because of the sluggishly bleeding gash on his thigh, probably from her magic blade.

“Specially made for werewolves?” he guessed, dodging when she struck out with the blade, blinking when suddenly Lydia stood in front of him, blade in hand.

“Stop fighting, Ethan,” she said, smiling too sweetly. “You know you’ll never be pack to these teenagers. You can come fight for me though.”

“No thanks,” he snarled, taking his chances and darting in, his claws connecting with her throat at the same time as her blade found his torso.
Above them, a thundering roar rocked the room, before the tiger threw Aiden to the ground below, jumping down after him. The reverberations of the room doubled as Lydia’s scream echoed into the warehouse from outside.

-6-

Scott dodged Peter’s claws neatly, trading places with Derek as they both managed to score blows down Peter’s back. The older werewolf roared in pain, but still swung around and would have landed a devastating blow to Derek except Stiles had stepped in, pure power blasting into Peter and sending him flying back into the stone altar. Scott started to dart forward, but found the pressure of the air suddenly holding him still, feet frozen to the floor.

Derek made it a few steps further, but Stiles flicked a hand out, and Scott watched Derek struggle, helpless to move forward as Stiles walked closer to Peter. “You’re not becoming an Alpha this way,” Stiles said flatly, and Derek abruptly faded from beta state back down to all but human features, his blue eyes still flaring.

Peter chuckled, starting to rise, but Stiles slammed a hand out, an invisible force flattening him back down to stone. “How long do you think you can keep this up?” Peter taunted him, gasping as he struggled. “You may have the raw power, but you’re no trained emissary yet, Stiles.”

“I have help,” Stiles replied, walking over to Scott, grabbing hold of his frozen, outstretched claws. Scott blanched when Stiles suddenly drove Scott’s claws into his arm, blood welling up quickly.

“Stiles,” he protested, but stopped when he saw the blood form into lines over the black, burned in dagger tattoo, something forming, becoming solid. The blood and ash wrapped around each other, weaving and writhing, then slowly, the black and burgundy slid away, leaving a golden dagger, hilt glittering with peridot crystals, resting on the now unmarked skin of Stiles’ forearm.

Stiles looked to Derek, who was looking warily back at the display of power, hurt etched into his expression. Stiles sighed, turning back to the altar and approaching Peter, who had started struggling even more earnestly. “Impressive show,” Peter snarled. “But you’re no killer, Stiles. And I’ll rip your throat out when your magic stops holding me. You’re fading already.”

Scott could see the drip of blood at Stiles’ nose, strain suddenly evident in his body as he held Peter down. Peter snarled and bucked impressively but ultimately stayed pinioned to the altar. Scott suddenly felt as though he could breathe, his arm falling from midair.
“Scott,” Stiles called to him, and Scott closed the distance between them quickly, surprised when Stiles offered the blade to him.

“I don’t…” Scott started to say.

“It’s yours, if you want it,” Stiles told him, tremors starting in his friend’s arms as he held one out over Peter, pinning him down, the other with the blade extended to Scott. “Your choice. Take the chance, see if you can be cured by killing the one who turned you. But if not, you get all the powers of Deucalion and the Darach.”

Scott stared at the blade, paralyzed by the choice even as Isaac limped into the room, looking stunned by the tableau before him. One of the twins - Scott couldn’t tell which because his face was turned into Isaac’s shoulder - barely held himself upright by clinging to Isaac, stumbling as he moved.

“Scott!” Stiles snapped, focusing his attention back on the extended blade. “I can hold him a little longer, but you have to decide quickly.”

“Stiles,” Derek said softly, and Stiles shook his head without looking over.

“Not like this,” Stiles repeated, and Derek rolled his eyes.

“I promise, not like this,” he replied. “Just trust me, Stiles. Let go of your hold on me and focus, because if you kill yourself from exhaustion, I will come after you so I can drag you back and kill you myself.”

“You would, too,” Stiles huffed, and Scott saw Derek shake himself, apparently also able to move again.

“So sweet,” Peter mocked, eyes turning purple as he regarded Derek. “You’ve stolen everything from me, nephew, the Hale Alpha powers, the Volkov emissary, it all should have been mine!”

“Scott!” Derek barked, and Scott jumped, turning indecisively toward Isaac.
“You’re my Alpha,” Isaac said simply. “I’ll honor whatever choice you make, whatever happens.”

“And if I’m not a wolf anymore?” Scott couldn’t help asking.

Isaac laughed, shifting slightly to better support Ethan, who looked absolutely wrecked, a stab wound to his stomach bleeding out sluggishly. “You think that’s why Allie and I love you?” he demanded. “You’re ours, wolf or human.”

Isaac had never said it before, and the words slid through Scott, white hot and perfect. “If you’ll have me,” Ethan winced as Isaac set him down. “I’d have you for my Alpha. You’re a good wolf.”

“We can share the territory,” Derek reminded him, shrugging when Scott couldn’t stop himself from shooting him a surprised look at his opinion. “I told you when we met, we’re brothers. I meant it, if you’ll accept it.”

“Touching,” Peter grinned, shoulders actually rising from the stone as he fought this time. “I don’t think Stiles can hold me long enough for you to cut my throat. Come on, Stiles, finish yourself off for me. I won’t even be mad that I never got to sink my fangs into your throat.”

Stiles snarled, clearly ignoring the blood that was now starting to slip from his ears, and Derek stepped up behind him, bracing him, eyes flaring bright blue, flickering red occasionally as his power bolstered Stiles. “You’re not supposed to do this alone, idiot,” Derek reminded him, and Scott sighed with relief as Stiles seemed to steady again.

He stared down the dagger, trying to remember being human, the struggling to breathe, the bench warming, the video game marathons and quiet normalcy. Being normal. Weighed them against the terror he felt from hunters, the heavy mantle of the wolf, of being an Alpha. His eyes flared red, then he sighed, stepping back. “I don’t want a cure anymore,” he told Stiles, shrugging. “I think… I think I’m good the way I am.”

His wolf curled, content, and with both of them in sync, functioning as one, the darkness shrank rapidly, contained to the tiniest buzz, finally held tightly in check, where it belonged. He nodded, suddenly feeling the confidence of his decision.

Peter laughed, bitter and mocking. “The True Alpha isn’t capable of killing, keeps his claws oh so clean,” he said scornfully. “Derek gave his word, so that just leaves you, Stiles. And you’re no killer.”
Stiles stepped in close, lowering his head so Peter could hear him clearly, and Scott knew, if he hadn’t had an Alpha’s hearing, he’d have missed the quiet, grim words. “I’ve considered myself a killer since I was ten years old.” The knife moved quick and certain, neatly slitting Peter’s throat, glowing green as the power surged into the wound, preventing it from healing.

Peter’s eyes flared purple once more, then the room rocked as the purple light fled from his eyes and exploded out from the room, bright and blinding everyone, the warehouse shuddering before silence filled the room once more.

Scott looked to Stiles, but Derek was already there, gently easing the dagger out of his hand and locking his own fingers in place, and unlike Scott, if he felt any revulsion for what he’d just seen Stiles do, it was too well hidden for even Scott to find. He turned away, feeling like he needed to give them that token of privacy, and looked to his betas instead.

“Where’s Aiden?” Scott asked, and Ethan shook his head, eyes dropping. Scott felt his stomach drop as he registered just how broken Ethan looked and smelled in that moment, even heavier than the stink of the enchantment devouring him from the stab wound in his side.

“I finished the were-tiger,” Isaac reported softly. “Too late to help Aiden though. Ethan took out Ms Kelly but…”

“Can’t feel anything below the wound,” Ethan’s words slurred as he forced his head back up to look at Scott. “She had a magic blade. Wolfsbane, I think.”

“Okay,” Stiles said, nodding to Scott as he and Derek stepped up beside him. “Lydia has something I whipped up earlier to help, if you’ll let me treat your beta?”

The formal deference threw Scott, rocking him to the core. He saw Stiles pause, looking uncertainly down at his own fingers, sticky with blood and streaks of clay. He swallowed hard, reaching out and taking the messy hand in his own. “You’re my brother, you never need permission to help my pack,” he said softly. He knew he’d done well when Derek’s too tense frame relaxed.

“I’ll take Peter’s body, Chris has a plan for cremating it with Gerard’s tonight,” Derek said wearily. “Scott, if you can carry Ethan back out, we’ll send Cora and Jackson back for Aiden’s body.”

Stiles, meanwhile, finally left the support of Derek’s arms, weary but still standing, and walked back
down the stairs from the altar to the edge of the room. The Qilin watched him approach warily. “Why join with Peter?” he asked quietly, and she stood upright, actually taller than him, looking down at him.

“I am the last of my kind,” she reminded him. “There are many who would want me dead. Peter stopped one such hunter, and I owed him my boon.”

“You’re more vulnerable now, this alliance cost you far too much,” Stiles observed, glancing pointedly at her maimed arm.

“And you will offer your aid, as long as I relinquish all claim to your cuckoo,” she concluded, amending it when he glared. “To Danny.” She nodded, offering the maimed hand out, palm up to Stiles. He reached across, taking it with his opposite hand. “I relinquish all claim to Danny in exchange for the boon of Emissary Stilinski.”

Light flared between them, and Derek was across the room before Stiles could stumble, glaring. “Enough magic,” he growled lowly, warning Stiles.

“We’re done now,” Stiles agreed, nodding to the Qilin. “M’lady.”

“I sincerely hope never to see any of you again,” she sniffed, melting into the shadows as she stalked away.

“Should we warn everyone outside?” Scott asked, and Stiles smiled weakly, rubbing his arm absently. His wrist was smudged with what Scott had first taken for a bruise, but realized a moment later was the shape of a unicorn’s horn, burned in with the same stinking scent of burned mountain ash. The dagger that had been above it had vanished, and other than some smudged bits of blood, no trace of the wounds his claws had made remained either.

“They’ll never spot her,” he told Scott. “And let’s just be grateful we dodged that bullet. She could have razed this town, and none of us could have stopped her.”

Scott decided not to question it, instead moving to help Ethan.
It was well after noon when Stiles finally stirred, shifting in Derek’s arms, and then frowning as he realized where he was. “Hey,” Stiles murmured, blearily confused and hopelessly adorable. “Dad let you stay?”

Derek huffed, tightening his grip for a moment. “Your dad was shanghaied by Chris to help procure your ashes. I was *ordered* to stay.”

“I’m not going to go get into trouble,” Stiles scowled, and Derek frowned back at him.

“Once we were done with clean up, you passed out,” Derek replied. “Scott’s mom had to come and check you out.”

“Did I pass?” Stiles asked, wondering why Derek looked so upset.

“Exhaustion, she thought,” he said, and Stiles shrugged.

“Figured that was all,” he admitted, and Derek’s jaw dropped.

“All?” he growled. “You drained your magic to the point you passed out! Your pulse was so low I had to keep my ear to your chest all night to be sure you were still here! Dammit, Stiles, why would you—”

“My job is to protect you,” Stiles broke in, narrowing his eyes at Derek. “To protect our pack. Sometimes that’s going to involve pushing myself up to the brink. You have to trust me to know my own limits.”

“And you have to trust me to help you, to not just push to the limits recklessly, but to take my strength when you need it,” Derek snapped back, and Stiles flinched, unable to stop himself. “What?”

“I…” Stiles shuddered when Derek pulled him closer, nudging his nose at Stiles’ throat and softly nuzzling there. “I don’t want to be another person in your life using you, using your strength for my own purposes,” he admitted quietly.
Derek froze for a moment, but then very deliberately repeated the nuzzling motion. “You aren’t,” he swore softly. “We’re going to be partners, right?”

“I want that,” Stiles agreed easily.

“So we start here and now,” Derek said. “I trust you to make the decisions when you need to.”

“Like with the Nemeton?” Stiles couldn’t help asking, and Derek nodded. “And I tell you when I can’t make you promises instead of making them when I know I shouldn’t?”

“And you tell me when your crazy ass plan will take you to the brink, so you can have me ready to support you,” Derek countered.

“And you trust me,” Stiles finished softly, even though he knew it didn’t need said. “And I trust you.”

“I trust you, and you trust me,” Derek agreed, groaning as Stiles wiggled so he could lay against Derek’s chest, snuggling in to the wolf’s warmth. “Did you think Scott was going to try for the cure?” he asked Stiles, and Stiles snorted.

“No, Peter was right about that,” Stiles admitted. “Scott will never be a killer. Even if he had still wanted the cure. But I wanted him to get that point for himself, to learn that he does want what the wolf gives him.”

“He thinks it helped him finally figure out how to control the darkness and stop fighting himself,” Derek told Stiles, who smiled to himself.

“Good,” he replied. “Now he can also stop blaming you for killing Peter the first time.”

They were quiet for a long time, then Stiles stirred slightly. “Beacon Hills is going to need both you and Scott, you know. The Alpha who wants to save people and the one who knows you can’t save some people. Balance.”
“I know,” Derek sighed, his arms tightening around Stiles for a moment. “And… I think as long as I have you, I can make my peace with it.”

“We should get up,” Stiles remarked, but made no effort toward heading to the shower. “I still need to finish my deal with the Nemeton today.”

“We’ve got some time,” Derek replied, not moving either.

Danny woke slowly, aware almost immediately that the bed underneath him was nowhere near as comfortable as his own or the beds at Derek’s. This, more than any desire to move, prompted him to open his eyes.

There was an IV line snaking out from his hand, and that reminded him that Melissa had taken one look at his head wound the night before and sent him straight to the hospital for stitches and a concussion watch. He rotated his hand uncomfortably around the IV, then looked to the other side of the bed, unsurprised to see Delia asleep in one of the uncomfortable plastic chairs. What was surprising was that Ethan was curled in the other, also asleep.

The door opened softly, and Melissa stepped in, smiling when she saw Danny awake. “He’s been there ever since we came in last night,” she told him softly.

“What are we telling everyone?” Danny asked, touching the bandage on his forehead gently.

“Car crash,” Melissa told him. “You were in the front seat, Aiden was driving. Ethan was lucky, sitting in the back, he didn’t get hurt, but you banged your head up pretty badly.”

“Why did they say Aiden was…” Danny sucked in a breath as he realized. “Aiden didn’t make it out, did he?”

“Hey,” Ethan stirred, checking Danny over immediately. “S’ok, he went down fighting, was what he wanted, really,” Ethan admitted, shrugging. His face was too pale, mouth pulled down at the corners even though he tried to smile, and Danny knew nothing was okay. “Are you okay?”
“My head’s hard enough to take a few blows,” Danny scoffed, but Melissa glared.

“Yeah, how much of last night do you remember?” she asked, and Danny winced, shrugging.

“It’s a pretty big mess up here,” he admitted. “After Cora got me out and the adrenaline crash, it’s pretty much a blur. Did we win?”

“Yeah, we won,” Melissa said, looking fond as she adjusted his IV. “I need to let Derek and Stiles know you’re awake.”

“Thanks,” he told her. He fell silent when she left, uncertain what to say to Ethan. As big a mess as his head was, his heart was an even bigger jumble.

“I’m... I’m not leaving,” Ethan stammered awkwardly, and Danny frowned, struggling to sit up. Ethan was on his feet and adjusting the bed instantly, helping Danny sit against his pillows. “I mean, I know I was planning to leave, that Aiden wanted to but… I can’t. I need pack.”

Danny nodded, even though his mind was reeling. “I don’t think Derek,” he started to say, and Ethan shook his head.

“I couldn’t ask him for a second chance, not with what I did,” Ethan agreed, sighing. “But Scott’s agreed to give me a second chance, a real one, as part of his pack.”

“Oh,” Danny replied dumbly. How did being in different packs work anyway, he wondered, frowning, trying to figure out when he’d decided he might want to give Ethan a second chance too.

“And I’m not ready for it yet,” Ethan continued, looking pained. “But… our packs are going to be allied… and maybe… maybe you’d give me a second chance too?”

“Maybe,” Danny breathed, tension suddenly easing out of his body. He didn’t have to decide now. He just had to leave the door open to the possibility. “Are you okay?”

Ethan looked one breath away from completely shattering as he shook his head, and Danny held out a hand, at least able to offer that much.
“Mr. Argent?” The young man at the morgue looked awkward as he set a silver box of ashes on the counter. “I need someone to sign off…”

Chris sighed, lifting his head from his hands, but the Sheriff clapped a firm hand on his shoulder, keeping him seated. “I’ve got it, Chris,” he said softly. Chris tilted his head, watching as the sheriff signed out for the box that contained not only Gerard’s ashes, but Peter’s as well. The morgue had been just as easy to break into as the Sheriff predicted, and Chris couldn’t say if he was more horrified or relieved.

“All done?” he asked, surprised how hoarse his voice was, when the sheriff rejoined him.

“It’s taken care of,” the sheriff agreed. “I’ve also arranged for the urn to be interred in your family plot, even if the ashes won’t be there,” he told the other man, looking awkward.

Chris hadn’t thought it possible for his throat to close up any further, but it did. “Thank you,” he managed, barely breathing the words, but it was apparently enough.

“You know, you don’t have to come with,” John said, as they stepped out into the bright daylight. John helped himself to the keys to Chris’s SUV, tugging them right out of his jacket packet, as though Chris wasn’t dangerous, as though reaching in without asking wasn’t a bad idea. Chris stared at John for a moment, then sighed, deciding that as far as the sheriff was concerned, apparently he wasn’t. He wasn’t sure what had happened to his own defenses, to let the man touch and take without so much as a twitch, but it was interesting.

“I need to see it all done, another of the horrible scars my family left on the face of this town healing,” he admitted, settling into the passenger seat. “I’ll force myself through being there when Derek finally decides to tear down the old Hale house and rebuilds, too,” he continued. “I’m capable of terrible things, John. I’ll only remember where to draw the line if you and Melissa and Allison keep reminding me. I don’t want to let myself forget.”

“You know, we are more than just the sum of our families,” John said, offering a half smile. “I’m not sure how I can help, but I’ll be glad to do my part as well.”

Chris couldn’t help himself, and quirked a suggestive eyebrow at the Sheriff, drawing a slight groan
and eye roll from his friend.

Derek pulled the Camaro in behind Scott and Isaac’s bikes, turning off the engine and climbing out, nodding to Scott.

“You sure this can’t wait a couple days?” Scott called over to Stiles, who Derek had to agree still looked pale.

“Relax, it’s a bit of my blood, a tiny bit of magic from the three of us, and the rest is all the tree’s magic,” Stiles waved it off with a careless gesture. “The Nemeton won’t wait for us to rest and be ready, Scott. It needs to be done.”

“And you think this will help, make it stop drawing in the dark creatures?” Isaac asked skeptically, and Derek bit down the urge to glare at Isaac. The beta’s suspicion of Stiles seemed to stem from rivalry for Scott’s friendship more than a genuine lack of faith, but it still made Derek want to snap and snarl till the beta remembered his place, which as a beta, should be lower than Stiles within a pack. But Isaac wasn’t his pack anymore, and Scott didn’t have a hierarchy, acting more like a democracy than the traditions his pack still wove together instinctively.

“There are no guarantees with this, except that not doing it ensures that the Nemeton will continue to draw in darkness,” Stiles replied coolly, linking his fingers with Derek’s as though he could sense the Alpha’s need for a calming connection. “And the status quo isn’t exactly doing us any favors. For Allison’s sake, you should be in favor of this.”

“As long as it works,” Isaac replied, and Scott sighed, nudging Isaac gently.

“Enough, we decided this already,” he chided Isaac gently, and Isaac nodded, sighing.

Derek was prevented from saying anything by the Agents’ large black SUV pulling in behind the other vehicles, the sheriff surprisingly sliding out from behind the wheel a moment later. “We all set?” Derek asked, and Chris nodded, holding a large silver canister up as he slid out of the SUV.

“Was easier than I thought to get Peter’s body in with Gerard’s,” he admitted. “We fudged the weight on the intake forms, so nothing was questioned on the other side.”
“There’s a bit of a trail if someone is really digging for it, but it’s as buried as it can be,” the sheriff confirmed, squinting at Stiles. “You okay, kid?”

“Tired,” Stiles admitted, shrugging. “Ready to be done. The magic in the tree tattoo is starting to get uncomfortable now that the ashes are here.”

Uncomfortable was probably an understatement from the chemo-signals Stiles was putting off, but Derek decided to keep his mouth shut and just squeeze Stiles’ fingers a little tighter in a silent offer of support. He was mildly surprised when there was a slight answering tug from Stiles’ magic, drawing on his strength as he’d promised to do, but it made his lips quirk upward in an almost smile that earned a sideways look from both Argent and the Sheriff.

The walk to the Nemeton seemed shorter than ever, and not for the first time, Derek wondered about how the mood of the tree influenced the Preserve around it, how much of the Nemeton power really had anything to do with the physical tree itself and if it wasn’t more about the whole territory and all the ley lines rotating around this point. If he was right, the tree itself was just the control switch. The clearing was still, but not uncomfortably heavy with a smothering quality to the air. Instead it seemed as though everything around was holding its breath, waiting for something new and exciting.

“Mr. Argent, the ashes need to cover the cut surface of the tree, spill it down into the cracks as much as possible,” Stiles said softly, stepping up so his feet were surrounded by the exposed roots.

Argent leaned in as well, stepping up across from Stiles and spilling the ashes slowly over the stump, paying close attention to where the remains of the tree had split and cracked from stress and weather in the years since Gerard had cut it down. “Good?” he asked, hesitating when the last of the ashes spilled out of the canister.

“Yeah,” Stiles swallowed, grimacing a little. “It’s perfect, but I think you and Dad and Isaac should get back, toward the tree line. The power’s getting… intense.”

Derek stepped up closer, touching Stiles’ left elbow gently, while Scott instinctive moved in closer on his opposite side. Argent stepped back, holding onto the Sheriff’s arm a little as he enforced Stiles’ order for them to move back. “What do you need?” Derek asked softly, and Stiles lifted Derek’s fingers softly.

“Claws,” he murmured, and Derek focused, just changing his hand in Stiles’, though his eyes flared
as he did. Stiles smiled softly, nodding as he admired the werewolf’s control.

“You’re going to be amazing,” he said softly, then took Derek’s finger and sliced a neat long cut from the tip of the branches to the ends of the roots burned into the skin of his forearm, a long line of blood welling up behind it. Derek didn’t fight it, trusting Stiles to control the depth and length for himself. Scott made a soft noise of sympathy, but flexed out his own claws when Stiles beckoned.

“Don’t worry, buddy, I saved the short cut for you this time,” Stiles said, grinning at Scott’s grimace.

The cut was short, bisecting the tree in a precise mirror of the blow that had cut down the tree. Stiles held his arm out over the tree. It wasn’t just blood that poured down and sealed long lines over the lines of the cracks in the stump, but the ink and ash were running off his skin as well. The wounds fortunately were healing over as well, Derek noticed, then realized he had been paying too much attention to the wounds on Stiles’ arm and almost hadn’t noticed the light, reddish and bloody, starting to pulse from the stump as it drank in the ashes and magic.

The air seemed to be compressing around them, the Nemeton sucking in a massive amount of power. Derek barely processed his awareness that the power would be blowing back out before he had Stiles wrapped in his arms and pressed to the ground.

The power was a roar of noise and light above their heads, deafening and blinding, leaving Derek breathless. Stiles had buried his face into Derek’s neck, making a soft noise of wonder that almost got drowned out by the roar above them. Just as suddenly, the roar ended, and the clearing around them abruptly came to life.

Derek lifted his head in surprise when the sound of birdsong started, the clearing no longer preternaturally silent. “Whoa,” Stiles murmured, sitting up but not leaving the circle of Derek’s arms. “Oh my god.” Derek couldn’t help silently repeating the sentiment.

The stump of the Nemeton was gone.

In its place, a young oak tree—17 years old, if Derek were going to guess—stood tall, leaves sprouting and reaching high above his head. The clearing hummed with soft energy, a buzz of life and magic seeping into the ground and forest around them.

“What?” Scott shook his head, obviously having taken the brunt of the blast, his werewolf abilities healing a rather impressive bruise on the side of his head.
“Dad?” Stiles scrambled up, looking over to the tree line, where Chris Argent was slowly letting go of where he’d been bracing the sheriff in his arms, probably having knocked him down the way Derek had done for Stiles. Isaac looked stunned a few feet away from them, but was getting to his feet slowly.

“I’m good,” the sheriff remarked, wincing as he stood, letting Chris help him up. He squinted, then shot Stiles a look. “Did you just regrow a tree?”

“I had no idea that was going to happen,” Stiles said immediately, but he was grinning. “But how cool is that?”

“You’re feeling better,” Derek observed, taking in Stiles’ bright smile and healthy flush.

“Carrying the Nemeton’s magic, it wasn’t good,” he admitted, shuddering a little theatrically. “And I think it maybe gave me a boost once it was done with the whole grow new limbs thing. Ha, limbs. Tree limbs.”

Derek smirked, Stiles’ nonsense actually reassuring. “The darkness?” he asked, and Scott and Stiles both frowned, hands moving in sync to their chests, rubbing oddly at their breastbones.

“There, but lighter, controllable,” Stiles observed. “Not so overwhelming.”

“Yeah,” Scott agreed, stretching and tilting his head weirdly. “And I think… huh.”

He slipped his shirt off, and Argent coughed, surprised. “Sorry, maybe turn away,” Scott said, flushing brightly before he started on his belt.

“What are you doing?” Isaac asked, but no sooner had Scott shucked his jeans and boxers than his form was bending and twisting rapidly before them, a tawny wolf, even larger than his mother had been, with deep ruby eyes, was chasing its own tail, yipping in excitement as it turned.

“Well, that just happened,” Stiles blinked, looking just as stunned.
“That’s…” Argent trailed off, looking helplessly at Derek.

“Did I know he could do that?” the sheriff asked, and Stiles laughed.

“He didn’t know he could do it,” Stiles replied, shrugging. “You going for a run, buddy?” he asked, and Scott yipped, jumping up and knocking Stiles back into Derek playfully.

“Lick me and I’ll hex your fur off,” Stiles said, shoving back playfully before he leaned down and scooped Scott’s clothes up into a bundle and tossed them at Isaac. Isaac caught them, scowling slightly.

“Hey, we’re getting out of here before we get a second show,” Stiles quipped easily as Scott took off, bounding away into the preserve. “You don’t mind it.”

Isaac shot Stiles a dirty look, glaring pointedly at Argent. “You kids aren’t as subtle as you think,” Argent remarked, giving Isaac a pained look. “I expect you both for dinner Friday night.”

Isaac went pale, and Derek tried not to enjoy the way it made Stiles snicker as they started walking up the path toward the cars with his dad and Chris. “I’m not sure what you’re laughing at,” the sheriff remarked, giving Derek a sideways look. “I expect Derek over for dinner once a week from now on.”

“I’m good with that,” Stiles replied cheerfully, shrugging off Derek’s scowl. “Cheer up, Sourwolf, you survived his weapons tour, it’s all uphill from here.”

“Uh huh,” the Sheriff said skeptically. “When you go back to our place, you’ll find an application for the police academy on the table, Derek. I expect it filled out this week.”

Derek mumbled something, he wasn’t sure what he actually said, under his breath, hoping it sounded like agreement, surprised when the sheriff walked toward Argent’s SUV instead of stopping at the Toyota with them. “I’m going with Chris over to his apartment,” the sheriff told Stiles, who blinking, also surprised.

“You’re going to trust me at home alone with Derek?” he asked, making Derek’s flush, the tips of his ears burning. Argent started chuckling, obviously amused.
“Kid, I was up half the night with your nightmares last night,” his dad remarked, walking back closer to his son. “I borrowed some of your books to try and bore myself to sleep and I learned something interesting. His eyes turn red before you’re 18, and we’ll have words.”

“Oh my god,” Stiles burst out, but allowed his dad to pull him into a tight hug.

“I’m so proud of you,” the sheriff whispered, and Stiles’ grip tightened, holding onto the hug for a long moment.

“Love you,” Stiles muttered, and the sheriff muttered it back before they parted, the sheriff tossing a last warning look at Derek.

“Your dad won’t be home tonight,” Chris called over to them before the two older men closed the SUV doors, and Stiles frowned.

“Uh, I thought he was dating Melissa,” Stiles said, looking over at Derek.

“He is,” Derek confirmed, sighing.

“But…” he trailed off, looking back at the departing SUV. “Uh… so… should I be worried about my dad?”

“Yeah, Argent definitely meant—” Derek started to say, but Stiles waved him off.

“Him being a horny bastard doesn’t surprise me somehow,” Stiles retorted crudely. “Do I need to be worried about my dad?”

“Oh yeah,” Derek confirmed, enjoying the face Stiles made at that.

“Take me home and fix my brain, you just broke it,” Stiles declared, tossing Derek his keys.
“I can do that,” Derek agreed.

“We have one more stop to make before we go home,” Stiles said, biting his lip. “And I want your permission to tell a lie.”

Danny sat up when they came in, giving Stiles and Derek a crooked smile. “You missed Delia,” he said. “She wanted to thank you.”

“Way too much of that going on,” Stiles shuddered in mock horror before flopping into one of the plastic chairs and dropping his bag on the bed. “We ran into Ethan on his way out.” Danny’s face flushed lightly, and Stiles grinned. “Figured,” he remarked. “Just be careful, you have a gift for picking assholes, and I don’t really think he’s changed.”

“We’re not back together,” Danny admitted, biting his lip. “He’s really messed up after Aiden, and I’m… look, the Qilin said some things. And I’m…”

“A bit messed up over it?” Stiles asked, shrugging when Derek scowled at his flippancy.

“How can you joke about it?” Danny burst out. “What if she was right? What if someday a switch in me gets flipped, and I’m not me anymore?”

Okay, first off, that’s not how it works,” Stiles said, as Derek took a seat by Danny’s knee, a soothing hand on Danny’s knee a moment later. “If it were true, which it’s not, the only thing that would happen is that one day you’d become aware of it, and you’d suddenly have a lot of power at your fingertips. And you’d have me and Derek and the rest of our pack to figure out how to deal with it. You’ve been you, this you, your whole life. Changelings are exchanged in the first few days after they’re born. But it won’t happen.”

“How can you be sure?” Danny demanded.

“Because I’m magic, and I can feel it in Lydia and I could feel it in Devine, Morrell, Deaton… but you feel human,” Stiles reassured him. “And if that’s not enough, I whipped up the potion Devine taught me for detecting faeries.”
“I thought… the Qilin said…” Danny stammered, watching as Stiles opened his bag and pulled out a small container of a clear liquid.

“The Qilin was very old,” Stiles said, shrugging. “And Devine’s vendetta against the fae is new. More things in heaven and earth, but I’ve seen this work, Danny.”

“What do you need?” Danny asked.

“Finger,” Stiles beckoned, holding up a finger stick he’d stolen off a nurse’s cart on their way in. Danny rolled his eyes but offered his finger to Stiles, who made quick work of pricking the skin and drawing a drop of blood to the surface. He then unscrewed the jar, turning Danny’s finger so a fat drop of blood slid down into the container. He let go of Danny’s finger, recapping the jar and shaking violently. The liquid stained faintly pink but otherwise didn’t react.

“So?” Danny asked, and Derek was the one to smile, hand tightening a little on Danny’s knee.

“Human,” Derek told him. “It’d turn green if you were fae.”

“Okay,” Danny sighed, suddenly deflating completely in relief.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Stiles swooped in, tugging Danny into a hug. “Swear I’m not hitting on you,” he mumbled, making Danny laugh at the reminder of their conversation over a month ago.

“Alpha’d kill me if you did,” Danny replied, looking over Stiles’ shoulder at Derek, who looked wryly amused.

Stiles scooped the jar up again when they left, waiting until they reached the parking lot. He handed the jar to Derek, then offered him a small vial. “Your call,” he told the werewolf. “Just add two drops to find out.”

Derek regarded the jar, then tossed it several meters away into an open dumpster. “Show off,” Stiles grumbled, tucking the vial away.
“Like you said,” Derek remarked, taking Stiles’ hand in his own. “If anything ever happens, we’ll be there for him, so what’s it matter? I know what I need to, and he’s got his peace of mind.”

“Derek Hale, that was suspiciously close to a declaration of trust,” Stiles teased him. “Quick, take me home, I feel the urge to reward you with an abundance of borderline sexual activity.”

“Brat,” Derek replied, but still kissed him before opening the Toyota door for him.

-6-

Cora, Jackson, Lydia, and Danny found them relaxing on the front porch swing at Stiles’ house as the sun was sinking below the horizon. “You out AMA?” Derek growled at Danny, who held up his hands in a picture of innocence.

“Hate to be the one looking for a serious discussion, but what’s the plan now?” Jackson asked, sprawling across the porch, leaning on a post so his feet sprawled back toward the swing. Cora perched on the rail with an easy grace. “Cora and I have return flights to London on Sunday.”

Derek looked to his sister, who shrugged. “I should maybe get a degree?” she half asked, and Derek nodded, looking down to where Stiles was still snuggled to his chest.

“I still want to go to London when I graduate, get a real degree and education in magic,” Stiles replied to the unasked question. “Scott doesn’t plan on leaving Beacon Hills, community college probably, then the vet tech school over in Woodbridge. We have a year and a half to make sure the territory is stable enough for his pack to hold alone for four or five years while we study.”

“And Cora and I could go back to school now?” Jackson asked hopefully, and Derek looked at his sister once again.

“Yes, we can’t leave Jackson on his own,” Cora replied dryly. “He’s too little and cute, the other wolves might pick on him.” Cora was grinning, and Derek could tell she enjoyed having a younger brother in Jackson.

“Fuck you,” Jackson scowled back, the pair making faces at each other for a moment.
“Danny?” Derek asked, and Danny shrugged. He was leaning on the rail across from Derek and Stiles, looking thoughtful, but restless.

“I’ve got the grades to go anywhere,” he said. “I’m thinking London sounds good, I want to travel.”

Derek looked to Lydia, who rolled her eyes. “I’m not joining either pack,” she informed him, planting her hands on her hips. “The way I see it, a banshee isn’t really a pack creature, but Beacon Hills is my territory too. So I’ll be a go between for the packs, but independent. And I’m going to Stanford or MIT, whoever coughs up the better package. And once I have my PhD, I can pursue advanced mathematics wherever I chose. And I will win a Fields Medal before I turn 40,” she informed Stiles who was shaking with soft laughter against Derek’s chest.

“Delia’s not sure how she feels about packs, but she really wants to learn,” Danny put in. “Maybe you can help her out?” he asked Lydia.

“Been a while since I had a good minion,” Lydia shrugged, although her lips were curling in a pure and pleased smile. “Why not?”

“You’re perfect, Lyds,” Stiles informed her once he’d stopped laughing. “Far too good for Jackson, but since we’re keeping him, I suppose you can keep him too.”

“Fuck you, Stilinski,” Jackson jumped in, but there was no heat in the words. As though Jackson’s joke had broken the last doubts, Lydia flounced down on Stiles’ legs and tossed her own over Derek’s lap, while Cora helped Danny up to perch on the porch railing, laughing as it took several tries for his human coordination to achieve the balance her werewolf grace had managed with ease.

Derek stayed quiet, watching his pack talk and laugh, but no one seemed to mind his contented silence, simply accepting it and beaming back at him whenever they coaxed a grin out of him. “Pack,” Stiles whispered softly, and Derek nodded, dropping a kiss softly on the top of the emissary’s head.

-6-
Chapter End Notes

On screen death of Peter Hale, off screen death of Aiden.

Just the epilogue left!
Stiles lit the final wand of incense, taking a quick inventory of the room. It was dim and golden, flickering candles in a line along the south wall of the room tossed off the light that filled the newly restored space, still empty and only the subflooring in, which had made it the perfect space for him to paint all the symbols for the ritual on. The south wall was the most finished, the paneling in place, and a large black wire spiral frame attached over it. The ever widening spiral covered most of the wall, and every few feet on the wire was a candleholder. All the candles were lit for the ritual Stiles was preparing.

Long, thin rails of PVC pipes lined the other three sides of the room as well— to the west an open half pipe of water. Eventually, Stiles had plans to install a fountain on the wall.

The pipe to the east had thin holes bored in, which Stiles had used to hold the sticks of incense he’d just finished igniting. The fourth and final pipe had been pulled in from the garden, part of the makeshift herb garden Stiles had started and the soil filled half pipe was dotted with small, growing herbs making their way free of the soil. Eventually he would turn these walls into permanent elemental displays as well, but for tonight, the room was complete enough.

The floor was painted with all sorts of colors and symbols, all of which Stiles had carefully planned out around the large mat in the center of the room, where Derek sat nude and waiting for him. Once the ritual was done, Derek would finish laying the hardwood floors on the first floor of the rebuilt Hale house over the top of the design. This space was theirs for ritual and magic, permanently dedicated for only that purpose, and it still thrilled Stiles every time he remembered Derek had built it with them in mind.

“Last chance to back out,” Stiles warned Derek, as he removed his robe, folding it and dropping it on top of the one Derek had recently shed.

“Pretty sure we’re well past that,” Derek replied dryly, though his eyes were fond and soft. Stiles couldn’t help leaning down and pressing a soft kiss to the werewolf’s lips, before kneeling next to
the small altar he’d set up alongside the mat. They didn’t need much for this ritual, just the blade that sat on top of a black cloth.

Despite their intentions to ring in Stiles’ 18th birthday with a thorough and practical examination of every sexual fantasy Stiles or Derek had come up with during the past six months, Stiles had been the one to decide to hold off a little longer. His birthday had fallen the day after the full moon, so they’d waited another fourteen days, till now, the dark of the moon, for after the ritual that would bind them together as Alpha and Emissary. Stiles was fairly certain it would happen naturally after the ritual anyway – given the way the energy was building between them though, he’d be surprised if the ritual didn’t pull them together sexually to complete the bond.

“Give me your hand,” Stiles said, picking up his athame from the altar. He had given the peridot blade back to the Nemeton not long after Peter’s death. This one was one he’d had help forging himself, with a crisp black metal and garnets so deep a red only the occasional glint from the firelight turned them from black to burgundy.

Derek looked skeptical of the dagger still, but Stiles was certain he had prepared it so that it would mark Derek, cut and scar him the same as if he was a human. Ever so carefully, in the skin along the side of Derek’s wrist just below his thumb, Stiles used the knife to carve a thin infinity symbol.

“I, Gennadiy Volkov Stilinski, hereby pledge my allegiance to Alpha Derek Hale,” he said softly, tracing the symbol with the flat of the blade. “I choose the symbol of infinity, because my loyalty is infinite, my love is infinite, and my duty to the Hale pack is infinite.”

The words were traditional, for the most part, but in light of the poor decisions he’d seen Morrell make in the name of her oath, he’d sworn duty to the Hale pack, and not just the Alpha. It was the idea Deaton had planted in his mind just before his passing. Derek surprisingly had insisted on it as well, trusting that if he ever followed in his uncle or Deucalion’s footsteps, Stiles would stop him. Stiles, in turn, had extracted similar promises from his pack.

The blood in the thin slit of a wound hissed, bubbling slightly as it seared into Derek’s skin and marked him as permanently as any tattoo, a faint flush of burgundy blood color staying in the mark on his skin.

Stiles offered the hilt of the knife to Derek, who took it, then Stiles’ proffered arm, breathing a slow exhale before he could lower the sharp tip to Stiles’ skin. Stiles had expected Derek to trace a variation on his triskelion, but instead he cut a razor thin eight fold knot, symbol of a never ending path. “I, Derek Edward Hale, hereby pledge my allegiance to Emissary Gennadiy Stilinski,” he said, and Stiles smiled when his birth name slid flawlessly pronounced off of Derek’s tongue. “I choose the mark of the unending path in the hope that our journey together is unending, because my love in
unending, and my trust in unending.”

Just like it had with Derek, the blood burned itself into Stiles’ skin, marking him, but the color rose up like the smoke from the boiling wound, fine, ashy grey and the knot became a moonlight colored mark on Stiles’ wrist. Stiles looked up, smiling when red eyes glowed in the dim light back at him.

“This mark is my blood oath, and my loyalty I seal with a kiss,” Stiles said, and Derek echoed the words back quickly, breathlessly, before their mouths pressed together, Derek’s hot and hungry on his.

Stiles let Derek roll him backward, never breaking the kiss, hands roaming at his waist, the magic still rising and weaving between them. “You’re gonna have to… gonna have to be more,” Stiles gasped, arching and moaning when Derek deliberately trailed his fingers down Stiles’ sides, touch feather light. “It’s not sealing, the spell is still open.”

“I can feel it,” Derek agreed in a low rumble, one of his hands reaching for their robes and fumbling for the pocket. “I know you said… but I have to…you’re still okay with this?”

“Dammit, okay doesn’t even come close to how much I want this,” Stiles panted, pulling Derek down into a fast, sloppy kiss as he managed to finally extract the small tube of lubricant from the pocket of Stiles’ robes. “Hurry up,” he started to order the werewolf and lost any further complaints on a shout when Derek leaned down and swallowed down as much of Stiles’ cock as he could fit into his mouth. Stiles felt his eyes roll closed, pleasure and power crashing around him and all his focus pouring into that moment of hot, wet, slick, Derek… his thoughts jumbled and aligned, eyes flying open again when Derek slid a slick finger inside him, motion smooth and gentle compared to the needy noises Stiles realized were coming from him. Touch burned through him; in the six months they’d been together, they’d teased and watched, but always from a distance, always holding that last boundary in place to make certain they didn’t tip the power before they were ready.

One finger became two, and Stiles gasped, fighting the way his hips wanted to buck up into Derek’s mouth. “You won’t hurt me,” Derek murmured as he backed off, then coaxed a sharp cry from Stiles with a twist of his fingers. “Don’t hold back, Stiles.”

His head hit the mat with a resounding thud as Derek’s tongue slid down his cock and his fingers continued working him open in tandem. His eyes rolled back closed as Derek’s too hot mouth closed over the tip of his dick once more, the power rolling through his body and the sensations from Derek feeling like they just might split his body open, power ready to spill out through the cracks in his skin.
“Derek, god, fuck, ungh,” he choked out helplessly as Derek sucked him deeper, urging Stiles to start fucking his mouth even as he slid a third finger in. “Can’t… not like this,” he stammered, and that was enough to finally have Derek pulling back, tilting a curious eyebrow at Stiles.

“Waited too damn long to have you in me, you are not making me come like this,” Stiles snarled, tugging Derek up into a biting kiss, his furious energy making Derek snarl, gasping as he forced red eyes back to human.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Derek confessed, voice soft as he buried his face in Stiles’ neck.

“Trust me, trust yourself,” Stiles urged him, even as he hooked his ankles around Derek’s knees, tugging them closer together with determined intent. “I’m yours, and you’ll know how to control this, I swear it.”

Derek didn’t reply with words, instead simply raising his head into a soft kiss even as his hands came down to support Stiles’ hips, positioning himself carefully and slipping just the tip of his erection into Stiles. Stiles groaned, fighting the urge to slam forward and just take Derek, breathing carefully as Derek very slid inside, slow inch by slow inch.

Stiles opened his mouth, deepening the soft kiss once Derek’s hips brushed his ass, fully seated in him. “My Alpha,” he whispered when they broke apart, and Derek nodded, rocking his hips and drawing a wordless moan from Stiles.

“My emissary,” Derek replied, his hips beginning to move faster now, sliding in and out with a more confident rhythm. Stiles scrambled to wrap his hands behind Derek’s shoulders, fingernails scoring lines that quickly vanished in the werewolf’s skin. Derek thrust harder in response, cock now repeatedly nailing Stiles’ prostate and drawing little pleased cries from him with every thrust instead of teasing around it.

“Not going to last long,” Derek grunted helplessly, and Stiles shook his head, the power raging inside him throttling his words and keeping him from sharing the sentiment.

He caught Derek’s eye, holding his gaze for a long moment, then managed to choke out, “Don’t hold back.”

Derek’s eyes flared red, the power no longer able to be held back by him either, his thrusts now merciless, splitting Stiles open and allowing the power to feel like it could overwhelm them. Stiles’
hands flew to the ground, trying to ground his energy.

“Now, Derek,” he gasped, letting go of his tenuous hold on his control and power flaring out of him as he spilled his orgasm over his stomach, crying out helplessly at the pleasure swamping his body. He was dimly aware of Derek’s last few wild thrusts, but then overwhelmed by the second flare of power that tore through him, racing from Derek through his body and out his fingertips into the ground. The smoke from the incense braziers raced in a sudden burst of air out the window, the candles snuffing just as quickly and the ground rocking unsteadily under them. The room fell into deep darkness, and grew still for several moments.

Derek half collapsed, huffing out a weak groan, while Stiles laughed softly in surprise. “What the hell did we just do?” he slurred sleepily.

“Let’s hope it didn’t get Scott’s attention,” Derek chuckled back, hands sure as he slowly stroked Stiles’ arms, gently grounding them in his own way. “He’s insufferable when you get too flashy with the magic.”

Stiles could feel himself trembling slightly as Derek pulled out, only going far enough to find one of their robes and draw it up to gently wipe away the mess they had made. Stiles couldn’t see Derek’s face in the darkness, but the gentle touch along his face told him how to find Derek’s face for a soft kiss. “I’m gonna want to do that again, like really soon,” he informed Derek, letting the werewolf pull him in close, relaxing as Derek spooned him, resuming the gently stroking down Stiles’ sides as they calmed down.

“You’re still trembling,” Derek observed in a quiet rumble.

“I’ve never felt power like that,” he admitted, burrowing a little deeper into Derek, letting the Alpha ground him, the steady thrum of the other man’s heartbeat helping ease his trembling more. “And while you rocked my world too, I want to do it again, without the power making me feel like I’m about to go supernova. Just us.”

“Understood,” Derek rumbled in agreement. “And… me too.”

Stiles nuzzled at Derek’s shoulder sleepily, enjoying the quiet lassitude that had enveloped them. “It’s not just the Hale power,” Derek confessed, stretching out his fingers, looking to where they were linked with Stiles’ own. “I’m pretty sure it’s a lot more.”
“It is,” Stiles agreed, chuckling when Derek elbowed him and scowled. “Ow, look, all the power Peter stole… when I killed him, you should have inherited it.”

“But I didn’t,” Derek frowned, and Stiles rubbed soothing fingertips across his collar bone, knowing the soft way to ease Derek all too well.

“No, the Nemeton sort of held that power in trust, until we were ready,” Stiles explained. “Until you became a True Alpha.”

“I’m not a True Alpha,” Derek scowled. “I’ve killed and my power was bought with blood.”

“How do you know Scott’s was any different?” Stiles asked, shrugging. “Kali died just before Scott ascended, and she had no pack to inherit her powers. They had to go somewhere. So did the twins’, come to that. Conservation of energy applies, albeit loosely, Derek. And the definition of a True Alpha is simply an Alpha who rises through willpower, which you did. You held it down when it was called for, and when it was time, you took the step forward of your own free will.”

Derek looked pained, and Stiles huffed out a laugh. “I promise not to use the term in front of others,” Stiles swore, tone teasing even though he knew his face showed his solemnity.

“So I have Deucalion and Jennifer’s powers now?” Derek asked, ignoring the promise.

“Nope,” Stiles popped the p with a bit of exaggeration, then created a quick shower of sparks by waving his hand. “’Fraid you’re not the only one who leveled up on this one.”

Derek looked contrite, actually raising the fingers that had just created sparks to his lips for a soft kiss. “I’m sorry,” he said softly. “I know you don’t want her powers, don’t want to become anything like her.”

“Part of why the power was held in trust, by the territory and the Nemeton, is so that when it came to us, it’d be cleaned out, the taint as scrubbed away as the Nemeton could manage,” Stiles shrugged, even though his heart was pounding at Derek’s display of understanding. He levered himself up to straddle Derek, smiling. “How long till we can manage round two, do you think?” he asked, and Derek tugged him down into a rough kiss, teeth tugging lightly at his lower lip as they parted.

“As much as I like the idea,” Derek said, between quick presses of kisses. “Company’s coming.”
It took Stiles the space of two or three more kisses to properly process what Derek said. “Wait, who?” he asked, and Derek tilted his head, listening.

“Your Dad’s patrol car, pretty sure he’s got Lydia with him, Scott’s bike,” Derek reported back. “The big three.”

Stiles sighed, nodding toward the bag by the door. “Guess we better get dressed.”

They slid back into clothing, taking care to put on shoes before they headed back into the main part of the house, which was still fresh painted walls and unfinished floors. The back door was slightly ajar, so they headed toward it first, Derek frowning at the potential for damage from the mini-earthquake they’d apparently just caused. Chris Argent hadn’t wanted to work on the inside of the house, but had insisted on being part of the rebuilding, so he and the sheriff and Melissa had worked together to build the back semi-enclosed porch. It would be a shame if their power had done any damage to the gorgeous work the parents had done.

Stepping out, Stiles couldn’t see any sign of damage to the porch, but before he could sigh in relief, his eye caught on something further out. Behind the house, the yard had previously enjoyed the shade a barrier of a small overhanging cliff, about 15 feet tall, which had created a natural border to the woods about 50 yards back from the house. The overhang was now a waterfall, cascading down to a riven split in the earth, a stream that now wrapped the edge of the property, curving gently toward the front of the house.


“Come on,” Derek grumbled, taking his hand as they followed the stream to the front of the house. It wasn’t terribly deep, but burbled prettily, and Stiles had to smile, as it seemed like a rather nice addition to the Preserve.

“Guess it wasn’t really an earthquake,” Stiles observed, and Derek nodded, eyes following the ribbon of water further into the woods than Stiles could see.

“Looks like there’s a good sized pond about 300, maybe 400 yards in,” Derek told him. “And the stream continues out the other side.”
“Wonder where the source is,” Stiles mused, kneeling down to dip his hands into the creek. The water was surprisingly warm, almost too hot, and he sighed, relaxing his hands into it. “Ooh, god, that’s nice. Must be an underground hot spring, we’ll be making use of that pond soon,” he informed Derek, grinning.

The crunch of tires on the long gravel drive up to the house drew Stiles’ attention away from the brook. He waved at his dad as he climbed out of his cruiser, followed by a suspiciously smug looking Lydia. Scott kicked his bike stand into place, scowling as he removed his helmet.

“Do I want to ask what all this is about?” the sheriff asked, and Stiles grinned, broad and unrepentant. Lydia began giggling, eyes actually watering, and his dad sighed.

“She hasn’t really stopped since I picked her up,” his Dad said wearily.

“Earthquake?” Stiles tried as Scott joined them, and Lydia laughed harder.

“Earthquake?” his dad repeated, giving him a look that clearly said ‘stop fucking with me, kid’.

“Well, you’ll spin in that way, earthquake that exposed an existing underground hot spring?” Stiles tried, and if it was possible, Scott and his dad glared harder.

“Spin is great, now what happened?” his dad demanded.

“There… uh, was more of a power backlash than I expected from our… ritual,” Stiles admitted sheepishly. “I’ve never read about anything like this though.”

“The creek follows the territory line right through town,” Scott informed them, sighing. “No property damage, but I’m pretty glad we stuck to the preserve and park to create the dividing lines, or we’d have taken out major streets.”

Stiles winced, shrugging helplessly. “I really didn’t intend to do it,” he reminded them, and Scott’s face softened slightly. He perked up, looking to his dad. “Hey, does that mean this goes through our backyard?”
“Stiles, we have a pond in our backyard that looks suspiciously like an in-ground pool,” the sheriff replied, rolling his eyes.

“Should have gotten me a pool when I asked as a kid,” Stiles nodded, putting on his best mystical Deaton-esque voice. “Perhaps that would have avoided this.”

Derek tapped the back of his head at the same time as his dad gently slugged his arm. “Ow, hey,” he complained, looking to Lydia. “Any real damage? I assumed it was just localized out here.”

“No deaths, no major damage,” she confirmed, wiping her eyes and managing to put on a serious face in spite of the absolutely wicked sparkle in her eyes. “Only you could cause a natural disaster to announce you finally lost your virginity,” she added, smirking when the sheriff groaned and Scott held out his hand for a high five, which Stiles returned enthusiastically. “Is it all grounded?”

“We’re good,” Stiles confirmed, looking to Derek, who flared his eyes briefly, getting an acknowledging nod from Scott. “I really am sorry, Dad, I didn’t intend for there to be dramatics,” he added, scuffing his toe against the ground sheepishly.

“It’s fine,” his dad said gruffly, tugging him into a hug. “I’ll head in and do damage control if needed. Just remember to be home tomorrow night, you have school on Monday.” The last part was directed sternly in Derek’s direction, his dad all too aware that Derek would be more likely to insist than Stiles was to listen.

“I’ll let Danny know we need some city planning maps showing the underground spring,” Lydia put in, nodding to the sheriff. “If you’ll drop me off, Sheriff?”

When he nodded, Lydia leaned up and kissed Stiles cheek as they left, giggling again and ruffling his already messy hair. “Almost sorry not to know what I missed out on,” she remarked impishly, grinning in response to Derek’s soft growl. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” she called behind her.

“Doesn’t rule out much,” Stiles yelled back, and she waved before the Sheriff continued around the driveway loop and pulled back up the drive, taillights fading away into the Preserve.

Stiles turned back to Scott, who sighed helplessly, exasperation giving way to a reluctant grin. “Dude,” Scott said.
“I know,” Stiles replied, laughing a little.

“Okay, on that note, nice seeing you, Scott,” Derek broke in, and Stiles noticed for the first time just how red Derek’s neck and ears had become. “You can talk on Monday, when I’m not around.”

“Sorry, dude,” Stiles shrugged apologetically, letting Derek tug his hand back toward the house. “I have plans this weekend. Don’t you have a boyfriend of your own? Girlfriend? One of each?”

“We’re commandeering your backyard hotspring!” Scott called back, wiggling his eyebrows in a demented way.

“Whatever, got one of our own,” Stiles shot back, pointing off to the woods, before laughing as Derek pulled him into the house. “Oh my god, I swear I didn’t mean to announce it to the whole freakin’ town,” he gasped, relieved when Derek pinned him back to the door, kissing his fiercely.

“Guess it saves me the trouble of marking your neck,” Derek replied dryly.

“Objection,” Stiles said weakly. God, he loved when Derek left his neck half covered in hickeys. He opened his mouth to inform him of that fact, but what tumbled out instead was, “God, I love you, Derek.”

Derek froze, hand cupping Stiles’ throat and thumb softly running up Stiles’ jaw. “I know,” Derek managed to say, and Stiles groaned.

“You’re giving me Hans Solo?” he teased the werewolf, grinning and tugging him toward the stairs that lead up to the master bedroom where a mattress was in place. “Take me to bed, Geekwolf, I may just swoon!”

“You know I do too,” Derek said awkwardly, and Stiles tugged him into a short, soft kiss.


-E-
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