A Pulled Stitch

by denelian

Summary

There's an old saying, 'A stitch in time saves nine'
What if you change the stitch? How many can you save then?

Notes

This is my first fic on AO3. and my first fic in... years and years.
thanks to some encouragement from a couple pre-readers, i've decided it's not stupid or
boring or badly-written, and decided to post the first chapter. i will, if nothing else, end up
posting everything i've gotten finished.
Hopefully, people will like it enough that i actually finish the whole thing. ;)

Derek/Stiles is ENDGAME, guys. since the main fic starts when Stiles is *14*, please be
patient.
what'da'know, someone already set up Talia Hale/Sheriff Stilinski? i'm not as clever as i
thought, le sigh.
in this 'verse [set of 'verses, whatever] Derek is 2.5 years older than Stiles. Laura is 2 years
older than Derek. other ages have been adjusted just... because, i have no real reason to
have done so. but they just were that age? i dunno, sigh.

NOT Edited by anyone else -- if you see anything PLEASE point it out! if anyone wants to
beta/edit, please let me know [i tend to stick to being a beta/editor, and rarely write, so almost everyone i talk to? are primary writers. *shrug*

also: i can't seem to copy into Rich Text mode, which means if i want all my italics to stay, i have to manually add them. i had to manually add spaces between paragraphs, and that was a total pain; i’m much too lazy to seek out all the italics. so only the flash-back "interludes" are italics, because i’m LAZY. if anyone knows an easier way [or can tell me how to copy into the RTE...] i’m all ears. or rather, eyes for reading it.

EDIT: so, yeah, i didn't realize there was & as opposed / when it came to relationships. there will be greatness orchestrated by Lydia and Peter, but it's more of a "science buddies" sort of relationship. sorry for that confusion...

See the end of the work for more notes
August 20th, 2018

“Damn it, Derek, move!” Stiles pushed futilely at the growling werewolf in front of him. “I can't negotiate with someone I can't see.”

“You can't negotiate with someone who refuses to compromise, either.”

The woman currently being blocked from Stiles' view sniffed derisively. “I can compromise, cur. I merely see no need.”

“Whereas I see no need to –“

“Okay, let's just calm down, okay?” Stiles yells over whatever it is that Derek was trying to say. “Madam Oresk, what my Alpha means is that you have intruded upon our lands. We are not seeking hostilities, but are not afraid to protect what is ours.”

That derisive sniff sounds again. “Well, of course you protect what is yours.” She sounded begrudgingly impressed. “Still, was there any call for being forcibly abducted? What happened to manners?”

Stiles sighs. “I know, I know. And I can't apologize enough for that. But look at it from our point of view. We've had waves of invaders, for the past four years, we're a little hair-triggered.”

“I know. That's why I'm here. There has to be a better way.”

Derek stops growling, and Stiles perks up just a bit. “You have ideas on how we can stop dealing with this crap?”

“Just a few.” Stiles catches her chilly smile, because Derek had stepped slightly to the side.

“We'd love to discuss any ideas you have.”

Her smile grows. “This is my favorite. Tempest fugit!”

“No!” Stiles lunges in front of Derek, intercepting whatever the spell is.

“Don't kill her Derek!” Is all Stiles hears, before he goes dizzy and passes out.

August 20th, 2004

“You gonna wake up, cutey?”

Stiles blinks up at the – incredibly beautiful – woman above him. “Um. Maybe?”

She laughs, an infectious sound that hits Stiles with a weird feeling of deja vu. Still, he can't help smiling at the sound, wondering why she seems so familiar.

“I'd think a common burglar would stay awake during a heist, so you must be uncommon, no?”

“Burglar? I’m not a...” Stiles snaps his mouth closed, finally realizing he's awake, not dreaming.
His last memory was hearing Star shout at Derek, then the spell took over; obviously, it was a transportation spell of some sort. “I'm sorry, I don't know where I am.”

The woman grins again. “You're in my house.”

Stiles nods dumbly, then looks around.

Again, that feeling of déjà vu. Like he's been here before. He shakes it off. “It's a lovely house. Can you tell me where it is?”

She leans forward, nostrils flaring ever-so-slightly. “Get lost in a teleport?”

“Something like that.” Stiles shrugs. “Not my spell. I was with my Alpha and –“

“Stop.” The smile had disappeared from her face, leaving her looking rather... severe. “You're human, but you have an Alpha?”

“Yes, ma'am.” Stiles gives the half nod/half-turn of his head that he had been taught to show to friendly Alphas who weren't Derek. “We had been attempting negotiations with a sorceress who invaded our territory, when she cast... something, I’m not sure what, and I’m here.” He doesn't move his head, now that he's placed it correctly. “I'm Stiles. Stiles Stilinski.”

The woman flashes red eyes for a moment, and sniffs his neck. “You smell like Pack.”

“Yes, ma'am.” He says uncomfortable; it's not the most comfortable of positions. “I'm part of my pack.”

“No, Stiles – what kind of name is Stiles? – you smell like part of my Pack.”

“Uh...” Stiles can't think of anything to say to that.

“More, you smell... you almost smell like mate.”

“No, I’m Derek's mate.” Falls out of his mouth before he think.

The woman recoils as if slapped. “You're claiming to be my nine-year-old son's mate?”

Stiles widens his eyes. “No! Derek's twenty-three!”

“Now, Talia, you know that Derek isn't an uncommon name.”

All the blood drains from Stiles' face as he looks over at the man lounging in the doorway.

“Peter?”

The man straightens, and Talia gives Stiles an unreadable look. “You know me?”

“But you're not... Wait, you aren't creepy crazy. Wait – Talia? Talia Hale?”

“You've heard of me?”

“That crazy ass bitch!”

“Excuse me?” Talia's tone could freeze water.

“Not you, sorry! I mean the sorceress! This is gonna sound crazy, but what year is it?” Stiles shakes his head. “No, never mind, I can work it out; you just told me Derek's nine. She sent me
back in time fourteen years, and you're still alive, I kinda-sorta get to meet my mother in law but!”

“Still alive?” Trust Stiles' luck that she'd honed in on that, first thing.

Still. This was more important than anything; it hurt Stiles, every day, that Derek had lost essentially his whole family, because of a psycho-xenophobic-stalker-bitch.

Either this would work or destroy the whole universe. And considering the universe was still there, he'd take his chances, because this could not be the first time this spell had been used.

“Okay, I don't know how long I’m gonna be here, so don't interrupt. When Derek is 15, he's gonna fall in puppy-love with a girl named Paige. Peter, trying to be helpful, but being Peter, comes up with the bright idea of having another Alpha give her the Bite. Her body rejects it, and Derek eventually kills her at her request because she's in so much pain.”

“What are – “ Talia shuts her brother up with a single look.

Stiles just keeps talking, fast as he can. “Derek never blamed you, Peter, I swear, not for any of it. So then, a bit over a year later, a crazy-crazy oh my gods crazy-pants insane Hunter, she abandoned the code and just kills any werewolf or human who associates with werewolves, she uses Derek's depression and seduces him – she's like a decade older than he is or will be or whatever – and she lies about her name, about everything.” It never occurs to Stiles to tell Talia and Peter Kate's name; years of talking around it have conditioned him to avoid it. “He didn't know she was a Hunter until after she trapped all of you, except Derek, Laura and Cora, in the house with mountain ash and wolfsbane and burned you all to death. Except Peter, who was burned so badly it sent him into a coma for six years and drove him insane. Serial killer insane, and he went rogue and Bit my best friend against his will, but it wasn't your fault, Peter, none of what you did was, I swear Derek forgave you years ago, and I got used to the Little Red jokes, you bought me this red hoodie and it's my favorite, but seriously, you've got to keep Derek away from this Hun– “

“Stiles.”

Talia looks up at the woman who just appeared. “Star. Fancy meeting you here.”

The half-Fae gives Talia a crooked smiles. “Something like that.”

“I presume you're here to return Stiles to his proper time?”

Star nods, giving Stiles a supportive smile.

“Why are you crying, then?” Stiles tries to smile at Talia's question, fails.

“Please, make sure he's happy.” It comes out a whisper.


“I won't meet him now, because Scott won't be Bitten. I'm just human.” Stiles gulps, but forces himself to continue. “So please. He'd have given anything to have you back, now he's going to get you back, well he's never going to have lost you, please make sure he's happy?”

“Did you just give up your mate so he could keep his family?” Talia sounds shocked.

“He's so miserable, even when he smiles, he aches for you every minute.” Stiles says hoarsely. “I had to.”

“Stiles Stilinski... your mother is Claudia, right? The librarian?”
“I have to take him back, Talia.”

“One minute, Star.” She brushes off other woman, reaching out to grab Stiles’ chin. “That’s the most selfless thing I’ve ever seen. Trust me, you'll still meet Derek.”

“Of course he will.” Star rolls her eyes. “At some point, he'll wake up and remember at least some of this. Not right now – right now, seven-year-old Stiles is being taken to the ER.”

“What?” Three voices demand. Stiles shoots Peter an uncertain look; he'd forgotten the other man was there.

“There's two of him right now, it's a stress to the body, and kid-Stiles doesn't any stored magic.” Star pokes Stiles in the side. “So I need to get you out of here before you kill your younger self.”

“He just re-wrote history.” Peter sounds amused, but then Stiles thinks Peter always sounds amused.

“He created another branch, anyway.” Star replies cheerfully.

“Don't blame Chris or Victoria or Allison!” Stiles all but spits out. “Gerard's insane, but Chris and Victoria really believe in the code! I promise!”

“We got it.” Talia winks at him. “Go home to your mate. Trust me, you'll still have him.”

“C’mom, Stilinski, Derek's gonna kill me for letting you get lost in time.

**August 20th, 2011, 9:00am**

Stiles wakes up slowly, stretching and wondering at what he now knew.

“Morning, son.”

Stiles rolls over and smiles. “Morning, dad.”

“I know it's the last day before school starts, but don't waste all of it, okay?”

He shakes his head. “I'm gonna go to the library later. Get a head start on finding stuff for some of my AP classes.”

John frowns. “You sure you're up for all those, kiddo? Bad enough to have skipped a grade, but...”

“I'm good, dad. I’m golden. I’m so golden, you could sell me in Zurich. In fact – “

“All right, I get it, you're good.” John chuckles at his son. “I'm off to work. Breakfast is in the microwave, yes it's turkey bacon, I’m off at seven.”

“Have a good day sheriff-ing! And don't get killed!” Stiles shouts after his father, then rolls out of bed and heads to the shower.

He's got a lot of data to try and integrate, and most of it won't go. Sighing, he takes an Adderal, gets dressed, then bites his lip, debating.

She'd remember, wouldn't she?

She has to, right? She'd shown up at the hospital the day after he'd collapsed for no reason,
bringing cupcakes for himself and his mom. She and mom had become friends, even if he hasn't seen her since mom's funeral, two years ago. Not really. Her husband had died a few weeks later, in a car accident.

She'd been at the arcade last month, when he was there with Scott for his 14th birthday, but that seemed incidental, since she was there with Cora and James, her younger two kids. But maybe she'd been there to see if Stiles remembered yet.

He remembers now.

Stiles lets out his breath and picks up the phone.

“Hello?” Comes a grumpy, disinterested male voice. Stiles heart leaps, though he's not sure why.

“Um. Hi. May I please speak with Tal – with Mrs. Hale?”

“Who may I say is calling?” The voice now sounds suspicions.

“Please tell her it's Stiles.”

The only response is a growl, then Stiles hears a faint, “Mom, the Sheriff's kid's on the phone for you!”

A minute of fumbling, and Talia speaks. “One moment, let me go into my office...” A door closes on the other end of the line. “How can I help you, Stiles?”

Stiles gulps. “Alpha Hale.”

Talia gasps. “You remember.”

“I... sort of? I remember that there are werewolves, that I was with a pack but wasn't a werewolf myself, I was... I did something with magic, I think? I don't... it's all fuzzy, Alpha, and I can't... I can't...”

“Stiles. Breathe.”

“Yes ma'am.” Stiles takes a deep breath. “I'm sorry. I just woke up and... there's so much, and I remembered it all when I woke up, but most of it's fading.”

“I talked to Star about this – do you remember her?”

“Yes? I think so... she's a, a half-fairy girl who fights like someone from the Matrix?”

Talia chuckles. “She's half-Fae, don't ever call her a fairy, it's an insult. Otherwise, yes. She's the one who rescued your future-self. We have a lot to talk about. Can we meet somewhere?”

“I told my dad I was going to the library...”

“Good. That's a good place to meet. It's nine thirty, now. Why don't we meet in the fantasy section at eleven? We can talk a bit, and then I'll buy you lunch. How's that sound?”

Stiles sighs in relief. “Thank you, Alpha.”

“No problem. But you can't call me Alpha – “

Stiles pales. “Oh, gods, I’m sorry, I didn't mean to be disrespectful, I know I’m not really Pack I
didn't mean anything, I’m sorr – “

“Stiles.” She says his name firmly, cutting him off mid-word. “You aren't being disrespectful and you ARE Pack. I was going to say, you can't call me Alpha in public.

**August 20th, 2011, 9:30am**

“Peter!” Talia opens her office door to call for her brother. She finds her elder son scowling at her, instead.

“What did the Sheriff’s kid need, that you went into the office for?”

“That isn't any of your business, Derek. Where is your uncle Peter?”

The scowl deepens. “He's upstairs with Sarah, looking at baby stuff.”

“Run along and get him for me, will you?”

Grumbling, Derek took off, and Talia returned to her seat, chortling to herself.

’Make sure he's happy’, Stiles had begged. The only thing wrong with this day is that it didn't come sooner; that it didn't come while David was still alive to see it.

He'd taken the kids camping the week that Stiles had popped in from the future, a blessing in more ways than one. If Derek had been here when his future-self's mate had shown up...

Well. He hadn't been. Because David...

Damn it. She'd meant to keep closer tabs on Stiles, after his mother died, but David had been killed by rogue Hunters just weeks later, and then Chris and Victoria Argent, of all people, showed up at edge of their property, completely unarmed, Victoria in a sporty SUV and Chris in a beat up old van...

“I know that look.” Peter frowned at her from the doorway. “Is there a problem with the treaty?”

“What?” Talia shook her head to clear it. “Oh, sorry, no. Something else, though I was thinking of your favorite Hunters. But as a side-thought. Come in and shut the door.”

Peter raised a brow at her, but did so. “Why all the mystery? Derek was just bitching about you taking secret phone calls in here, and now we're having a secret meeting?”

“It's hardly a secret if Derek knows about it.” Talia didn't bother trying to repress her smile. “But guess who it was that called?”

A smile crept over her brother's face to mirror her own. “Finally!” Peter scrubbed his hands together gleefully. “Alan's gonna love the kid!”

“Calmly.” She teased her brother. “He said his memories are 'fuzzy'; I don't know what he remembers. I’m about to go and meet him at the library.”

Peter started to get up, clearly intent on going with her.

Talia sighed. “No.”

“No?” He blinked at her, clearly confused.
“Remember how he looked when he saw you? Until I know what he remembers...”

Peter deflates. “You don't think I’m going to be a serial killer, do you?” It's said lightly, but Talia can see the pain and worry in Peter's eyes.

“If I’d been burned almost to death and spent six years in a state that everyone thought was a coma, but was more like paralysis, I’d turn into a serial killer. Of all the idiots who didn't realize I was awake.” Talia says bluntly. “Yes, Stiles had mixed feelings about you. You may have scared him, but you also must have impressed him, if he was that adamant that you know that Derek didn’t blame you. And he kept you from making the same mistake, and gave you time figure out what you were going to do about the Paige situation. What happened later was in no way your fault.”

“I know, it's just... it's been odd, I don't know how you can stand it, knowing that there's another member of our Pack and we can't even...” Peter shakes his head, frustrated.

“Not to mention he was easy on the eyes.” Talia teased. Peter flushed, and Talia let out a peal of laughter, delighted that she'd made him blush. It had been months since she'd been able to do that last.

“I'll have you know I’m a happily married man.”

“A valiant attempt at deflection. How's Chris?”

Peter gives her a wolf's-grin. “You really wanna know?”

Snorting, Talia shakes her head. “No, I really don't. Are they coming to dinner this Sunday?”

“Yes. Victoria's decided that Allison is old enough to know, now, and they...” Talia raises a brow at him, eliciting another small blush. “...Fine, we, told her everything yesterday.”

Talia nods, humming. “Good. I think I’ll take Stiles to meet them today, after I’ve spoken with the Sheriff.”

“How are you going to handle him?” Peter's question would seem innocent, if she couldn't see the sly look in his eyes.

She ignores it. “I'm going to tell him as much of the truth as I can – Claudia and I were good friends, and if David...” Talia clears her throat. “If David hadn't died when he had, then I would have kept in close contact. He's a single father, he works a lot, and now that he's Sheriff... shouldn't be too hard to convince him. Especially since Cora and Stiles are the same age.”

“And Stile only has the one friend.” Peter and Talia both frown at that. “But we’ll be changing that, won't we?”

**August 20th, 2011, 11:00am**

Stiles got the library early, and poked around the shelves waiting for Al – for Mrs. Hale.

“There you are.”

Stiles let out a squeak and jumped, dropping his books. Talia chuckled.

“I swear, I’m gonna bell every single... erm.” Stiles gulps. “I'm sorry, you startled me.”

“I meant to.” She grins at him, clearly teasing, and Stiles finds himself grinning back.
“Typical.” He flashes a grin, trying to seem more confident than he is. “This is a great spot to talk, people will think we're talking about books.”

“That's the idea.” She nods him to a grouping of chairs, and they sit. “So, what do you remember?”

Stiles frowns, trying to marshal his thoughts coherently. “There was a dead body... no, half a dead body found. I wanted to go look for it, so I snuck out, got Scott to come with. I got caught by my dad and sent him. He was Bitten by Peter.”

Talia frowns at that. “How did Peter become Alpha...” Something flashes in her eyes, and a pained look crosses her face. “Crazy, you said. Never mind. And then?”

“Next day, we went to try and find Scott's inhaler – we didn't know that he'd become, you know, yet. We met Derek. I realized who he was – that he was Derek Hale, one of the only two real survivors of the Hale Fire.”

“Two?” Talia's voice is a bit sharp, and Stiles shrinks away. “I thought you said Laura, Derek and Cora survived?”

“We didn't know that, then. About Cora. It was assumed she'd been trapped, too, but she'd been playing or something. No one really knows, she wouldn't tell anyone what happened, and... yeah. Even now, I mean then, I mean...” Stiles grinds the heels of hands into his eyes, frustrated.

“Take a breath, cutey. It's okay. So, you met up with Derek.”

“We didn't trust him. More Scott than me, really. I figured out that Scott was, you know, but Scott wouldn't listen. Derek tried to tell him, told him they were brothers now, but Scott... he just wanted to be normal.”

Stiles feels an echo of annoyance at this. “After that... I know the Alpha was Peter. I know we helped Derek kill him, and Derek became the Alpha. He had a pack, other than Scott I mean because Scott didn't want to be pack. Derek really sucked at being Alpha, for a while. A long while. There was a kanima – “

“Who did he Bite to that became a kanima?”

“He Bit...” Stiles blinked rapidly. “I don't know.” How can he not know? He just knew a second ago, why was it gone now?

“Breathe, Stiles. Star told me about this; you're going to lose things, most of it except the shape, because you might cause damage otherwise.”

“What damage? If I tell you who the kanima was, we can avoid it!”

“Did the person stay a kanima? Or were you able to save them?”

–The Power of Love, it can do anything–

“Oh! Because it's that person's destiny to be a kanima, and then be saved from being a kanima by love!”

“Saved by love?” Talia looks a bit bemused.

“I just... when you asked, I heard myself telling someone 'The Power of Love, it can do anything'. I think that means we saved the kanima through love. Right?”
Talia gives him a proud smile. “That is what my research tells me, yes, but I’ve never dealt with one personally. What happened after the kanima?”

Stiles hesitates, trying to sort it. “There was... nothing, for a bit. Then a... an Alpha Pack? Is that a thing?”

A breath hisses out of Talia, and she looks pissed, though not at him. “It is a thing, a bad thing, generally. Not always. I know the leader of one, Deucalion – “

Stiles scrambles backwards before he can stop himself, almost toppling his chair in his effort to get away from that name.

“What is it?”

“I don't... don't say his name! He's... he's bad, somehow!”

Talia pauses. “He wasn't 'bad' when I saw him a year ago. I take it was his Alpha Pack?”

“I think so.” Stiles whispers. “I remember them hunting me, over and over, because I was only human, and there shouldn't be humans in a Pack...”

“That doesn't make any sense.” Talia's talking more to herself than Stiles. “He's never said anything to us, and we have several humans in our Pack.”

“You're strong.” Stiles says flatly. “They didn't think we were. We weren't, really. After Gerard took Erica and Boyd, and beat me up, well the Alphas took Erica and Boyd. Killed Erica. Kept Boyd prisoner, along with Cora. So it was just me and Derek and Issac, because Scott... wouldn't help until it got really bad. And Lydia and Allison helped, too, when they could.”

“Allison Argent?”

Stiles studies her face, but it's neutral, so he nods. “Yeah. I mean, I know that Kate and Gerard are crappy people, but Allison and her parents aren't. I mean, Chris can be hard, and Mrs. Argent is terrifying, but they're... allies? Or will be, I guess. Would have been? Argh, I clearly need to read more Heinlein.”

Her amused grin is back. “Clearly. And they are allies; we have a formal treaty with them.”

Stiles knows that his eyes must look like dinner plates. “You do? It took me months to get Derek to agree to even an informal alliance...”

“You changed a lot more than you thought you would, cutey. I’ll tell you about the treaty later. How did you deal with the Alpha Pack?”

“There was also a... a Darach? Is that the right word? She was evil, she was against the Alpha Pack, we set them against each other and ducked. Though she almost killed my dad, and Mrs. McCall and Mr. Argent!” Stiles bites his tongue and tries to calm down. “Sorry, didn't mean to almost yell. There was a scary ritual Dr. Deaton had us do to find a.. nemeton? Yeah. And The Darach had poisoned Cora with mistletoe, and Derek gave up his Alpha powers to save her, because Peter said it was the only way... I don't remember how Peter came back, by the way, just that he was, and was less crazy but still creepy, Peter now isn't creepy is he? He didn't seem creepy, he seemed more like he was later, only a lot less sad... anyway. The twins turned against the Alpha Pack because Ethan was in love with Danny... wow. I so do not want to remember finding Danny like that, I’m gonna blush when I see him...”
Stiles blushes now, he can tell, at the indulgent grin on Talia's face. “Sorry. um... Derek went away with Cora for awhile, Scott somehow became a 'True Alpha', whatever that is – Deaton never would tell us – Derek came back, there was a kitsune, and smoke demons, and Derek's Alpha Powers came back at some point... Scott didn't want to be Alpha, and Derek had hated it, so eventually they worked together and it was sort of like a democracy? But things kept coming, because of the nemeton, and that leads to the sorceress and the spell and... yeah.”

“Do you remember what you told me? What we talked about?” Talia is watching him closely.

“I...” Stiles blinks rapidly. “I... I told you about Paige. About the bitch and the fire and Peter...”

“What did you tell me about yourself?”

“That I was the Pack's magic person. I was training to be Emissary, but I don't know if I told you that or not.” His breaths are getting shorter. “That not all the Argents are bad. I... what else did I... I can't remember!”

Talia's hands were on his shoulders, warm and tight. “It's okay, Stiles. You aren't supposed to. Not yet. It's the temporal displacement, it's okay. You'll forget most of what you've told me, too. Or would have, if you hadn't told me, anyway.”

“Does this mean I'm useless?” He hates that he sounds so small, like his voice is trying to hide. Everyone thought he was useless, except his dad and Scott. Even though he had the second highest grades last year, and that was after having skipped seventh grade.

Talia's hugging him, a huge hug that, frankly, takes his breath away. “You could never be useless, Stiles. You're smart, and funny, and kind, and always think of others first. You're Pack, and while only Peter and I know that right this second, we both know it. He's kind of mad at me, that I wouldn't let him come, you know. We've known that you're Pack for seven years, and we've had to wait.”

“You still want me?” This was no less small, and a bit breathless, and Stiles winces at the naked hope in his voice.

“Just try and keep us from having you! We're going to go have lunch, then I'm gonna talk to your dad, okay?”

“My dad? Why?” He leans back, trying to see her face, to understand.

“It's not his fault that he has to work so much, he's the Sheriff, but you need more social interaction. I'm going to see if you can't spend time with us, with the Pack – though remember to call us family, right? Maybe you can help Cora with some of her schoolwork, you've had the classes she's going to be taking, and you're both fourteen. So proud of you, cutey, skipping a grade like that and still keeping straight As!”

Stiles goes beet red. “I don't know if... I mean, if my birthday was a couple month sooner, I'd have been in this grade all along, you know?”

Talia ruffles what little hair he has. “Please, you worked your butt off to do it. I wish I’d been there... but David...”

“Ohmygosh!”

“Yeah?” Talia sits back on heels, looking at him.
“It was... Mr. Hale was a... you know. He didn't die in a car accident, he... Hunters!” Horrified, Stiles pats her arms, trying to express everything he feels. “Al – Mrs. Hale! That's... and you've got four kids, and then the rest of everyone, and they just... how can they do... but you have a treaty!”

Talia gives him a small, sad smile. “I'll tell you on the way to lunch, cutey.”

**August 20th 2011; 2:00pm**

Talia is more than pleased by how much Stiles does remember; Star, frankly, had been half-convinced that all he'd remember was werewolves! and Talia herself.

She was ecstatic that Stiles didn't remember being Derek’s mate; they were both too young, and gods only knew how Stiles would act around Derek if he knew. Derek was two and a half years older than Stiles, even he was only a year ahead of him in school, thanks to Stiles skipping a grade. Derek would resent the younger boy trying to worm into his social circle, as Stiles would if he knew they were mates.... and Derek would probably resent having Stiles as a mate, as well; right now Derek was moody and unwilling to contemplate romantic attachments of any sort, after the Paige fiasco. Which, thanks to Stiles, wasn't the fiasco it could have been... even if it turned into something just as tragic.

Peter had, after six years of thinking about it, decided the only way was to tell Derek to just tell the girl. Because it would be child's play for Talia to remove the memory, if she took badly. Instead, she didn't take it all. Derek worked himself up into a state, finally got the nerve to tell her, and she... didn't want to hear it. Talia still wants to slap the little brat, for how she'd acted. Derek worked hard to make her a special dinner, and the whole Pack had left the house for the evening so he'd have the time and place to talk to her. He'd started by saying, “There's something important about my family we need to talk about.”

And Paige had refused to hear it. “It's not about your family, Derek. It's about us.” When Derek had told her that his family was important, she'd asked, “Are they more important than me?”

Derek had replied the only way he could; by saying that they were his family.

She'd thrown a fit, and left.

Talia and Peter had been hard-pressed to keep straight faces, torn between laughter at the girl's idiocy, and rage at the way she'd treated their boy.

Stiles would never, ever do anything like that.

Sadly, three days later, they discovered why she'd acted as she had, and it all became moot. But today was one of new beginnings, not dwelling on old heartache, so Talia pushed the memories away.

The first topic, after they'd gotten to the restaurant for lunch, was his dad.

“I just... I remember, or whatever you call it, having to lie to him. Like, a lot. It was tearing us apart. After the Alp--... after Deucalion and his AP showed, Derek finally gave me permission to tell him, and then things were good. I know you don't want to tell him now, and that's okay, but I can't lie to him, Mrs. Hale. I can not tell him things, but I can't – “

She'd cut him off there. “I'm not expecting you to lie. No, I'm not going to tell him today, or soon. Unless something happens, it'll be your call as to when to tell him, but I promise, Stiles, that if anything does happen, we'll tell him immediately.”
“Anything?”

“Anything that might involve him or you. A rogue shows up, or other supernatural shenanigans, we'll tell him, if they might intersect with him, or with you.”

Stiles had been relieved, and they'd moved on, happily chatting about various supernatural critters that Stiles half-remembered. In five years, he'd met a larger variety of things than she'd met in thirty-eight.

It was fascinating, what he remembered. Facts about creatures, even specific encounters with things they'd fought, he seemed to have an almost picture perfect memory of; events having to do with the non-supernatural, or supernatural people who had been on their side, were slippery and easily lost. He knew there had been a kitsune, and that it had been a girl and his friend. He couldn't remember her name, or her face, or even how they met.

And he knew more werewolf lore than Derek or Cora. He might actually know more than Laura, she'd have to test them to be sure.

“While I’m positive you're going to become our Emissary, I think you're also going to become our Lore Master, Stiles.” Talia couldn't help but smile at the boy, so enthusiastic about every bit of knowledge.

“Lore Master? That's a real thing? A person who's in charge of gathering and collating all the Lore they can find? Really?”

“Yep. That's Peter, right now, though he's also my second.”

Stiles face is a study; on the one hand, most of his memory of Peter is of him going rogue, biting Scott and gods only know what else. On the other, he also seems to have some... echo, of trading sarcastic remarks and quips with Peter, in a friendly, if wary, fashion.

She reaches over and takes his hand. “I know that your most vivid memory, recollection, whatever, of Peter isn't positive. I’d like you to try and... I don't know, pretend that that was his evil twin. From Mirror Verse. Or something like that.”

Stiles gaped at her for a moment, then grinned hugely. “Oh, Mrs. Hale, you done it; we're gonna have huge Star Trek marathons, just for that!”

She chuckles. “That would be excellent, actually. I’m a bit of a Trekkie, and not ashamed to admit it.”

“Yeah? When the new movie – ohmygods!” The kid flails a bit, almost wild, as Talia hands her credit card over to the waitress.

“What now?”

“I just realized; I’ve already seen it, and I can't remember! This is terrible! No fair!”

“Just think of all the video games that came out that you can’t remember.”

His jaw drops and his cheeks flush. “That’s it, where’s this Star chick? I need to remember these things! What if one of them sucks, and I knew it but I can't remember and buy it again? Worse, what if some are amazing and I don't get them because I don't realize?”

Talia throws back her head and laughs. “That's what you're upset about? Movies and video games? What about the people you'll date? Don't you want to know who your first kiss is?”
He blushes hard. “I kind of doubt I date a lot, you know?” And shrugs a self-deprecating little shrug.

Talia snorts. “If I hadn't been a married woman, I’d have been all over you when you popped in seven years ago. Granted, you were legal and all, by then, but...” She winks, making him blush harder.

“Maybe when I’m 21. nobody likes me now. Hell, the only friend I have is Scott.”

Talia doesn't bother stopping herself, she ruffles his short hair again. “Right now, sure. That's going to be changing, starting soon. First, we're going to go talk to your dad.”

John Stilinski hadn't seemed pleased to see them.

“What has Stiles done now?” He sounds exhausted and a little worn out.

Stiles gives his father a strange look. “When have I ever done anything?”

“Sheriff, I’m not sure you remember me...”

The Sheriff shakes his head, and musters up a tired smile. “I'm sorry, of course I do. Talia Hale, right? You were friends with...”

Talia cleared her throat when it became obvious that he wasn't going to continue. “That's actually why we're here; Stiles and I ran into each other at the library, and I realized how long it's been... can we speak privately?”

Stilinski is confused, but nods agreeably. “Sure. Stay out of trouble, son. And Rémy, no more teaching him B and E, okay?”

“But the kid's a natural with lock-picks, boss,” a deputy Talia can only assume is Rémy protests with good humor. “How about a little hacking, then? What'do'ya say, Stiles, we can train you for the NSA if your da' doesn't want you be CIA.”

Stilinski just waves them off, leading me into his office.

“Coffee? No? So, how can I help you, Mrs. Hale?”

Talia studies his face as she answers; he's working himself to the bone, probably to escape his empty bed, and it shows.

“It's about Stiles, of course. And Claudia.” He sucks in a breath, but nods for her to continue. “I... sorry, this is hard for both of us. David died less than a month after Claudia, and by the time everything was cleared up... it had been so long. But I’d promised her that I’d look after Stiles, as much as you’d let me.” Talia had promised more than that, but she couldn't tell the Sheriff. Not now, anyway. “I'd meant to be there, for both of you, but...”

Stilinski covered his face for a moment, and Talia took a deep breath, trying to stay calm.

It worked. Too well.

No wonder Stiles smelled almost like her mate; he was his father's son.

How had she never noticed before?

Stilinski read her startled silence as her being overcome by memories, because after a minute, he
nodded. “Yeah, that was a bad summer. But, look, you don’t need to feel guilty, Mrs. Hale, we’re fine.”

“Please, call me Talia.” She smiled at him, subdued charm. This was going to be a slow hunt. Of necessity, very slow.

He nodded back at her. “Of course, Talia. Call me John.”

“Thank you. As I was saying... when I saw Stiles, I was struck by everything. He and Cora are the same age, though she's nowhere near as studious. And you work long hours. I thought maybe he could start working with Cora, maybe staying with us when you work over-night, then you wouldn't need to worry. And it would be good to give my kids a scholastic role-model.” Talia couldn't help the little eye-roll at that; her kids were slackers, all of them except Derek. “Laura's starting junior college this year, sure, and Derek’s a Junior, but Cora's a freshman, and James is in eighth grade. He'll be good for both of them, and I think they'll be good for him.”

John studied her as she had studied him. “I do remember you; you were at the hospital almost every day. Always sneaking treats in, for Stiles as much as Claudia. They both adored you.”

“I adore them both.” She replies softly.

“It'll be good, to know there's someone else watching him. But you know he comes with an attached Scott, right?”

Talia takes that for the win it is, and allows herself a small chuckle. “I can handle Scott; I became friends with Melissa, too, you know. Plus, I’ve got a secret weapon.” At John's evident interest, Talia stopped hiding a wolf's-grin. “I've got my brother Peter.”

The Sheriff chuckled with her. “I remember him quite well, thank you. The boys won't know what hit 'em.”

After several more minutes of exchanged information – Stiles Adderal dosage, emergency contact info, the works – the outline of the arrangement was in place, and Talia sailed out to collect her newest Pack member and take him home.

**August 20th, 2011 3:30pm**

Stiles stared at the huge house. “Do they know about me?”

“Not yet. They're about to, though.”

Stiles turned to stare at his Alpha. “I don't mean... but, is this a good idea?”

“Are you kidding? It's a great idea, cutey. Also, they kind of need to know.”

“But Mrs. Argent is terrifying, Mrs. Hale!”

“Would you stop that?”

Stiles twitched back in his seat. “Stop what?”

“Calling me 'Mrs. Hale'. Call me... call me Tee, okay?”

His eyes were huge again, he was sure, and she laughed at the look on his face. “Really? But won't that look weird? I mean, even Mrs. McCall still makes me call her Mrs. McCall...”
“Stiles. I’m not just your friend's mom; I’m your Alpha. If anyone has a problem with you calling me Tee, they'll have to take it up with me. Which they won't.”

“Wow.” Stiles took a breath, and another, blinking back tears. Then he threw his arms around Talia, hugging her as hard as he could; she could take it, she was the Alpha werewolf.

She just laughed and hugged him back. “Now c'mon; there's some Hunters you need to meet. And their daughter, too. Peter told me they've told her.”

“They told Allison? Wow, I changed a lot, didn't I?” Stiles climbed out of Talia's SUV, mind spinning. “How did I manage to change so much?”

“You told us we could trust most of the Argents, and which one to not trust. That led to more open, and more friendly, dealings, which snowballed.”

Stiles nodded, trying to take it as the walked up to the Argent's front door.

Chris opened it before Talia could knock, smiling. “Talia! Good to see you. What can I help you with?”

Talia smiled back, and Stiles couldn't seem to get over how friendly they were; he still had vague impressions of terse stand-offs between Chris and Derek, between Allison and Derek...

“It's what I can help you with. May we come in?”

Chris gave Stiles a puzzled look even as he ushered the two of them inside.

Once the door was shut, Talia engulfed Chris in a hug. “Now, get your family so I can introduce you to my newest Pack-mate.”

Chris blinked rapidly at Talia, then at Stiles. “But... but he's...”

Talia giggled. “I'll explain once the girls are here.”

Chris still moves almost as silently as a werewolf, Stiles notes. He leans closer to Talia. “How does he know that I’m human?”

She shrugs, still looking like she's about to die laughing. “Hunters. Can't live with 'em – “

“Can't kill us all, because who'd do your dirty work then?”

Stiles turned, to see Victoria Argent smiling. It was possibly the most shocking thing he'd seen in weeks – including his memory of a dragon cuddling with Lydia, for some reason – and it was rather uncanny, the way to two women grinned at each other like they were in a grand conspiracy of some sort.

“I knew it was something like that.” Talia agreed. “I'd like the three of you to meet Stiles, the newest member of my Pack.”

Allison peeked out from behind her mother and waved at him. Stiles gave a little wave back, feeling really self-conscious.

The smile faded from Victoria's face. “Not to be a bitch, but can you explain?”

“Please?” Chris added.
Talia's smile, if anything, grew. “Gladly. Remember how I told you, years ago, that I’d been visited by a future pack-mate who told me you were trustworthy?”

Chris got it first, but was still skeptical. “You believed a twelve-year-old?”

“I'm fourteen!”

Chris just waved this off.

“He was in his twenties when I met him then. Stiles doesn't remember all of the future, of course, or even most of it. But what he does remember... well. He's read your entire Beastiary.”

“What?” Victoria was shocked.

Stiles couldn't repress a giggle at the look on her face. “I know, right? Because archaic latin, what were people thinking? It's a pain in the butt to translate, not to mention the terrible, terrible handwriting. And half of what you need to know isn't there, or isn't clear, so then I’d have to go and find more info using what was already in the Beastiary as a base, but it actually saved time, in the end. I mean, take what it says about vampires. It let me winnow down what I was finding everywhere else, not that I hadn't already winnowed down because Twilight is obviously not real, whatever, and anything will die if you shove a stake through it's heart. But the thing about compulsive counting, it allowed me to test and make sure we really were dealing with a vampire, that thing was like Rain-man levels of obsessed with counting the matchsticks I’d dropped everywhere...” Stiles was finally able to shut himself up when he heard Allison laugh.

Talia squeezed the back of his neck, and he shot her a grateful look.

“No offense, son, but I'd like to test this.” Victoria gave Stiles a hard look, then motioned to her husband with her head.

He padded silently away, and was back in less than a minute with the Bestiary.

Stiles wrinkles his nose at it. “There you are, you beautiful, evil creature. The only good thing Gerard ever did for the world was create a digital copy of you.”

“You mean other than werewolves? Which, by the way, some of the info in there's a bit out-dated and wrong, but I’m not correcting it.” At Chris' frown, Stiles waved his arm, trying to ward off the adult-type evil eye. “The kanima. Starts on page 68, but that's just a drawing, which isn't really all that accurate, by the way.”

Chris opened the book to the correct page, and then looks at Stiles again. “So come read it.”

“Sure thing, Mr. A. Uh...” They do a little dance of sorts, when Stiles thinks to take the book, until they're positioned where Stiles can read it over Chris' arm. “Just so you know, my pronunciation is crap, but my translation is top-notch.”

Stiles reads the first paragraph with, as he'd noted, a fairly bad accent, then started translating. “The child of murder may himself be innocent, but once infected with the vitriol of lycanthropy, a dangerous mix is introduced. He becomes like a dragon, seeking the hearts of those who are themselves murderers, and nothing can stop him but a Master. Yet being a Master is a two-edged blade, for that blade can cut the wielder as well as his opponent; if the kanima eats the hearts of those innocent of this sin, the sin of their death flows to the Master. Too many hearts, and Master
becomes as slave, both vile in the view of Righteous men.' That's true, you know. A kanima naturally seeks to kill murderers, and we're going old-Bible interpretation here, one who intended to kill without justification. Accidental manslaughter need not apply type deal. But if a kanima's Master has him or her kill people who haven't committed murder, they start to turn into kanimas, themselves. It's sort of sick, actually."

Chris stared at Stiles blankly for a moment, then flipped the book randomly. “Read this page.”

“Oh, um.” His pronunciation wasn't improved by reading it with no clue what he was reading, but Stiles gamely read the first page. Then translated; “...claim to weave moonbeams to cloud the eyes of men when they frolic on beaches.' Oh, selkies! They're bad-tempered bastards, every one. Where was I? Right. In truth, it is more that most men do not wish to see what is plain before them, that as a people, the seal-kin are uniformly alike, having almost no variation amongst a family group. Many legends of doppelgangers probably have some basis in selkie pranks, though these are mostly harmless. It is the rare pod that requires intervention, and rarer still any of our kin would be able to do so, for how does one tell the difference between a selkie and seal when they look the same? At one time, all seals were killed on sight, but in the past century this practice has fallen out of favor, as the selkie are generally non-violent and uncaring about the world of men.' They're still bad-tempered bastards, all of them, though I guess I can't blame 'em, they live centuries, so most of them were alive when they were still Hunted for no reason, but does that give them reason to be grumpy even with... erm. Sorry.” Stiles stopped his latest ramble. “Everything just sort of... flashes into my head, you know?”

“That's remarkable.” Victoria breathed.

“Isn't it?” Talia was smug. Stiles looked at her, to make sure he was doing okay, and she flashed him a grin. “He knows about creatures who aren't even in your Beastiary, if you ask. He may not know until you do, but once you have...”

“Um...” Stiles swallowed at the look of acquisition of Chris' face, and took a step closer to Talia.

“He's Pack, Chris.” Talia said sharply. Chris held up a placating hand, and her grin returned. “But I have a proposition for you.”

That's how Stiles found himself slated to train next to Allison twice a week, in return for Chris prodding at his knowledge for an hour before each session.

**Interlude: Silver is Gold**

“Alpha Hale.” Victoria had taken the lead; Hunters were by tradition matriarchal. “I know that we aren't the people you wish to see, and we won't step foot on your land.” She took a deep breath, and Talia could smell the regret and sadness wafting off her. Also a sort of muted gleeful vindictiveness. “We cannot mitigate your loss, but we can offer justice.”

Talia couldn't suppress a snort. “What sort of justice can you offer? We had to make it look like a car accident!”

Victoria closes her eyes on tears, stunning Talia to silence. “We would have been here to help with that, but we were hunting them.” She hooks her thumb at the van behind her.

*Her husband gets out of the van and joins her, throwing the keys to Talia. She notes, as they fly through the air, that there are keys to more than just the van. “Them?”*

“Those who did it.” Chris says, giving Talia a respectful nod. “I'd suggested bringing you their
heads, but my wife was convinced you’d rather take them yourselves.”

Talia was stunned, mouth dropping open. Peter steps forward, subdued but still livid. “Are you saying you brought us their corpses?”

“No, Beta Hale.” Victoria's gaze never moves from Talia’s. “They're alive. Do with them as you wish.”

“Why are you doing this?” Talia whispered, she couldn't force her voice to obey her.

Chris’ face hardened in something akin to rage. “We have a code. We follow it. To our Conclave, this is Argent territory, and these assholes broke into our territory, attacked a peaceful werewolf who hadn't broken the code, risking our unofficial treaty. They – “ He cuts himself off, looking away while he brings himself back under control. “We hunt rogues. Not family men, not park rangers who donate time at the local homeless shelter, not fathers.” His voice breaks.

“And you had nothing to do with these Hunters coming here, or killing our Alpha's mate?” Talia could hear the sneer in Peter's tone; by their winces, Victoria and Chris could see it clearly.

“No, Beta Hale.” Victoria broke her eye contact with Talia to face Peter. “Neither of us had anything to do with any of it, until we hunted them down like the jackals they are.”

Her heart stayed steady.

“Mr. Argent?” Peter prodded.

“No, Beta Hale. We didn't even know they had been here until we saw the obituary. We would have stopped them, if we had known. Tried, anyway, and we would have warned you.”

Something that had been frozen inside Talia for the past three weeks melted, and tears slipped down her face. “Gods. Oh, Gods.”

Chris looked down, his own eyes watering, but Victoria re-found Talia’s gaze, letting her own tears loose. “As I said, Alpha Hale, there is nothing we can do to mitigate your loss. Both yours, personally, and that of your Pack and family. All we can do is give you justice. Give you those who broke the code.”

“Thank you.” Talia said it firmly. “We will be busy for the next several days, but I think it would behoove us to meet, Alpha to Matriarch, and make that unofficial treaty official.”

Victoria's mouth drops in shock, but she nods for a several seconds until she can find her voice. “I'm – yes, I, we, would like that.”

“Good. I’ll call you.”

Husband and wife both nodded respectfully, then climbed into the SUV and drove away.

“Huh.” Peter sent a speculative glance after the couple, then turned towards the van and the five heartbeats inside it. “Stiles was right.”

Talia shocked herself by smiling, even if it was a small smile. “Of course he was.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Stiles settles into the Hale Pack...

Chapter Notes

I decided just one chapter wasn't enough, given that i've never posted anything here at all before. so -- here ya go, the second chapter.
it'll be a few days before the third; i want to get further ahead before i post again. if i stay far enough ahead, i won't end up behind.
at least, that's the theory *G*

August 20th, 2011 6:00pm

She finally got Stiles away from Chris and Vic, and most especially Allison, by pointing out that the Sheriff was going to be at her house at seven thirty for dinner, and she still had to take Stiles home and introduce him to the rest of the Pack.

Victoria had been shocked silly that she'd brought Stiles to them first, then openly pleased.

“What was that about?” Stiles had asked, so she'd had to explain the specifics of the Treaty. Technically, Talia was to take new Pack members to the Argents immediately; logistically, that bordered on impossible, and neither Argent had expected her to introduce a new member before he'd even met the rest of his Pack.

It showed just how serious Talia was taking it.

“Of course, I’ve got ulterior motives.” She'd assured the boy with a grin.

He just nodded, like he knew she had to have them, because that was her job, and returned to asking questions about everything.

They'd just pulled up to the house, and Talia sent her brother a text.

“Remember what I asked you to do, about Peter.” She reminded Stiles.

He gave her a wide-eyed look, then nodded resolutely. “Movie marathon, here we come!”

Talia bit back a smile, and led him inside.

Peter was standing near the front door, all but bouncing on his toes in his impatience, Sarah patiently leaning on the wall further in. “Stiles!”
“Hi, Peter.” Stiles gave him a brave smile.

Peter moved slowly, it made Talia want to cry. “Is it okay...?”

Stiles blinked at him, then smiled a real smile, tilting his head to the right. “Of course.” Peter wrapped his arms loosely around the boy, scenting along his neck.

Cora came thundering towards the front door, Derek on her heels, both of them yelling “Mom, he won't/she won't!”, when they saw their uncle scenting Stiles and came to a crashing halt.

Sarah grabbed Cora's arm, keeping her from falling on her face, and grinned at Talia.

Talia grinned back, just looking at her brother and her future son-in-law. Stiles had relaxed completely as soon as Peter's nose hit his neck, and was the calmest he'd been all day.

“Mom?” Derek shot her an incredulous look.

Peter gave a little shake, and stepped back, still holding Stiles' shoulders. “I'm so glad you're finally here, Little Red.” This had to be reference to the red hoodie Peter holds up, a present for Stiles.

Stiles blushed harder than Talia'd ever seen. “Glad to finally be here, Uncle Creeper.”

Peter laughed joyously. Derek and Cora stood as if rooted, unable to fully process what they were seeing. Sarah made a chuffing noise and moved forward. “That's my husband, attentive as always.”

Peter laughed again, but reached a hand towards her and pulled her forward. “My apologies, you know how I’ve been waiting. Sarah, this is Stiles; Stiles, this is my wife, Sarah.”

Stiles gave her a polite nod, “Ma'am,” and offered his neck to her as he had to Peter.

Derek whimpered; Cora actually flinched. Talia raised a brow at them both.

They didn't notice, eyes glued to the tableau offered.

Sarah ran a quick nose across Stiles' neck. “He's been waiting for his student rather impatiently, Stiles.” She had a gentle smile on her face, warm and accepting. “But I promise I'll make him control the worst of his creeper tendencies.”

Stiles opened and closed his mouth a couple times, then laughed nervously. “He's not really a creeper, ma'am, it's a... it's a weird joke, ya know?”

Sarah winked. “I know. Especially because he's a total creeper. Remind me to tell you how he asked me out, sometime.”

“Oh, no, adults aren't allowed to do things like that! All romantic activities must stop once you hit age twenty one. It's in the Constitution and everything!”

Peter and Sarah both laughed. “But we're werewolves, Stiles.”

“You're still U.S. citizens, Peter.” Stiles stuck his tongue out at Peter, and Peter returned the favor, to Stiles obvious delight.

“Mom!” Derek had found his voice again.

Talia snorted. “Right. Pack meeting in the great room, five minutes.” Her middle children just stared at her, as if she'd grown a second head. Stiles shuffled awkwardly, looking from them to
Peter to Talia, clearly unsure what to do. Talia raised her brow again, and clapped her hands twice. “What did I say? Go get everyone and meet in the great room in five. Go!”

Stiles looked at his feet until Derek and Cora were gone, then gave Talia a shy look through his lashes. “You... you didn't tell anyone about me?”

“Aw, cutey.” Talia ruffled his buzz cut again. “We didn't know when you were gonna show. We told Sarah, because Peter couldn't not, they're married. And David...” She had to clear her throat. “David knew. I'm sorry you didn't get to meet him.”

Stiles blinked rapidly; he was blinking back tears, she realized. “Me, too. I'm sorry I'm late, Tee.”

“You're not late.” She winked at her newest boy. “You're here exactly on time. Now, c'mon, you've got to meet the Pack before your dad gets here.”

“The Sheriff is coming?” Peter's lip twitched, she's knows it, even if she wasn't looking.

“Well, he's Stiles' dad. Even if he doesn't know anything about this yet. C'mon, I’ll explain.”

August 20th, 2011 6:30pm

This was a lot of people, to meet and once, and Stiles was flustered to be at the center of so much attention. He could only be grateful, that only the core of the Pack lived in Beacon Hills, and that most of them seemed to be at least willing to tolerate his presence.

Actually, that wasn't exactly fair of him. Once Cora got over her shock, she was delighted. Laura had cackled, clearly loving the idea of having another little brother to torment. James had smiled shyly and asked Stiles if he liked Mario Kart. The younger cousins, Denis and Adam and Shelby, had clamored around, excited because the older kids were excited but unsure what was going on. Baby Mary, who insisted she wasn't a baby because she was four whole years old, and that makes her a big girl now, didn't see what the big deal was; of course Stiles was Pack, just smell him!

The other adults were bemused, David's brother and sister concerned about Talia taking a “wounded bird” into the Pack (and Stiles was going to do his best to ignore that, ignore that they equated being human with being wounded; they didn't know any better. Because they were raised by wolves, but even his internal jokes didn't make it sting any less. Especially when Jonathon had a human mate, the hypocrite!), while Talia's other brother, Brian, and his wife Rose were warmly welcoming. Rose was a cousin of some sort to Star, the half-Fae who had “rescued” Stiles future-self once before, and seemed to have known he was coming, though like Talia she hadn't known when.

Derek stayed as far away from Stiles as he could.

“Don't worry about him, little man.” Laura rubbed her nose over Stiles' pulse comfortably. “He's not good with people, period. I mean, Jon and Terry have been with us for nine years and he still barely speaks to them.”

“Shut up, Laura.” Derek yelled across the room. Right, werewolf hearing, have to get used to that again. Is it again when this is before he had, before? Oh, man, tenses, what even was his life when he couldn't figure out tenses?
“I so need to read more Heinlein.” Stiles moans. Both Talia and Peter crack up at that, while those who'd been paying attention – read, everyone – gave Stiles odd looks until they remembered. Stiles could remember the future, sort of.

It was not, as Talia explained it, precognition. Just that he remembered what he'd learn later, and could apply it now. It was a strange little talent, Terry said, but it sounded interesting, and she could see why Peter was so happy, since no one else wanted to be Lore Master.

“Such a promising student!” Peter had crowed, rubbing his hands together gleefully, and Stiles had blushed again.

He wasn't used to this much attention.

No, he wasn't used to any attention.

He could only hope that he got used to it before summer, when the whole of the Pack would be in town for the yearly reunion.

“Let's go wait outside for your dad, yeah?” Talia took pity on him, and led him to the front porch.

“I know you're all still listening.” Stiles said, once he sat on steps. “And you know what they say about eavesdroppers?”

“No, what do they say?”

Stiles stared at Talia. “You mean you haven't read Voyage of the Dawn Treader?” Stiles kind of flinched when he heard Laura cackling again, but couldn't help a grin at the predictable “Shut up, Laura!” That came from Derek.

“Touche, cutey.” She settled beside him, content to just sit on the porch with Stiles.

That was the most overwhelming thing of all.

“Can I ask…” Damn.

“Yeah?” Talia turned to look at him, warmth shining from her face.

“I'm sorry.” He whispered.

She frowned, then sighed. “Ah. I was wondering when you'd ask.”

“No, no. I'm not. I mean, it's not my place, and I don't want – “

“Stiles.” Her calm voice calmed him some, too. “I offered. But you know as well as I do that there's no guarantee, especially when a person's already sick. Claudia didn't want to lose any time with you.”

Stiles tried, he did, but then he was crying, and Talia was holding him.

“That's ok, let it out. sh... I know, kiddo, I know.”

About ten seconds after Stiles got himself under control, Jonathan and Terry stepped out, Baby Mary bouncing to Stiles and hugging him hard.

“What's up, Princess?”
“Don't cry, Syl! It's okay, I hug you, you don't have to cry!”

“Thanks, Mary.” He hugged her back, giving her parents a questioning look.

“We're gonna take her home. She's... a bit young, to t-r-u-s-t around non-Pack.”

Stiles feels his face heat. “Oh, I didn't even... I'm sorry.”

Jon looks a bit annoyed, but Terry shakes her head at him. “No worries, mano. We know how this dance goes. Trust me, we know – my dad still doesn't know, and I’ve been married this cannibal for seven years.”

“I'll remind you yet again, it’s not cannibalism if I eat humans.”

“Dude, it so is!”


“Yeah you are. I mean, yes, you're a werewolf, but you're also human. Otherwise, how'd this bundle of sweetness get here?”

“I don't follow.”

Talia covered her smile with her hand, but nods for Stiles to explain himself. He shrugs; in for a penny... “It's the definition of speciation, actually, as long as you can have viable offspring, you're still the same species.”

Terry gasps out laughter, and some invisible bit of tension Stiles hadn't even consciously noted left Jon's frame when he grinned down at Stiles and his sister-in-law.

“Alright, kid, you got a point. And you were right, Talia.”

“I was.” She said mildly. Jon tips his head, Talia nods, and Jon nods back.

“C'mon, Princess.”

“But Syl was cryin'!”

“I was, but you hugged me and I’m all better. See?” Stiles pulls back, and so does Mary, examining his face closely. Then she smiles broadly and buries her face in his neck. “I'm the bestest!”

“You really are, Princess Mary.” Stiles agrees.

She lets go to hug Talia, and Stiles stands to say good-bye. Terry gives him a quick hug, then rescues Talia from the octopus named Mary, letting her husband run his cheek across Stiles.

“Be safe, Little Red.” Jon winks at him. “Most cannibals aren't as nice as I am.”

Stiles snorts. “Every other cannibal I've met was a windego.”

Jon and Terry both choke for a moment, and Jon punches him – gently – on the arm. “You'll have to tell us about 'em. When we don't have certain short people around.”

“I'm at your service. Wouldn't worry, though; we're too far south, here. It was up in Washington.”

Jon was looking decidedly fascinated. “What's a winnaglow?” His gaze dropped to his daughter,
and he sighed. “I dunno, Princess. Why don't we go home and look it up?”

“Yay! I like using googles!”


“See, mommy? Stiles and I are great! We can have a googles wedding! With looking bars everywhere, so people aren't bored during the talky-bits!”

“That'd be the most fun wedding ever, Princess Mary, I totally agree.” Stiles just nods. And smiles and waves until they're gone. Then he counts to a hundred.

“So. You gonna give me away at my wedding, Tee?”

Talia laughs. “You aren't marrying Mary, Stiles.”

“What?” Stiles pulls himself upright, miming affront. “I could totally marry her! You saying I’m not good enough for your niece?”

“You're ten years older than her. That's a little much, don't you think?”

“Well, now. Give us twenty years.”

“I'll remind you of this conversation in twenty years, then.” They grin at each other, and Talia sweeps him into a hug, saying so softly no one else can hear it, “Since I’ll actually be here to do it, because of you, cutey.”

As per his night, Stiles blushes.

**August 21st, 2011**

The first day of school had always been nerve-wracking. This year, it seemed... looser. Maybe because Cora and Allison had been waiting for him on the steps.

Cora and Stiles had shared amused grins at the shy looks Scott and Allison kept exchanging; Allison had gone to the other middle school, so they'd never met before.

The only hard part was leaving them to go to his class, since all three were freshmen. Still, it made him feel better to know that they'd be there at lunch, that it wasn't just him and Scott, anymore.

And Lydia Martin went out of her way to sit next him in AP Trig. Her explanation of “Don't think this means I like you, I just want to make sure I’ve got a partner who isn't an idiot,” didn't fool him a bit. Lydia knew how much he adored her, and clearly she was beginning to appreciate it.

Her boyfriend Jackson didn't appreciate it quite so much. But he was a douche, so who cared?

Lunch brought other people into Stiles social awareness; Cora’s “mini-boyfriend”, Issac (“Yes, Stiles, mini-boyfriend. It means we hang out and we have guaranteed dates to dances and stuff. But we're not really boyfriend and girlfriend. I think I’m too young. I try and learn from my sibling’s mistakes, ya know?” Stiles had nodded, vaguely remembering something about Derek and a girl named Paige. The sour look Derek had shot Cora ensured Stiles didn't ask.), Issac was a tall kid, over six foot already, with messy brown-blonde locks and cheekbones to die for.

What? Stiles was confident in his bisexuality. Well, confident that he was bisexual.
With Issac came Boyd, who was almost as quiet as Derek, but wasn't anywhere near as grumpy. He just seemed... zen. He was almost as tall as Issac, which was only fair since he was older, sixteen and a sophomore. He was also one of the star players on the lacrosse team, and one of his few contributions was that he was helping Issac practice, so it wouldn't be a bother – would, in fact, help in the long run – to help Scott and Stiles, as well.

Scott, predictably, leaped at the chance. Stiles said he'd think about it, because he had a very full plate. Mondays and Wednesdays he'd be working with Allison and her day, Tuesdays and Fridays he'd be working with Peter, plus he had five AP classes.

Then again, Scott was going to pout at him until he caved, he just knew it. And all this training was going to cut into best-bro time, so by the end of lunch, he'd told Boyd yes. Surely Peter and Mr. Argent would understand?

Stiles had the bright idea to do an end-run around Mr. Argent, and went to see the Principle.

“Mr. Stilinski.” Victoria peered at Stiles over the frames over glasses. “How can I help you?”

Stiles gulped, but forged forward. “It's about the training I’m supposed to do. Is this a... safe place?”

She raised a brow at Stiles, then stood to shut her office door. “Go ahead, Stiles.”

“YES, ma’am. I know I’m supposed to come over at four, every Monday and Wednesday, but can we make it five? Because Scott wants to try for lacrosse, and I’m already going to have cut down how much we hang, and I sort of need to deflect suspicion...” Stiles trailed off, unsure what the best argument would be.

Victoria smirked at him, just a bit. “That actually sounds reasonable. Plus, the conditioning you need to do for lacrosse -- you know Finstock insists that all his players also do cross country, right? -- the conditioning will carry over. If you've practiced before you get to our house, it will cut down the amount of work we have to put you through.”

“You're also going to be...” Stiles shuts his mouth with a snap, worried that he'd insulted her.

But Victoria just smirked more. “I'm meaner than my husband.”

“I... literally have nothing to say that won't end with you handing me my testicles, do I?”

At that, the principle laughed. “You're as bright as Talia claims, anyway. So we'll see you here at four thirty; Allison and I can wait for you to practice.”

Stiles squirmed. “We aren't starting until next week, ma'am.”

“Good. Then we'll see you at last bell.”

“Yes ma'am.” Stiles fled to Chemistry.

On the plus side, Lydia sat next to him again.

On the downside, for some reason the teacher, Mr. Harris, saw Stiles, and it was hate at first sight.

Stiles had never been so happy to go to P.E. in his life.

P.E. was the only class he had with Scott, because it wasn't segregated by grade. Derek was also in this class, and Stiles was treated to what appeared to be an on-going feud between Coach Finstock
and the Hale clan.

Werewolves shouldn't play sports in public; it just wasn't a good idea. Finstock didn't know that Derek was a werewolf, of course; how could he? All he knew was that Derek was absurdly physically talented, and yet he followed his older sister's path and refused to join any team at all.

And it pissed the coach off.

“Damn it, Hale, I can guarantee you an A in this class if you'd just join the lacrosse team! With you, we'd be sure to win State this year!”

“Sorry, Coach, I’m not interested.”

“Think of college! They like to see extra-curriculars!”

“I've got plenty of extra-curricula activities, Coach. I don't like sports.”

Finstock had thrown his hands up, muttering about waste, and gone back to organizing the class for their basic fitness evaluation.

And for the first time, Stiles got to see Derek slightly impressed with him. His flexibility, at least. It wasn't like Stiles tried to be bendy; he just was. Tall for his age – nothing like Issac, but he was still five foot ten – and skinny, he’d had to become somewhat flexible, just to continue fitting into his favorite seat at Scott’s, not to mention climbing the trees outside his and Scott’s windows, and the various “games” Rémy had set for him (basically a master's curriculum of B&E activities; Stiles wondered if Rémy really did think that he was going to grow up to be a cat burglar? But it was fun, and had been for years, so Stiles had kept it up.)

His last class of the day was Latin, he'd gotten Victoria to change him from Spanish 2 to Latin 2, and both Lydia and Allison were in the class; Allison had shared a conspiratorial smile with him, while Lydia gave him an incredulous look.

Then she'd been shocked at how much Stiles knew. Maybe impressed, too.

If he'd managed to impress both Lydia Martin and Derek Hale, it was shaping up to be a good year.

**September 23, 2011**

“Why do I have to be here, again?” Derek frowned at his mom, annoyed by the crowd and the noise and the... everything.

“Because it's Homecoming and Stiles is playing!” Talia grinned, annoying Derek further.

“Stiles isn't playing, he's holding down the bench.”

Talia rolled her eyes. “He might get some time on the field, you never know. Even if he doesn't, though, we're here to support Pack.”

Derek frowned harder at that. He still didn't understand how the kid was Pack. There was no doubt he was, but it was weird.

Still, there was no arguing, so Derek let it go, resigning himself to two hours of hell.

Cora kept grabbing his arm, bouncing like a lunatic, and Allison was shrieking on his other side, and he knew it was impossible but he swore he had a headache.
“Oh, dude, is she here for Boyd or for Stiles?” Cora nodded towards a leggy blonde in baggy clothing.

“Both.” Allison grinned.

Cora rolled her eyes. “Fat chance; Stiles’ is gay.”

“Nah, he's bi.”

Derek felt a flush creep over his face at their conversation, and tried to tune it out. Who cared?

“What da' mean, he's bi?”

“Haven't you noticed he's, like, totally in love with Lydia?”

If anything, Cora rolled her eyes harder. “I don't get it. At all. She's a ditz.”

“That's a mask, Cora.” Allison gently reproves Cora. “I know you don't like her, but Lydia's my friend. And she's the only person in the school with a GPA higher than Stiles. It's why he has the crush.”

“She's a snob! And a total bitch to Stiles.”

“In public, yeah. I’ve talked to her about it, actually. But Jackson hates Stiles, and she doesn't want to fight with him. He understands, you know?”

“He shouldn't. Either they're friends or they're not. Being friends in secret...”

Allison shrugs. “He'll take what he can get. It's not like anyone else is interested in him.”

“Except Erica.” Cora leers.

“What's up with that, anyway?”

“I think it's a hold-over from middle school.”

Derek leans forward, putting his chin on his mother's shoulder. “I'm getting something for this torture, right?”

She shoots him an amused look. “Yep. I’m letting you take the car to the dance tomorrow.”

“But I’m not going to – “

“Derek.” He shuts up, but glares. “Go to the dance. It won't hurt, I promise.”

“Mom.” He lowers his voice, so hopefully only she will hear him. “You know that I’m not ready – “

“You're not ready for a steady, sure. You can still go have some fun. Dance with some girls. Or boys. Whatever. You're sixteen, try and act like it!”

“They're all so... immature!”

“Like you're so grown up?” Cora interjects rudely.

“Comparatively.” Derek sneers.
“Yet you're whining like Mary.” Derek shrinks away from his mother's amused look. “You're driving Cora, Allison, Scott and Stiles. Try and have fun.”

“Whatever.”

**September 24, 2011**

Stiles really didn't want to go to the dance. The things he did for Scott!

So he let Cora dress him, babbling all the while about Issac, and prayed to any deity that would listen that Derek wouldn't kill him.

Derek confused Stiles.

On the one hand, he was the hottest person Stiles had ever seen – he was even hotter than Lydia, and that shouldn't be physically possible. But he was also the moodiest, broodiest person Stiles had ever met, and that was just sad. Stiles wanted to make Derek laugh, or at least smile, but the most he ever got was a startled look.

Stiles played with the collar of his shirt for a minute, delaying leaving James' room for as long as possible, until Cora yelled at him to hurry up. He didn't quite understand why he had to get ready here; he loved being at the Hale house, but he had a perfectly functioning home of his own. Whatever, Cora had bullied him into 'getting ready with her' – read, her dressing him like a Ken doll – and now he was out of time and didn’t have any reason to not go.

However much he didn't want to go.

Cora gave a wolf whistle as he walked down the stairs. “Looking good, Stilinski!”

“Whatever. But you look gorgeous, as always.”

Derek walked in, ran his eyes over Stiles, and gave a short nod. For some reason, Stiles blushed. Thankfully, neither notice, as Derek had bowed to his sister. “And what vision of loveliness is this?”

Cora punched his arm. “Give it a rest, Derek.”

He smirked down at her. “Sure. I’ll let Issac try. And break his face if he gets grabby.”

“Now, children.” Peter slouched against the door frame into the sitting room. “Play nice. Derek, glad to see you've embraced color.” And he had; Derek looked sinful in a pair of tight black slacks and a green button-down that brought out the green of his eyes. “Cora, I’m sure Issac won't know what hit him; that is, until your brother is forced to hospitalize him.”

“Peter!” Cora shrieked. “That's my Issac you're talking about!”

“Um-hm. And Stiles. I see you've kept to the theme.” Peter grins at him, and Stiles flushes a bit. “Red's a good color for you. Who knew you'd clean up so nice? Beside me, anyway.”

“Stop tormenting the boy, Peter, or you're sleeping on the couch!” Sarah yelled for Stiles' benefit, since he was the only one present who wouldn't hear her if she spoke in a normal tone.

“Stiles needs to get used to it; he'll be beating them off with sticks.”
“Sure I will.” Stiles can't help sounding a bit sour. But he shakes it off, or tries, anyway. “We better go, we have to get Allison and Scott.”

“Have fun, kids. And remember, don't do anything I'd do.”

Derek's lips twitch, and Stiles wonders if he's actually going to smile.

“I doubt any of us could, Uncle.”

Peter waves them out the door with a pleased smile.

Lydia was radiant. Jackson was a jackass.

Stiles hadn't meant to eavesdrop; he'd needed some fresh air, because being wedged between Scott and Allison's cuteness, on the one hand, and Cora and Issac’s hormones, on the other, was beyond depressing.

“It's just a stupid dance, Lydia. What does it matter?”

“It matters because if you get kicked out, I get kicked out! It matters, because you're a jerk when you're drunk. You know I don't like being around you when you're like this.”

“Deal with it, babe. I didn't want to come to this stupid thing. I'm only here because you wanted to come so bad, and I'm wishing I hadn't come!”

Jackson slammed back into the gym, leaving Lydia dejected outside.

“Wow, Lyds, I don't know if I should apologize for him being an ass, or for seeing it.”

Lydia looks up dully. “Just don't say anything to anyone and I'll take them both as read.”

Stiles moved closer to her. “Why are you with him, if he acts like that?”

She shakes her head. “He doesn't act like this most of the time. He had a fight with his parents earlier, and he didn't want to come... I thought it'd get him out of his head, you know? Normally, he's sweet when we're alone. Attentive.”

“Really? Cause normally, he's just a jerk to everyone. When you two first got together, he started to act almost human. But then... well. Yeah. I don't get you, really.” Stiles had no clue where this uncharacteristic boldness was coming from, he was almost as startled by his words as Lydia was.

“What do you mean?” She demanded defensively.

“You're the smartest person I've met, probably will ever meet. And you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. You're going to go to MIT and major in cybernetic design and create new theorems and win a Nobel before you're thirty! Why do you act like a... a...”

“A ditz?” She finishes gently, a soft smile gracing her face. He put that smile there. “Well, for one thing, no one sees that but you. For another... I don't think you'd understand, your dad cares.”

Stiles blinks hard. “Are you saying your parents don't?”

“Honestly?” Lydia shrugs, and he doesn't think she's faking her nonchalance. “As long as I look and act the part of dutiful Republican daughter, they're happy. That was the deal, you know – I can take any classes I wanted, so long as I didn't try to talk about them around anyone who matters.”
“That's fucked up, Lyds. They should support you.”

“Should. Don't. At least Jackson wants me to be happy. He doesn't understand what I’m talking about, most of the time, but he listens.”

“I understand when you talk.”

Lydia's smile turns wry. “I know you do. But it'd never work. You don't love me, you love this ideal of me that you've created in your mind. I’m bitchy and demanding and I’d walk right over you. And I like you too much to do that to you.”

Stiles snorts. “You're saying you like me too much to break my heart, so you're gonna break my heart?”

Lydia actually laughs. “I'm not breaking your heart, Stiles. I'm not even letting you down gently. I'm telling you what you've already figured out, but haven't been able to verbalize.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Stiles leans against the wall, and they stand in friendly silence for a few minutes. “I know. How about you dance with me? Since Jackson hates me, for whatever reason, it'll get him to come crawling back. And I’ve wanted to dance with you since I was in second grade and saw you on the other side of the playground.”

“Deal.” Lydia takes his arm and grins. “Besides, this'll get you some 'cool kid' points. I wish Jackson didn't hate you, though; I like you. I think, after tonight, I’m going to have to put my foot down and tell him to fuck off about it.”

“Whatever you want, Goddess mine.” Stiles grins back.

He was dancing with Lydia. She might be right, maybe he wasn't in love with her so much as the idea of her, but it was still a torch he'd carried since well before puberty. Dancing with her was a literal dream come true.

Until Jackson show up yelling.

“What the fuck do you think you're doing with my girl, Stilinski?”

“Oh, now she's your girl?” Stiles sneers back.

Jackson punches him.

Stiles knows how to take a hit, and he's about to return the favor when all the sudden, Scott and Issac are pulling away, and Derek’s dragging Jackson backwards by the collar.

“Wanna try that again, on someone your own size?” Derek glares at Jackson.

“Dude. He was dancing with my girl!”

“Don't call me dude. And if you don't want someone else dancing with your date, maybe you shouldn't have left her outside while you drank whiskey in the bathroom.” Stiles isn't sure if Derek actually looks murderous, or if it's just the lighting making his normal broody-face look that way, but...

This was going to get ugly if he didn't do something.

“It's fine, Derek.” He cuts in hastily.
“Fine?” Derek actually looks at him, startled. “You're bleeding.”

“I am?” Dumbly, Stiles touches his cheek and finds it wet. “Huh. Whatever, it's just a cut. He's not worth the trouble.” He hopes Derek gets his point; Jackson's human, Derek can't do anything to him, not without potentially getting in a lot more trouble than a single punch was worth.

Derek frowns at Stiles, and his heartbeat ratchets up; Derek is shaking in anger. “You're bleeding, Stiles.”

“If I’d known he was your pet, Hale, I’d have – “

“Jackson Whittmore!” Lydia's screech had everyone in the immediate vicinity wincing in pain. “You say one more word, and I’m leaving with Stiles. You've been an insufferable ass all night; Stiles was dancing with me because he’s my friend and my so-called boyfriend couldn't be fucked to do it! Knock it off!”

Jackson blinks rapidly, apparently shocked by Lydia actually standing up for Stiles.

Thankfully, that's when Jackson’s best friend Danny slid into view, trailed by some guy Stiles had never seen before. “Okay, everyone, let's calm down. Jackson, let's go sit down...” He smoothly extracted Jackson from Derek’s grasp, mouthed an apology to Stiles, and led his drunken friend to a seat.

“You okay?” Lydia touched Stiles cheek.

He snorts, then gives her a lop-sides grin. “I'll wear it like a badge of honor, milady.”

“Such a dork.” Lydia tells him fondly. “But really...”

“We've got him.” Derek snaps.

“Alright, if you're sure, Stiles?”

“I'm cool, Lyds. Go babysit your boyfriend. He must've had a really crappy day, if he'd risk being kicked off the team just to take a swing at me.”

She frowns over her shoulder at Jackson, then sighs, looking at Stiles cheek again. “Only you, Stilinski, could take a punch and worry about the guy who threw it at you. Give me a call tomorrow, I’ll help you with that Latin paper, yeah?”

Stiles can only nod, because Derek's hauling him to the bathroom.

Stiles watches him in the mirror as he cleans the – small – cut, biting his lip against the sting of it. “Why are you doing this?”

“Doing what?” Derek absently asks.

“Taking care of me like this?”

“You're Pack.” Derek says quietly, focused on the cut.

“But you don't even like me!” It bursts out, not quite a wail, and Stiles can't help the flush that spreads across his face.

Derek freezes for a moment, looking confused. “Who says?”
“You. I mean, not literally, but you don't talk to me if you can help it. Seems like you'd do anything to avoid having to be around me.”

Derek sighs, leaning against the sink and tipping Stiles head back. “I don't dislike you, Stiles. I just... I don't understand. I don't understand how you're Pack, I don't understand how you think, or... any of it. You confuse me.”

“I'm sorry?” Stiles stares at him, as confused as Derek claims to be.

“Don't be.” Derek shrugs. “Mom tells me I was born conservative, in the sense that I’m slow to change. You've only been around a month; I’m still getting used to you.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. oh. Besides,” And glory of glories, there it was – Derek was smiling! It was a small smile, but it was there. “You talk so much, I normally can't get a word in edgewise.”

“That's true. But only because I’m trying to cover the sound of your broody-ness.”

“I'm not broody.” Derek wipes the paper towel over Stiles cheek one more time, then flicks his ear. “I'm just contemplative.”

“You talk so much, I normally can't get a word in edgewise.” Stiles grins.

“Did that jackass scramble your brains?”

“Maybe, normally I’d be too scared to say anything like this to you.”

Derek rears back, looking almost hurt. “What?”

Stiles’ eyes widen at this display. “I mean, you're always wearing that murder-face, you look like you'd as soon kill someone as talk to them... no, that's not. Damn, Stiles, shut up.” He reaches up and pounds his fist into his own forehead a few time, until Derek gently traps his wrist and stops him. Stiles sighs. “What I mean, is that you always seem like you'd rather I not bother you, and I don't like bothering people or making them dislike me more than they do already.”

Derek frowns at him harder. “I'm sorry I made you feel that. I’m just... I'm not a bouncy person, like you. Not happy.”

“You think I’m happy?”

“Well... yeah? You're always joking and being all...” Derek waves a hand, as if to delineate what, exactly, Stiles is.

“Dude.” Stiles blinks at him in astonishment. “That's so people don't know, all right?”

“Don't call me dude.” Derek says reflexively. “And know what?”

Stiles looks away, uncomfortable. “Jokes and sarcasm are my only real defense. Or, they were, I guess. Things have changed. I actually am kinda happy, for the first time since my mom...”

Derek raises a brow, then nods slowly. “Yeah. Since. I get it.”

“I know.” Stiles assures him softly.

Derek sigh. “You've stopped bleeding, anyway. It didn't bleed all that much to begin with. Are you
“Stitches? I’ve gotten bigger cuts fooling around with Scott!” Derek growls. “Or from the Argents.” Stiles adds hastily.

“I... I’m not really used to being around people who might need stitches at all. I...” Derek cuts himself off with another growl. “Sorry. It's natural to worry about Pack, but I guess you're not used to it from me.”

Stiles gives him a tentative smile. “It's okay. I kind of like it. Makes me feel less alone, you know?”

Derek smiles again, even smaller than the first time. “Yeah. That's what it is. C'mon, Cora’s throwing a shit fit and talking about jumping Jackson. Which is a mess we don't need. If I beat the asshole, it just looks like a couple juniors fighting. If she does it, it looks... bad.”

“Right. Yeah. Absolutely, let's go back out there so everyone can see my bruise and cut.” Stiles grins. “After all, I bet I’ve collected masses of cool points, for being so calm and collected. Dancing with Lydia. Getting punched. Having Derek Broody McBrooderson Hale defending my honor.”

Derek rolls his eyes and starts towards the door. “I am not broody, Stilinski. You just talk too much.”

“Ha! You're so broody, you don't notice my charms!”

“Sure I do. You're squishy and taste good with ketchup.”

“Oh, so now you're a dragon?”

“To-may-to, to-mah-to.”

Stiles grinned bigger. So worth getting punched by Jackass Jackson.

November 24th, 2011

Derek ducked around Stiles, who was mashing the potatoes, trying to get the butter without knocking something over.

“This is the last pie, mom.” He says, swiping the butter over the top crust.

“Good.” She's in the dining room, fussing with the place settings. “Get it in the oven, then, we're just about ready.” Talia raises her voice so Stiles can hear. “Are your dad and the McCalls on their way?”

“Yes.” Comes the cheerful answer. “Should be here any minute.”

“Good. Remember, everyone, none of them are in on the Masquerade.”

Stiles and his mom – and Peter, from the great room – share a laugh at that. Trust Stiles to have introduced a term from a game about vampires.

Trust Stiles to have conned most of the Pack – those who were old enough, anyway – into playing it. Though they'd taken one look at the werewolf RPG and tossed the rulebook out. Besides, it wasn't any fun playing a werewolf when you already were one.
Stiles preferred Mage. Of course. He'd started a role-playing club at school, and somehow talked Derek into joining.

Stiles was a bad influence; people were talking to Derek at school. And not getting upset and going away when he replied in monosyllables.

And now he's working in the kitchen and singing along to random 80's hits with Stiles, because why?

Still, Derek had to admit he felt better than he had since... since he'd met Paige, actually. Maybe it wasn't the same as it would have been, had Paige joined the family, but it was still his family. Maybe... maybe he had to confess, if only in his own head, that his mother and uncle were right; he couldn't live in the past forever, nurturing his heartache like roses. She wouldn't want him to, either.

Not that he'd ever admit it. Ever.

“She-iff! She-iff!” Mary ran towards the front door shrieking at the top of her lungs. “Fin'ly, She-iff, I hungry!”

Derek allowed himself a small smile at John's reply. “You're always hungry, Princess. I swear, you've got a black hole in place of a stomach.”

“Nah,” Terry was taking John's coat, from the sounds. “She's just got hollow legs.” Mrs. McCall said hello to Terry and Jon, and Scott yelled a hello to Cora.

John laughed. “Only kid I've seen who can eat as much as Stiles used to.”

“Syl!” Mary yelled happily. “Are you gonna come to our goolges wedding, She-iff?”

“Of course I am; I have to give the groom away, don't I?” He replied easily, then started greeting the adults while swinging Mary up onto his shoulders.

“There you are, son. Your future bride could eat a horse, and so can your old man. So feed us!”

Stiles laughs and smacks his dad's hands away from the rolls. “Sit at the table, heathen. I swear, it so difficult, raising you!”

“You're the one who fed me turkey bacon this morning.”

“That's because I knew you'd be eating all this, tonight.”

“Wow.” Mrs. McCall was carrying a basket that held a few dishes, which she set on the counter. “You guys have really laid out a spread.”

“We tend to have to.” Talia said wryly. “There's a lot of us to begin with.”

“And then you add us on top.”

“Nonsense, Melissa! The more, the merrier. We're happy to have you.”

“We're happy to be here.”

“Really happy!” Scott beamed at the food, then at Allison. It was the third thanksgiving that the Argents had spent with them, and now it seemed weird that they hadn't spent every thanksgiving here.
Allison smiled back at Scott; her parents exchanged an eye-roll, then smiled at Melissa. “Talia's right; it nice to see you in a non-official capacity.” Victoria said. “Especially since it looks like Scott may get up the nerve to ask Allison out before she's ninety.”

Scott turned bright red while everyone else tried to not laugh at him.

“Mom!” Allison all but wailed. “That's not fair. Or true!”

“Oh, that's right.” Chris narrowed his eyes at Scott, who went pale. “He asked you out yesterday. I’d forgotten.”

Stiles bumped his shoulder into Scott's. “He's just messin' with you, bro.” He whispered. Derek wasn't sure why he bothered, since even Chris had to have heard him.

“Um. Yes, sir, I asked if she wanted to go shopping tomorrow, I suck at picking presents out, and then maybe a movie? If that's okay?”

“Hmm.” Chris rocked onto his toes and back down, eying the boy.

“Oh, knock it off, Chris. You know Scott's already terrified of you.” Peter pushed Chris' shoulder playfully. “Are you trying to give the boy heart-failure before he even gets a date?”

“It's an idea, sure.” Victoria burst into laughter, and Chris drops his scary face. “I'm teasing you, Scott. Curfew's 11, for the holiday. But be careful, people are crazy on Black Friday.”

“Don't I know it.” John said mournfully. “Last year, there was this old lady...”

Derek smiled again. It seemed like the more people came into the house, the bigger it got.

There was room for all of them.

December 9th, 2011

“C'mon, Lyds, you have to help me!” Stiles whispered furiously. “His birthday is next week, and I got him in the Hales Secret Santa! I don't have any ideas for a single present, let alone two!”

“What's that about, anyway? Why does the family do Secret Santa?”

Stiles rubbed the back of his neck, shrugging. “They're a huge family. So everyone over the age of 12 just has to get one present. I mean, I know Peter's also getting Sarah something, and I think Tee still gets her kids individual presents, but they'd all go broke if they bought each bought everyone something. Although,” And Stiles blushed, a little embarrassed, “I did get Mary a present. And Peter and Tee. But I didn't have to, so.”

“What did you get them?”

“I found this cool old book for Peter, he likes weird old books.” It had been a total accident, really. Someone had found an old Hunter Beastiary, from the mid-1800's, in an estate sale, and put it up on Ebay for like $5. He'd been torn between giving it to Peter and giving to Chris, but then he'd looked through it. There was nothing in it that wasn't in the Argent's Beastiary, but Peter'd get a kick out of the inaccuracies and personal comments. Chris would just collect any possible new information and include it in his, which he could do even if Stiles gave it Peter.

Besides, in a weird way, giving something Peter was almost like giving it to Chris.
He didn't question.

“And Mrs. Hale?”

Stiles rubbed at his neck more. “It's probably stupid.”

“Maybe. Still. What?”

Stiles mumbled.

“What was that?”

“Antique mother-of-pearly hairbrush, comb and mirror.” He repeats, slightly louder.

Lydia was taken aback. “Wow, Stiles. Didn't know you had it in you.”

“I just... my mom had a set that was similar, and I remembered how much she loved it. When I saw it, I just... it seemed perfect.” Stiles confesses uncertainly.

“Tell her that, she'll love it.” Lydia says warmly. Then she sighs. “But you can't think of anything for Grouchy McBroody? Really?”

Stiles turned red. “Nothing that doesn't seem... stupid. Wrong. I don't know.”

“All right. Only because you got through the whole week without detention from Harris. We'll pick you up tomorrow at noon.”

“We?”

“Jackson and I were already going shopping.” Stiles groans. “I know. Think of it as training. For both of you; Jackson learns how to be civil even with annoying people like you, he'll need that when he's the D.A. And you'll learn how to put up with people like Jackson. It's the only day I can do it before Derek's birthday, Stiles. Sorry.”

“Yeah, no, it's cool. I can deal with Jackson, so long as you keep him from punching me. Otherwise, Cora might do horrible things to his car.”

Lydia gave Stiles a look of horror. “I didn't need incentive, but there it is!”

Stiles chuckles weakly. “Admit it; you're dating him for his Porsche.”

“Hmmm.” Lydia gives Stiles a wicked grin. “And his ass, darling.”

“Ewww...”

**December 17th, 2011**

Derek stared at the blushing boy standing in front of him. “What?”

“I said, happy birthday. I hope... I mean... I know how you love Hemingway...”

Derek looks from Stiles face down to the book in being shoved at him. “You didn't have to get me a birthday present, Stiles.”

“I know.” If anything, Stiles turned even more red. “But I wanted to. I’m hoping to corrupt you.”
“Corrupt me?” Stiles was doing it again; he was confusing the hell out of Derek.

Stiles gave him a shaky grin. “You told me science fiction is all hackwork. And you keep misquoting, 'ninety percent of science fiction is crap'. Did you know that was a misquote of Sturgeon's Law? Which is 'Ninety percent of science fiction is crud, but then ninety percent of everything is crud.' So, I figured since you liked his quote so much, and my AP English teacher last year said he was the Hemingway of Sci-fi, and I really love his short stories, he's got some of the best work ever published, Sturgeon is really underrated, as far as sci-fi writers go, he should've been considered a Grand Master, too, and – “

Derek took the book, effectively ending Stiles' ramble. He bit his cheek, trying hard not to smile, afraid that Stiles would think he was laughing at him, when really, he was touched at the thought that he'd so obviously put into this.

“I've actually read a few of his short stories, and I really liked them. Especially “Baby Is Three.”

Stiles smile smooths out into something real and relieved. “Yeah? Then you'll love this collection.”

Derek opened the leather cover, enjoying the feel and smell of the book.

Stiles had written an inscription. “The other 10% is Gold. Happy 17, may you always be in the 10%, cuz you've been that for me. Stiles.”

Derek just stared at it. “Stiles. I don't know what... thank you.”

He shuffles his feet, and scrubs hands over his too-short hair. Derek wants to take away the trimmer Stiles uses, make him grow his hair out to something that'd suit him better...

Stiles’ embarrassed laugh jerks Derek’s thoughts back from that strange thought. “Anyway. Happy birthday, big guy.”

“Really, thank you.”

Mary barrels into Stiles, shouting “Happy bifday, Deek!” at the top of her lungs, breaking the moment.

Peter found him on the roof later, reading one of the stories.

“Little Red has good taste.” He remarked, a secretive smile curving his lips.

Exasperated, Derek shut the book. “Why do you call him that?”

“He's a young boy, with a penchant for red shirts, many of which are hooded, who spends most of his time with wolves. What else would I call him?”

“But did he wear that much red before you started?”

“He was wearing a red hoodie the first time I met him.”

Somehow, Peter's heart doesn't skip. “I was there, he was wearing a white t shirt and a blue and green plaid. Not a bit of red, until you gave him that red hoodie.”

“That wasn't the first time I met Stiles.” That secretive smile was still on Peter's face, but now he'd piqued Derek’s curiosity.

“When did you meet him, then?”
Peter gives Derek a fond look. “Sorry, I’m actually not allowed to tell you yet.”

“What?” Derek cocked his head and studied his uncle. “Why not?”

Peter shrugged. “Magic.”

“You've had magic cast on you that prevents you from telling me?”

At that, Peter throws back his head and laughs. “I wish it were that simple! But it doesn't matter, Derek. It's not anything to worry about, I promise.”

His heartbeat stays steady as always.

“You just love tormenting me, don't you?”

“Course I do. You're my favorite nephew. But I came up here for something else.”

“Yeah?”

“It's a different secret.” Peter grins. “We're not telling anyone else until Christmas. Only you'll know.”

December 25th, 2011

Stiles used the last bite of goose to mop up the last of his gravy, all but moaning over how good it was. He'd never had goose before.

Roasted goose was apparently an Argent Christmas tradition, and since they were hosting Christmas, goose it was.

“I swear, Mrs. A, if you weren't married to the scariest man alive, and I were even four years older, I’d marry you for this!”

Victoria laughed at Stiles. “That's sweet, but I think Mary'd beat me up.”

“Yeah. But I'd get more goose, so.”

“Proof, once again, that the way to a man's heart...”

“Is between his fourth and fifth ribs?” Chris finishes his wife's sentence with faux sweetness.

“Erm.” Stiles shoots Chris a worried look. “Please note I said if she wasn't married to you.”

“Just you remember that, son.”

“Not likely to forget.” Stiles almost squeaked, turning red when Victoria winks at him.

“Now Vicky,” John rolled his eyes at her. “Don't rile him up. I’ve got to work later.”

“Don't want you arresting my husband on Christmas.” She agrees with him.

Peter stands up, holding his wine glass loosely. “Fascinating as it to see how many shade Stiles can achieve in one sitting, Sarah and I have something to tell you.”

Talia's mouth drops open.
Peter gives her a smug grin. “By my loving sister's face, I’m sure you've figured it out, but.” He turns and smiles down at his wife, taking her hand. She beams backed up at him, eyes sparkling, and Stiles eyes burn with happiness.

“Sometime around the beginning of July, we’ll be introducing you to a new Hale.” Peter finishes.

The table explodes into congratulations and well-wishes, loud and happy. Laura whoops loudly, moving around the table to pick her aunt up in a bear hug; Talia wipes tears off her face, shoots Stiles an indecipherable look, then says “It only took you three years.”

Sarah snorts. “We've only been trying since June, Tee.”

“How much effort can it be for newlyweds?” Melissa asks slyly.

All the adults laugh. Stiles looks at Scott and sees the same embarrassed, slightly fearful look on his face that he's sure is on his own.

Still, Stiles has a duty, to the Pack and to his mentor. “Uh... I guess I’m going to have to learn how to change diapers, aren't I?”

This elicits even more laughter. Even better, Derek shoots Stiles an approving grin.


“Let's hope Peter's coming hell-spawn is even half as awesome as yours, John.” Talia raises her glass in a mock toast.

“Hey!” Peter sticks his tongue out at his sister. “I'll have you know, my daughter will be twice as awesome as Stiles, and she'll use her powers of awesome to steal his heart away from Mary, so my grandchildren will take over the world.”

“Oh, god, Uncle Creeper – that's the worst plan for world domination I’ve ever heard! And I’m including every attempt by Dr. Doom!”

“If it's stupid and it works...” Sarah says with mock sweetness.

Stiles fakes a shudder. “Who am I to reject my Evil Overlord?”

Christmas is about family, and anymore, his family is his Pack.

**Interlude: Blood is thinner than Dust**

Jeff sped to the Hale house, horrified both by his brother's actions, and those he was about to commit.

*He didn't think there was anyone to blame but Jared, that was the problem. He's spent the past five years making excuses for his brother, finding reasons for their 'bad luck' to be anyone else's fault. It was the Ennis brothers against the world, always had been, even before Jared killed their father and became Alpha. Jeff knows that a lot of their problems are left over from their father, residual bad decisions still raining on them. Others are actually bad luck, things beyond Jared's control. Some are the Betas, or rather the lack Jared sees because there are only three Betas. Most of the problems, Jeff thinks, really can't be blamed on Jared.*

*This? Was unequivocally Jared’s fault, and nothing good would come of it.*
Jeff didn’t bother to turn off the engine of his car, just flung open the door and ran to the house.

Alpha Hale was standing there before he’d gone three steps.

“Beta Ennis. I banished your Alpha from Hale lands.”

Without pausing to think, Jeff threw himself to the ground and rolled onto his back, offering the Alpha his total submission.

“What the hell?” Her second, her brother Peter, peered over Alpha Hale’s shoulder, looking shocked.

“Explain!” Her eyes flashed red.

“I tried to stop him, I really did he, he wouldn’t listen! He kept saying you had more than your share of Betas, that you didn't need to keep them all, and he’d win Derek’s loyalty if it killed him!”

“What do you mean?”

Jeff gulps, praying that she doesn't rip him to pieces for having the audacity to be Jared’s little brother. “He talked to that girl, Paige. Found out some stuff, ugly family stuff, and offered her the Bite. Told her that it would win Derek back. I tried to stop him, I did! But he said that you'd understand, be grateful even, that the girl's been given the chance to avenge herself.”

Alpha Hale stares at him, seemingly frozen, for several long minutes. Then she moves fast enough that she blurs even to Jeff’s sense, and pulls him to his feet. “Peter, get Derek. He's got earbuds in, that’s the only reason he’s not breathing down our necks. Jeff, back up and explain.”

“Yes, Alpha Hale.”

“Wait.” She holds a hand up. “This isn't the time for formalities; call me Talia.”

“Um. Yes, Talia. Jared’s been looking to expand the pack, without giving the Bite. I don’t know why; as long as it’s a choice, why is it a problem? But he's been adamant that he only wants born wolves. While we did come here to renew the treaty between our Packs, he was really looking to try and poach Betas. Because, he said, your Pack is so large, a few would be unhappy and want the option of moving higher. I told him he was out of his mind to try here, because you’re all family, but he didn't listen. He asked Derek first, and both your in-laws. They all rejected him, that’s the only reason he suggested...”

“Insulted.” Talia corrects with a growl.

Jeff swallows. “Of course. I didn't even know he was going to do that, I swear I would have done my best to stop him...”

“Did he really think that I’d marry my eighteen year old Heir to his mangy ass?” Talia raises an eyebrow, still looking like she’d bitten into a lemon at the thought.

“I don’t know what he was thinking; I’ve been trying for the past thirty hours to get him to explain to me what the hell is going on. Sure, we’re a pack of four, but we’re a nomadic pack; much bigger, and we’ll have problems. I think... I’m beginning to think Deucalion is right, and my brother has lost what few wits he had.”

“That happens, when you steal power that isn’t yours, boy.” The smooth voice of Alpha Deucalion seems to come from everywhere, so Jeff isn't surprised to see him step out of the woods.
“I…” Jeff looks at the ground, unsure what to say. Yes, his brother had killed his father, and that’s how he became Alpha, but he would have been Alpha if their father had died otherwise.

Wouldn’t he?

“No.” Talia’s voice is gentle. “Your father and brother lied to you, Jeff. I don’t know why; I’d fought with your father about it often, but he refused to believe me. Said the eldest would always be Heir.” She sighs, exchanging a look he can’t decipher with Deucalion, then turns back to Jeff. “Jared knew he wasn’t the Heir, and that’s why he killed your father. I knew, of course, but I’ve no right to interfere in another’s Pack.”

Jeff shakes his head. “It doesn’t matter. What matters is the girl. She’s not old enough to be offered the Bite, and he’s going to call Hunters down on us. On you, too, maybe.”

“Likely not; Peter can call Chris on the way. We’ll do our best to protect your Pack, Jeff.”

“No.” Jeff closes his eyes against tears. “No, they’re not... they killed her parents and kidnapped her uncle. I’d have been here sooner, but Jared sent me to Yreka for something, I didn’t know about any of this until I got back...”

Deucalion growls. “The idiots.”

“Please, Alpha Hale – I ask for sanctuary.”

“Easily granted.” Talia turns to the house as her brother and son exit. “In the car, both of you. We’ll explain on the way.”

Derek was in agony; it had been less than a week since his disastrous dinner with Paige, and he’d been moping the whole time, unable to understand how he’d so misjudged her. To find out that she’d come to ask him to run away with him, because of the abuse in her own family... if he’d known about the abuse, the Pack could have saved her without killing anyone.

Jeff directs them to the motel right on the outskirts of town, bitterly amused at the wrinkled noses of all three Hales. They were a settled Pack, used to amenities Jeff can barely remember. Deucalion seems merely amused at the location. “He couldn’t find a safer local? And where are the rest of your Pack.”

“Burying the bodies.” Jeff whispers.

A scream cuts through the night; Derek stiffens, then starts scrambling out the door. “That was Paige!”

“Oh, no.” Talia whispers.

“That boy is right about everything, isn't he?” Comes the confusing mutter from Peter.

Then they're flanking Derek at the room's door, and Talia's pounding on it. “Open up, Ennis, now!”

Jeff sags back against the car in... relief? He thinks it must be relief, to see that his brother is there, and isn't being an idiot. Jared's glaring at him from the door. “Had to go run and tattle, didn't you, Jeff? You're not cut out to be one of us.”

“I'd hold my tongue if I were you, boy.” The mildness of Deucalion's tone served to point up the threat – Jared couldn't stand against two Alphas and three Betas. He couldn't even if the other two
members of their Pack were there.

“Let me in, damn it, I have to get to Paige!” Derek was monofocused, unknowing and uncaring about the underlying tension.

“I'm so sorry, baby.” Talia whispers to her son.

He doesn't respond, just pushes past Jared and crawls onto the bed holding Paige.

Jeff can smell it, now; the rot, as the girl's body rejects the Bite.

“What's happening to her?” Derek demands, stark black lines running up both his arms.

“Duke, would you be so kind as to take custody of Ennis, please? Peter, find out what Chris and Victoria’s ETA is. Jeff, come help Derek and I with Paige.”

Deucalion is forced to knock Jared out, Peter spends several minutes on the phone, but Jeff can't pay attention to anything but the drama in front of him.

“I'm so sorry, Paige. If I'd known what was going on, we would have helped.”

“I should have told you. I shouldn't have... I'm sorry, Talia. I said some things...”

“It's okay, Paige. I understand, we all do. You have every reason to be scared of family. Derek’s right – if we'd known, we would have taken care of you.”

Even with three of them pulling her pain, Paige's face was still pinched in agony. “I should have just... why does it hurt, Derek? He said the Bite itself would hurt, but that it wouldn't last, but it burns like acid.”

Derek shakes his head, too choked by his tears to speak.

“Five minutes.” Peter says shortly, casting a disgusted look at Jared’s slumped body, then sitting at the end of the bed and adding his own power to the mix. “Hey-a, Paige-girl, how's my favorite cellist?”

“Not so good, Pete...” The girl pants for a moment, eyes closed. “Is there anything to drink?”

“I'll find something.” Deucalion promises, kicking Jared’s head as he opens the room's door.

“Do you really think they'll have ideas?” Peter sounds doubtful.

“Worth a shot.” Talia answers grimly.

Jeff tries not to hear what Derek and Paige are saying, feeling like the lowest sort of voyeur. “I'm sorry, Paige, that I wasn't able to stop my brother.” Jeff looks at Derek, not Paige; she’s not the one who’s going to have to live with this, after all.

She's not going to live.

Jeff jumps when the door opens again, Deucalion carrying a bottle of water, and leading in the two Argents. He can't help shrinking against the bed, worried despite knowing about the treaty the Hale Pack has with them.

They take in the situation with one glance, and Victoria sighs. “She's only got one chance, and... it isn't a good one.”
“We’ll take it.” Derek says fiercely.

“Will she?” Chris asks gently. “She has to kill the Alpha who Bit her.”

“That’s all?” His voice harsh, Derek glares at Jared’s unconscious body. “He’s dead either way, isn’t he? For killing her parents and uncle, and trying to turn her so young?”

“Yes. But she might not want to kill him.” Chris reminds Derek.

“He killed my parents?” Paige recoiled, smelling of hurt and fear. “Why did he...”

“He told me it was punishment, for not protecting you.” Jeff forces the words out.

“But they were being hurt, too! He told me he’d take me away, that without me here, they’d be free to escape my uncle. He...” She starts crying in earnest.

Derek soothes her as best he can, peppering her face with kisses. “He’ll die for his crimes, sweetheart. In fact, it’s the only way we know that might save your life.”

“Save my – I’m dying?”

“Yes, I’m sorry, Paige; your body is rejecting the Bite.” Peter rubs her ankles, face blank but voice gentle. “That’s why you have to kill him.”

Every person awake in the room, aside from Paige, looks to Jeff.

Jeff nods. “He’s... he’s killed at least two people. Maybe more, I don’t know. And gave the Bite to this child, who’s too young...” he doesn’t know that that’s why she’s rejecting it, but it feels like it might be true.

“I’ll do it.” Paige says, after less than a minute's thought. “It... it’s self-defense, right? The only way to not die? He didn't tell me it might kill me! And, and he killed my parents.”

Chris nods. “Duke, if you'd be so kind as to place Jared on the bed. Peter, help hold this piece...” Chris flicks his eyes to Paige and censors himself. “...him down. Paige, honey, this is actually really easy, since he won't be moving...”

Chris talks her through how to kill an immobile man; Jared woke up, sending his brother a panicked look, but wasn't able to break the holds Deucalion and Peter had on him.

Two amazing things happened, as the girl slid the knife home, and one tragedy –

The black miasma seeping through her veins came pouring back out –

Power flooded Jeff’s body, arcing his back with the force of it –

A young Omega girl, older than Derek and Paige but still several years younger than Jeff, screamed from the door, snarled the word “bitch!” then threw herself claws-first at Paige.

Deucalion and Peter were busy holding down Jared; Chris was guiding Paige. Talia and Victoria were on the other side of the girl, and Jeff was collapsed on the floor. This left only Derek between Paige and the Omega.

He reacted without thought, pure instinct moving his claws to rip out her throat when her claws sliced into Paige’s side.
Paige shrieked and moved to hide behind Chris, who drew his gun and pointed it at the door.

“What...” Derek swayed, looked at his mother in fear. Talia looked back, her gaze proud but sorrowful.

Derek’s eyes were turning from their normal Beta gold to a shocking blue.

“Oh, nephew.”

“What – who is she?” Derek seemed shell-shocked, unable to really process. “Where did she come from, and why’d she attack Paige? Paige!” He whirls on his knees, the blanket bunching under his knees, making a weird sound as the blood soaking in was moved.

Paige leans against Chris, hand to her side, bleeding steadily but not very badly. “She barely got me, Derek. But you...”

“I just reacted. Where did she come from?”

“Jeff?” Talia prods him.

“I... I told he'd been trying to recruit. She must be someone he found in the past day, after he sent me to Yreka. That's all I can think of... she wasn't Pack. Maybe he'd offered her a place?”

“He did.” Tom said from the door. Tom had been Jeff's brother's second. “What's going on?” He glares at Jeff, hatred palpable.

Deucalion narrows his eyes at Tom. “Is that any way to speak to your Alpha?”

“He ain't no Alpha. Far as I can see, he just helped kill my Alpha.” Tom spits back.

Kelley, his girlfriend and the last member of the small Ennis Pack, isn't looking as confident. She pushes on his shoulder, murmurs, “Those are the Argents, Tom. Step careful.”

“I'll step however I damn well please – they just murdered our Alpha, for nothin’!”

“Nothing?” Talia's voice has gone icy. “He killed at least two humans and gave the Bite to a fifteen-year-old girl; either of those crimes would have called for his death. Did you help him?”

“We're only Betas; we can't give the Bite.” Kelley says it quickly.

Peter snorts, gallows amusement. “Did you help him kill any humans?”

Neither speaks.

“Derek, Paige, wait outside.” Talia doesn't remove her eyes from the – his? Are they his, when he doesn't want them? – Betas. Peter rips off a portion of the sheet untouched by blood, and hands it to Derek. “Use that, try to stop the bleeding. I’ll look her over as soon as we're done in here.”

Silently, Derek helps Paige outside. Once the door is closed, Talia points to the two chairs.

“How many humans did you help Jared kill, or kill on his order.”

Kelley swallows. “He... he made us kill... nine?”

“Nine?” Victoria’s jaw drops. “You’ve killed nine humans since he became Alpha?”
“Oh. Um, no. That's... that's in the last year.”

“God's sake, why?”

“What?” Jeff yells over Chris' question.

Talia and both Hunters look at him. “Did you know he was killing people?”

“Gods, no!” Jeff can't take his eyes off Kelley, can't wrap his head around it. “Answer Mr. Argent's question – why were you killing people?”

Tom shrugs. “Depends. Money, sometimes. Couple times, it was people who wouldn't be respectful. Once, it was a group of three who tried to take Kelley.”

“Those three, perhaps, could be forgiven.” Victoria says flatly. “But the rest? How many were killed because he made you, and how many did you kill without any force or will from Jared?”

Kelley swallows, and the scent of her fear is overpowering. “I... most of the ones I killed because he made me.”

“Most?”

“I... I'm sorry!” She starts crying, almost hysterical.

“Where are Paige's parents?”

Peter's question confuses Tom enough that he just answers. “We threw 'em in a gully, in the Preserve. Made it look like a animal attack, right? That's what we normally do.”

Kelley cries harder, and Tom gives her a dirty look, hissing, “Shut up, bitch! Jared's dead, and they know Jeff ain't gonna go around killing humans.”

Tom seemed sure he wasn't going to be punished at all; Kelley, on the other hand, was sure they were both going to die.

Jeff looked at the Argents, nervous and unsure. “I guess they're my responsibility?” He turned to Talia. “Is there anything short of...”

All three shake their heads, firmly. Talia gives Jeff a look of sympathy, knowing that while he holds little love for either of them, they were still Pack.

He sighs but pulls himself to his feet, letting his eyes go red for the first time and extending his claws. “I'll make it quick, at least.”

“We can do it for you.” Chris offer, sympathy lacing his voice.

“Do what?” For the first time, Tom looks unsure.

He shakes his head at the Hunter. “I'd feel better if I didn't turn them over to Hunters. No offense...”

Victoria graces Jeff with a small, understanding smile. “We don't take any.”

“Turn us... what you doin', Jeff?”

Kelley calms at Tom's panic and takes his hand. “It's okay, babe. He said he'd be quick.”
“This ain't right, man. We're your Pack!”

“You said I wasn't your Alpha.” Jeff points out, stalling, unsure he could really do this.

“Yeah. You'd be a shit Alpha, too nice. Too soft. Ready to kill us over some random humans!” Tom sneers, trying to cover his fear with bravado.

It gives him a moment's pause. “How many humans, exactly? How many did you kill without Jared giving you an Alpha order?”

“I don't know. A couple dozen?” He shrugs, unconcerned. “No one ever found nothin’, so it don’t matter, do it?”

The new Alpha moved before he finished his shrug, ripping his throat out as neatly as he could. Then he turns to Kelley. “And you? How many did you kill?”

“Not... only three or four.”

Closing his eyes, Jeff sighed. Opens them long enough to replicate the procedure with her, then sits back down on the floor.

“How the hell do I...” He looks up at Talia. “I... can I still?”

She nods, tears in her eyes. “If you can stand it, you can still have sanctuary here. But you can't stay for long, Jeff. We're not family; two Alphas who aren't family don't tend to coexist well.”

“I've a better idea.” Deucalion speaks up. “I'll train you. Being Alpha's a lot more than Jared ever understood. You can travel with my pack – I've already got another Alpha traveling with me, I know how to get along with multiple Alphas in a single pack.”

Talia nods slowly. “He'd be better, since you're used to the lifestyle. But if you ever need a break, Jeff, you can come back.”

“We agree.” Victoria says, surprising him. “You could have argued with us about killing them; you could have stood by and let us do it, because it wasn't your fault or your responsibility.” She was giving Jeff a look he didn't understand at first; once he did, it shocked him.

He doesn't think anyone has ever looked at him with respect before.

“We'll take care of them, if you like.” Talia motions to his brother's body. “We have a spot where we bury all of our kind.”

Jeff nods, feeling numb. “I'd appreciate that. I... I'm grateful, all of you. For the help, that we saved the girl... what's going to be done with her?”

“They set her parents up to look like they'd been killed in an animal attack. I'll have Jon check and make sure the site looks right, then call it in. We'll take care of her.”

“I doubt she'll want to stay with us.” Peter muses. “You might have to wipe her memory.”

Talia grimaces. “If I do, I'm taking the last couple weeks. She doesn't need... anyway. Don't worry about her, Jeff. She'll be fine.”

He nods again, probably too much. “Deucalion, are you...” He doesn't even know what to ask.

He kneels in front of Jeff. “I'm old, boy. You're what, twenty three?”
“Twenty five, sir.”

Deucalion grins ruefully. “I’m almost two centuries old.” Jeff can only stare at him in shock. “I know; Packs that live like yours, they tend to die young and don’t have anywhere near the knowledge to share with their children they should. My point, I’m old and I have that knowledge you should have. I know what I’m doing, boy. Give me five years, and you’ll be ready to start a real Pack.”

“When you're ready, come and talk to me.” Talia interjects. “Oh, I expect to see you every time Duke comes through, but... if it's you asking, Alpha Ennis, you might be surprised at the changed answer.”

Jeff opens his mouth, but can't find any words, and eventually just nods some more.

He refuses to leave Beacon Hills until the girl's life is settled; Duke is kind enough to indulge Jeff on this. He supposes when you've lived as long as Duke has, patience becomes ingrained.

Her parents were found, but her uncle never was. No one knows if Jeff’s brother killed him or if the man fled; no evidence was ever found pointing either way.

Paige had no other close family in the area, but her mother's sister fought hard to get her. Less than a month after her parents were found, Paige moved to Santa Fe.

She went with presents from the Hales ranging from electronics to clothing, and a necklace from Derek.

And missing almost two weeks over her memory; after discussing it with the whole Pack, the Argents, Duke and Jeff – and especially with Paige herself – it was finally decided that Talia would removed everything for the past 11 days, and she would be left at the top of the gully her parents had been tossed into. Jon “found” her, called 911, and she was treated for several claw-marks on her side and neck, further cementing the story of an animal attack.

She didn't want to remember anything about werewolves, too scared of everything, and who could blame her? She wanted to leave with only good memories, and Talia could make that happen.

Jeff felt bad for Derek, knew it was his fault for not stopping his brother. Worse, Derek himself had nothing but gratitude for the new Alpha, and looked up to him as a role-model, feeding his guilt.

Jeff owed the Hale Pack, and Derek Hale.

He’d find some way to pay them.

Chapter End Notes

To clear up confusion, though i've added a few lines that i hope help;

Jared Ennis is the Alpha Ennis seen on the show.
Jeff is his younger brother, and at the start of the flashback, his Beta. I imagine, in the original timeline, that Jeff was killed *sob* It's probable that the Beta Ennis wanted to see at the hospital was Jeff, but he doesn't have any documentation giving his name, so Ennis can't prove that it's his brother. or something like that.
But the change in the timeline continues on, and Jeff becomes the Alpha, like he
always should have been. So yay for that.

Does that help?
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Stiles is part of the Pack --
and the Pack is bigger than they thought.

Chapter Notes

SERIOUS TRIGGER WARNINGS: DV, abuse of a teen.

January 3rd, 2012

“I admit it, you were right.” Lydia said to Stiles, eying Derek.

Derek raises a brow at her across the room; she doesn't know he can hear her, of course, and she's staring blatantly.

“I was right about something and you admit it?” Stiles says incredulously.

“Mark it on your calendar.” Lydia tells him dryly. “Because I doubt I’ll ever say it again.” She nudges him hard enough that Stiles flails and almost falls off the cafeteria bench. “You know what I’m talking about.”

He stares at Lydia blankly. “No. Hate to say it, but no, I don't know what you're talking about.”

Lydia gives him wide eyes. “You mean you haven't seen Grumpy McBrooderpants today?”

“No?” Stiles peers around the cafeteria openly.

“At least try to be discrete, Stilinski!” Lydia hisses.

“Why?” Stiles asks, and Derek sees the moment when he finally spots him, sitting with Boyd, Issac and Erica, because his jaw drops and red begins to seep into his cheeks.

“Holy gods, Lydia!”

“Like I said, you were right. At the time, I thought, green cashmere sweater, old-fashioned. But damn, kid, you've got a good eye. Makes me wonder why you always dress like crap.”

“No one cares what I look like.” Stiles notes absently, still staring at Derek slack-jawed.

“If you dressed better, they probably would.” Lydia snarks, but it seems half-hearted. “But I have a different question, it's been bugging me for a while.”

“Oh-huh?” Derek smirks at Stiles and gives him a little salute. He's not sure why he's so pleased by
Stiles reaction, but he is, he's not going to question it. He's discovered questioning himself – or anyone, really – about Stiles just leads to confusion and metaphorical headaches.

“When did you start saying “gods”? And why? As far as I know, your mom was a holiday Catholic, and your dad can't seem to decide if he's agnostic or an atheist.”

“Deciding would imply he cares.” Stiles murmurs, still focused on Derek.

“Point. But, hey, focus!” Lydia snaps her fingers in front of Stiles, making him jump slightly.

“What?” He gives her wide-eyes confusion.

Lydia just sighs. “It must be repeat-day in Stiles land. I asked you when and why you started saying “gods”, doofus.”

“What do you mean?”

“It's 2012, Stiles, not ancient Rome or whatever. I didn't notice at first, but it's been bugging me since... I don't know, Halloween – ”

“Samhain.” Stiles mutters the correction, and Derek shakes his head at the kid. He frowns back in confusion.

Lydia ignores the interruption, talking right over him. Actually, Derek thinks she might not have heard him, he can't imagine she'd have let it go without further question, “Where anyone else would say 'god', you say gods.”

“I do?” Stiles blinks rapidly for a moment, obviously trying to figure out how to explain without saying something that would make Lydia even more suspicious. Derek had been forced to the reluctant conclusion that Stiles and Allison were right – Lydia was one of, possibly the, smartest person on the planet, and the only thing keeping her from figuring everything about Stiles, the Hale Pack, and werewolves out was how ludicrous the whole thing was.

“Uh.” Stiles runs a hand over his still too-short hair, then kneads the back of neck. “Well, you know how my ADHD gets... I ended up with so much information about myths and legends this summer. I sort of dove head first into the whole thing, and I guess it, I dunno, sort of... imprinted me?”

Derek gave a slight nod, impressed; it was the absolute truth, but didn't give Lydia anything to sink her teeth into. Stiles flushed slightly at this sign of approval and unconsciously straightened his spine.

Derek really liked how Stiles responded to him, how he was turning to Derek almost as much as to Scott. He was close to three years younger than Derek, but his intelligence truthfully wasn't much below Lydia's, and between his mother's death and his father's job Stiles had had to grow up fast. Add in his over-night recollection of events as much as a decade in the future...

Truthfully, he was more of a peer, a friend, than a younger cousin – that's how uncle Jon and aunt Steph told him to think of Stiles, back when mom first brought him home. Then again, Steph wasn't around much, so didn't really see Stiles and Derek interacting – she'd started dating a guy from a Pack down in Redding shortly before dad had been killed, and she'd all but moved there since. Steph had taken an instant liking to Stiles, though she hid behind her normal prickliness, which Derek thought was odd, because she was only Pack because of her brothers, she and mom didn't get along; Steph had resented her younger sister-in-law turning her baby brother into her de
facto Alpha. But she called Stiles 'baby coz', even introduced him that way, if the Sheriff wasn't around. Jon was around a lot more, and he'd dropped the 'cousin' remarks sometime around the beginning of October.

Maybe Derek could talk to Jon about Stiles, about his confusion? He'd tried to talk to Peter about it, but his secretive smirk quickly drove Derek away again. Mom wasn't much better; she'd just raised an eyebrow, asking “Do you have a problem with Stiles?” When Derek had protested that, she'd given him a pleased smile a patted his cheek. “So then what's there to talk about?”

It was frustrating! He liked the way they interacted, half sarcastic sass, half real, deep meaning, but he didn't understand it. He didn't understand when or why or how Stiles became someone this important. Sure, the kid's Pack, but he didn't go around seeking the approval of anyone except mom and Peter, sometimes Laura. He definitely didn't work to try and build the others up like he did Stiles. Part of that was probably because no one else needed it like Stiles – poor kid had less than zero self-esteem, though Derek couldn't, for the life of him, understand why – but Derek knew that wasn't all of it.

He just... didn't know what else it could be. Any of it.

Lydia and Stiles had continued discussing what he'd learned about various myths and legends, Stiles getting more exuberant as they talked, waving his arms and talking a mile a minute. The third time he almost smacked Jackson in the face – Jackson putting up with Stiles at lunch because Lydia made him created a weird mix of smug pleasure and gnawing worry for Derek – Jackson pinned Stiles wrist to the table with a hand and exasperatedly asked, “How'd you even get started on this whole thing?”

“I, uh. Okay, this is gonna sound weird, but this is me, it's always weird, right?” Lydia smirks at him, a 'of course' sort of smirk, a Stiles gives a self-deprecating nod. “I had this really vivid dream about fighting a Darach and several oni. I didn't even know what a Darach was, and turns out what I thought oni were wasn't what oni were at all…”

“So then what's a Darach?” Danny asked, seemingly fascinated. Derek narrowed his eyes at that; Danny's budding interest in Stiles rubbed him the wrong way, even though he liked Danny.

“Literally translation from Gaelic is “dark oak”, but it means a Druid who's gone wrong, twisting the teaching for selfish and evil purposes. Basically, a Darach is the Sith to a Druid's Jedi.”

Danny snorts a laugh. “So you had a dream about Japanese ogres and Darth Druidicus, and this somehow led to you reading everything on Wikipedia about mythology?”

“Darth Druidicus, nice!” Stiles offers his fist to Danny, who punches it with a pleased smirk. “And, basically, yeah. I fell down the rabbit hole. Like I said, dude, this is me – I spent hours and hours and days following the weirdest links to all over the place. It was actually pretty fun.”

Jackson rolls his eyes, which seems to annoy Danny, who smacks him. “Is that why you started that role-playing club?”

Stiles gives a little shrug. “I had all this random knowledge. Besides, it's fun.”

“Is it.” Danny studies Stiles for a minute then nods slightly. “You're meeting on Thursdays, right?”

“Yep!” Stiles beams at Danny.

“Maybe I'll drop by.”
“That'd be great, I – we'd love to have you!”

“It would be nice to have someone less spastic to sit next to.” Lydia agrees.

Derek growls to himself.

He spent most of Spanish trying to figure out why Danny being interested in Stiles was a bad thing. Danny was a cool guy, everyone liked Danny. The only 'bad' thing that anyone could even think to say about Danny – and only bigots would do so – was that he was gay. Hell, even most of the bigots in this town liked Danny.

Maybe... it must be Paige. Again. He'd fallen for her so hard, he'd somehow convinced his mother – his Alpha – to let him tell her the truth, and she hadn't even listened. Just. Out of nowhere, she tried to make him choose between her and his family, when he'd been trying to bring her into the family, was trying to make her Pack. And when she found out anyway, she hadn't wanted to remember.

That's what it is; Derek’s subconscious is poking him about the similar situation, worried that Stiles was going to go through the same thing. Except he wouldn't; Stiles is Pack, yeah, but he wasn't a werewolf, he wouldn't have the same problems.

Derek had convinced himself that everything would be fine by the time P.E. came around, forcibly ignoring the doubt remaining.

About halfway through class, Stiles jerked his head at Derek. Frowning, he followed the younger boy off to the side. “You seeing this, big guy?”

“Seeing what?”

“Issac, dude.”

“Don't – never mind. What about Issac.”

Stiles frowns at him. “He's limping. Again. And favoring his right side.”

Derek cocks his head at Stiles. “I asked him at lunch. He took a bad hit at practice last night. Probably because Coach insisted on practice while we were still technically on vacation.”

“He what?” Stiles stared at Derek like he'd grown a second head. “How did he lie to you, dude?”

“He didn't lie, Stiles.” Derek said, with what he thought was admirable patience.

“I was at practice, dude. All we did was run. No one touched him, at all.” Stiles bites his lip, worrying at it. “I've been watching, and it's getting worse.”

“Watching? What's getting worse?”

“He keeps showing up with bruises and scrapes. Always has a stupid excuse – he tripped, he dropped something, he ran into a cabinet.”

“You do that all the time.”

“Yeah, Derek.” He can smell Stiles exasperation. “I'm actually clumsy.”

“You're only clumsy when you think about it.” Derek points out without thinking.
Stiles just rolls his eyes. “Whatever. My point, Issac is the opposite of clumsy; he's so graceful, I sometimes wonder if he's related to you.”

“You think I’m graceful?” Why did that make Derek’s ears burn?

Stiles rolls his eyes. “You're ridiculously graceful and elegant and you know it, Der. no, there's something else...” Stiles gnaws harder on his lip, and Derek can smell blood now.

“You're making your lip bleed.”

“Well, someone's been making Issac bleed!” Stiles snaps back. “He hasn't said anything to you? Hasn't mentioned assholes in his neighborhood, or at his job, or anything like that?”

“He has a job? He's only fifteen.”

“Yeah, he works for his dad, he dad owns the company that does all the upkeep at the graveyard. That's why it's legal. He hates it, and I don't blame him. Morbid job, especially for a sunny kid like 'Zac.” Stiles scrubs a hand over his hair, licking his lip then wincing. “Can you just... I dunno, keep an eye out? Maybe try and get him to talk later? Not today, not after you already asked, but later in the week?”

Derek frowns back, worried by the worry in Stiles' eyes. “You really think there's something?”

Stiles ducks his head. “I hope there isn't, but I spent a lot of time hanging out at the station before Tee swooped me up. I’ve seen this pattern too much. We both know Cora isn't beating him. Might be bullies in his neighborhood, or some asshole that works with him. Something.”

“I'll see what I can do, Red.”

Stiles smiles for the first time since the conversation started. “Thanks, dude.”

“Don't call me dude.” It came out more fondly than Derek meant, and Stiles just grinned at him.

In English, Ms. Granada was working to get everything in order for her substitute – she was going on maternity leave starting next Monday. “So I’m going to spend the rest of the week meeting with each of you individually to go over your thesis. And no, Bryant, you may not change your books again, I told you that before Winter Break.”

Derek was handed a surprise along with his thesis – he'd changed his book, and thus his thesis, to More Than Human, because of the book of Sturgeon Stiles had gotten him for his birthday; it had inspired him and he was actually looking forward to the project.

Not only was Ms. Granada almost as excited as he was, she had a favor to ask. “Consider it extra credit, if you would. The sub, Ms. Dewitt, normally subs for junior high, and this will be her first time substituting for an AP class, period. She asked me to recommend someone from each class to act as sort of TA. You won't be grading papers or anything like that, and it shouldn't cut into the time you need to work on your thesis. You'll just be helping her understand my system, the requirements, maybe give her advice on how to herd certain classmates... rather what you do for me, just with the addition of explaining how I work to her. Think you're up for it? Not that you need the extra credit...”

“But it never hurts.” Mrs. Granada was one of the few teachers he had that he actually both liked and respected, so he actually smiled at her. “Well, if we can't have your substantial intellect here to guide us, our best bet is to train the sub to be as much like you as we can, isn't it?”
“Derek Hale – was that a dig at my overly-gravid form?”
She seemed to be teasing, but Derek flushed in embarrassment anyway. “Gods, no, I didn't mean... I would never, because there is nothing on this planet more awesome.” Derek bit his tongue for a second, trying to marshal his synapses into something other than gibbering idiocy. He wasn't helped by Ms. Granada sardonic smile and slightly evil chuckle. He sighs. “My uncle Peter and his wife announced at Christmas dinner that they're finally going to have a baby, and I swear everyone there – there were almost thirty of us, Ms. Granada – was crying happy tears. Pregnancy is sacred in my family.”

She snorts, amused and fond. “I know, I’m just winding you up. You're so easy, sometimes. Be careful of that, with Ms. Dewitt. She's both sharp and snarky; very bright girl, I taught her when she was your age, you know.”

Derek gaped at her in astonishment. “How old is she, then? Because she can't be – “

“Thank you, Mr. Hale.” She chuckles at him. “This is her second year teaching, I believe she's twenty-eight, or thereabouts. I had her as a student very early in my career... and when I became a teacher, fifteen years ago, it didn't take quite as long. It wasn't impossible or unheard of to do it in five years, freshman to Master's, then a year of student teaching – I was teaching my own classes at twenty three.”

“You must have been like Stiles.” Derek muses, adding it up in his head.

Ms. Granada favors him with another amused smile. “Yes, I did skip a year or two school before I entered college. Perhaps you should save all this flattery for next year's poetry section, Derek. Otherwise, you'll turn my head, quite, and my poor husband will wither in shame, outdone by a sixteen year old honors student.”

“I'm seventeen, ma'am.” Derek points out with what he hopes is only a mildly obnoxious cocky grin.

“Oh, doesn't that make everything better!” She throws up her hands, grinning widely. “What are you fishing for, hrm?”

“Well...” He turns his grin sly. “Have you considered 'Derek' as a name?”

Derek can't help the pleased smile when she actually laughs; somehow, Stiles efforts to make him smile and laugh have rebounded, and he finds himself working to do the same for the few people he actually likes. “I'll talk to Mike about it, but I doubt he'd be happy naming our daughter 'Derek'.”

“Well, there's always Laura.” He agrees philosophically.

“That's already going to be her middle name.” Ms. Granada's smile softens. “After Mike's mother. The fact that it's also your sister's name... well, I won't tell if you won't.”

“Your secret's safe with me.”

“Good. Now, I like the basic idea of your thesis, but I think it's too broad. Instead...”

**January 7th, 2012; 10:45am**

Stiles scooped a curly fry up, toying with it, still trying figure out the best way to approach the topic with his dad. He felt sick.
It wasn't going to be easy; Issac had been... less than forthcoming. He'd avoided Stiles as much as he could Wednesday, and he hadn't stayed at Game Night on Thursday; his dad had called, yelling about something that turned Issac white as a sheet. It was enough that even Derek looked concerned. Then he hadn't been at school yesterday. Stiles had pinged the secretary, trying to find out if Issac was officially sick, or skipping. He'd offered to collect his homework and take it to him, but the secretary had told him that Issac’s dad was going to pick it up. His phone was turned off, he hadn't answered emails, and since there wasn't a game this week, Stiles wouldn't see him again until Monday.

And he was really worried.

He was chewing his straw, physical manifestation of his mental gears working, when his dad sighed and put down the veggieburger Stiles had foisted off on him. “Alright, kiddo, spit it out. What's on your mind.”

“There's this guy...” Stiles begins slowly, still trying to figure out the best way to convince his dad to look into it. Maybe even get him to go over now, on the word of just a fourteen-year-old.

“If Danny wants to take you on a date, he'd better be willing to come and talk to me about it, since you're still only fourteen.”

“What?” Stiles froze in place, shocked wordless.

“Thought I didn't notice how you two flirt?”

“You, he, we, what? We flirt? Do we? Why do you think we flirt? Or is it just me, am I being flirty and I didn't know it? Or is he flirting back at me?”

John raises a brow. “If it's not about Danny, then what is it.”

Stiles narrows his eyes. “Right. But don't think we aren't coming back to this.” He reaches up, miming pushing something into the air. His hands shake, but he ignores that, trying to seem calm. “We'll just put a pin on the whole Danny conversation.”

“Yeah, let's do that.” John's watches his son, amused.

Stiles sighs, snark bleeding out of his face, leaving behind the serious expression he'd been wearing at the start of the conversation. “Like I said, there's this guy, Issac. I’m... look, can you just hear me out before you tell me I’m crazy?”

John raises his brows and studies Stiles, giving him a serious nod and putting a studious look on his face. Stiles hopes that he isn't just humoring him.

“So, at the beginning of the year, Issac was quiet, but sweet and fun, right? I thought he was being quiet and sort of withdrawn because, well, his brother, you know?” Issac’s brother, Josh, was in the military, and he'd been sent to Iraq at the beginning of August. “Cora said he was always like that, though, so whatever. But then...”

“I don't know. Samh - Halloween, he dressed as a zombie for Lydia's party, right? He said that the way he was walking was a 'zombie shuffle', but it looked more like a 'I've been kicked in the stomach' limp. Maybe he just sucks at being a zombie. Couple weeks later, he's got a black eye, claims he tripped in the dark and fell into a door knob.”

John starts to frown, and Stiles nods, feeling more confident. “He wasn't at school for the whole week after Thanksgiving. Did you know Tee had invited Issac and Mr. Lahey to join us? Mr. Lahey told her they were going to see his parents, but Issac told Cora and me that they were going
to see his mother's sister. Maybe they were doing both, I don't know, but he wasn't supposed to be
gone for a week and a half, and Mr. Lahey was back that Sunday – we saw him, remember, raking
the last of the leaves?"

“I remember.” John says quietly. They went to visit Stile's mom every Sunday after Thanksgiving.

Stiles nods again. “His phone was off the whole time, from the day before turkey until right before
school, a week and a half later. I'd offered to collect his homework, but the office said his dad was
going to. Except he didn't – Issac had huge amounts of work to catch up, we helped him at lunch
and during P.E. Don't frown at that, Coach knew about it, he didn't want 'Zac to miss a game
because he fell behind. And 'Zac was really worried, said his dad was stressed about his grades,
which is crazy because he's always had at least a three-oh.”

Stiles pauses, taking in his dad's demeanor, wondering if he was presenting this correctly. He
thought he must be, because John was worrying at his lip like Stiles did when he worried, and his
shoulders were tight as hell. “Things seemed calm after that. We had those games, and Issac kicked
as – butt, every game. He'd leave the field radiant, but at Saturday practice he'd be upset, cranky...
he'd snap at everyone. When Scott asked him was wrong, the second week, 'Zac had a two minute
long list of all the 'mistakes' he'd made the night before... dad, most of them weren't mistakes, or
weren't his fault, and that was the game we only won because of Issac.”

“He was supposed to meet Cora at the Winter Formal. He never showed, and Monday... that
Monday, he looked more like a zombie than he had on Halloween! I didn't see any bruises and he
wasn't limping or anything, but... he said his dad grounded him because he didn't do well on that
last Geometry test... he'd gotten a 92%, he was so proud of that grade, it was the best he'd done a
test in that class, ever.”

John leans forward, putting his head in his hands. “Then?”

“I tried to talk to him. Find out what was going on. I thought... they live right by the graveyard, you
know, and there's people over there... I thought maybe he'd been fu – screwing around with the
older kids down there or something, and that's why he got hurt and got in trouble, and he didn't
want us to know, embarrassed or whatever.”

John nodded. “It's possible.”

“Not anymore.” Stiles argued quietly. “At least, not like that. We had plans over break, you know,
a couple times. He never showed, didn't call, didn't email, and his phone went to voice mail every
time. Cora was frantic with worry New Years Eve, he was supposed to be at Lydia's, Cora had
asked Mr. Lahey herself if he could go, because Mr. Lahey is really strict... we even went to the
hospital and asked Mrs. McCall to look around, see if he was there. Thankfully, he wasn't, and he
came to practice that Monday. But he didn't talk to anyone. And the next day, he was limping
again, and he kept holding his right side – he told Derek that he took a couple bad hits at practice
the day before, but we didn't even do anything like that. So I tried to talk to him, asked about the
kids in his neighborhood, and he gave me a funny look, said “There are kids in my neighborhood?”
He was legit, dad, he really didn't know that there was anyone in high school near him. He avoided
me, avoided everyone, Wednesday, but seemed more normal Thursday. Until it came time for
Game Night. We'd just sat down when his dad called...

“Whatever his dad said, it really upset, maybe scared, Issac. He turned white dad, I mean the color
of this milk. No, paler. And he wasn't at school again yesterday. I tried, again, to offer to take him
his homework, and they said his dad was gonna get it. So I hung around, waiting for Mr. Lahey. I
was gonna offer to send my notes from English and History with him. I gave up at six, when
everyone else was gone.”
John's hands were shaking slightly. “Why didn't you say anything to me sooner, son?”

“I was going to, but... every time, everyone told me I was blowing it out of proportion. It was... it'd be, like, something happened, and there was either a reason, or a vacation. It wasn't until I saw him Tuesday, when he'd been fine Monday, that I really sat down and thought about it. I talked to Derek, and he was concerned, but didn't think it was all that serious. Until Thursday. Derek came home with me yesterday, we were gonna talk to you, but you ended up having to cover for Linda, remember?”

John winces. “Yeah, I remember. Why didn't you go to a teacher, or Mrs. Argent?”

Stiles rears back. “Oh... dude. I didn't even think. I... damn, dad, I screwed up.” This last was a whisper.

“No, no. you were focused on getting to law enforcement. Truthfully? If there is something, it's probably safer for Issac for me to know than a teacher. A teacher would probably call Mr. Lahey.” He shakes his head.

“What has Issac said about yesterday?”

“His phone's off again. And dad... this is the worst part, and why I begged you to come to lunch now.” Stiles knows he looks scared, because he is. “I went over. Even though the office told me Mr. Lahey was going to get his work. I figured, at worst, I could offer my notes, right? So I knocked on the door. He was drunk. It was 10am and Mr. Lahey was drunk. I told him I was a classmate of Issac’s, and that I had his homework for yesterday. He stared at me like... like I was a bug, or something, and said 'I got it already.' and slammed the door in my face. Then he started yelling for Issac. I could hear him yelling, demanding to know why Issac wasn't in school yesterday. The front window was broken, dad. I heard Issac say, 'you wouldn't let me, didn't want anyone to see me.' and Mr. Lahey said, 'yeah, no one should see you. No one should have to see.' – by that point, I’d gotten my phone set up.”

Stiles places his phone on the table and hits play.

“... should have to see you, you're a god damned disappointment. I bet no one notices you at all, do they? Except the creepy kids, hovering around because they like to know there's someone even worse than them around. What are you telling them, huh? You tell them how you can't do anything right? How you messed up, how your brother didn't get his letter because you can't even copy an address? Did you tell 'em that, huh, that you're a horrible brother and a horrible son? You don't deserve even...”

His voice continues, moving away from the window, becoming indistinct. Then Issac yells, “No, dad, please, you already locked me in for this, please don't put me back in there!” and there are three loud *SMACK* sounds, a door slams, then silence.

“I ran, dad.” Stiles says quietly. “I ran all the way from the graveyard to the station. I was so scared he’d realize I’d heard, that he was going to come after me...” Stiles blinks, realizes he's crying, and tries to wipe his face without anyone noticing. “And I was scared that he'd killed 'Zac and I did nothing!”

John's face was pale and resolute.

“Cindy, honey, I got an emergency. Twenty gonna cover it?”

The waitress looked up, saw their faces, their untouched food, and shoots them a supportive smile.
“No worries, Sheriff, don't worry about it. I’ve got it covered. You be good, Stiles.”

“Yes, ma'am.” Stiles replies automatically, following his dad's rush to his squad car.

“I'm gonna drop you at the station, you call Talia or Peter and go over to their house until I get you, hear me? I want you with someone we trust.”

“He's okay, right, dad?”

“He will be.” John says grimly. “Send me a copy of that file. Get Rémy to copy it into evidence, hear me? I’ll have him get an official statement from you later, or tomorrow. Just...” John grabs his radio, tells his partner, Linda, to be ready to go when he gets there, then reaches across and cups the back of Stiles neck. “That was a brave thing, son. You were scared to go over, and scared to stay and listen, but it was brave, and you were smart. Smart enough to record what you could, and smart enough to leave and get somewhere safe and get the information to me. You did good, and I’ll do everything I can to get Issac out of there. Just, next time – Lord, I hope there's not a next time, but if there is – don't worry about buttering me up to make me listen. I’ll always listen, you hear me? Even if I don't want to hear it, I’ll always listen, son. And I’m proud of you.”

“I should have said something sooner, dad.” Stiles was whispering again, unable to get anything much past the lump in his throat. “He's hurt and he's terrified and it's my fault, I knew there was something wrong and I just – “

“No!” Stiles tries to flinch away from John's steely tone, but he's anchored by the hand still on his neck. “It's his fault, Lahey's, not yours. God, kid, you're fourteen, I don't even know how you know the signs of domestic violence! You've done something amazing, and I’m proud of you. You're mom'd be proud of you. She... she has something in common with Issac, you can tell him that. Seems like her dad and Mr. Lahey were cut from the same cloth. You just remember, this isn't your fault, and let Issac know – every day, every hour if you have to, that it isn't his fault, either. It's Lahey's fault, and no one else.” John shakes his son lightly, worried at his silence, how he's shaking. “You hear me, kiddo?”

“Y-I-yes, dad.” Stiles stammered, tears streaming down his face. “Is he really thinking it's his fault, dad?”

“Probably.” John says grimly. “If only his father's been telling him it is; you heard him, you recorded it. It's what they do. So I’ll tell him, you tell him, you get Cora and Scott and Derek and all your friends to tell him, it's not his fault.”

When they get to the station, dad's partner Linda Reese is standing outside with Jackson, of all people, the most daunting frown Stiles' has ever seen on her face, from a woman who was never anything but sunny.

“John, Mr. Whittmore here came in to report screams from same address.”

John grits his teeth. “That's two, independent corroboration and probable cause, do you agree, deputy?”

She frowns harder. “I want to. But you know Judge Rich – two teenage boys, both on the lacrosse team with Lahey; maybe they're trying to cover something they did.” Stiles and Jackson open their mouths at the same time, and she holds up her hands. “I'm not saying I think that, boys – I know you two don't get on, and Stiles', you're friends with Issac. But that's what the judge'll say.”

“Then the damned judge can listen to this and say that.” Stiles spits out, hitting play.
...Issac yells, “No, dad, please, you already locked me in for this, please don't put me back in there!” and there are three loud *SMACK* sounds...

John gently takes the phone from Stiles and stops the playback. “How did you come to hear anything, Mr. Whittmore?”

Jackson's jaw was so tight, Stiles wasn't sure how he wasn't breaking his teeth. “My aunt owns the house behind the Lahey's. She's out of town, I was playing with her dog in the backyard. I tried to call it in, but whoever answered the phone yelled at me, told me they were tired of getting prank calls to the cemetery, it wasn't funny, and next time it happened she was gonna send a car around to arrest me.” He fists his hands, looking ready to punch something – Stiles meets his gaze, sharing a look of understanding and rage.

“Did they?” John sounds at least as pissed as the boys are. ‘That's something to look into, when we're done with this part – wonder if anyone ever went at all? Or if I’m gonna be firing a deputy?’ Then he shakes his head. “Later. The important thing right now is Issac. Jackson, I want you to wait here with Stiles, he's going to the Hale's as soon as they come and get him, I want you to go with him.”

“Excuse me?” Jackson's so startled, he doesn't even sound angry for a moment.

“Couple reasons. One, I’m gonna need a statement, two I'd like you safe. If I remember, your parents are at a couple's retreat this weekend?” At Jackson’s sullen nod, John sighs, “I don't think anything's gonna happen, son. But it might. Lahey might run. And if he does, he might get stupid and try and go after the one who reported him. Maybe I'm being paranoid, but if so, I've the right to it. Please, just go along to the Hale's with Stiles, wait there for me. I'll get an official statement there, then I’ll take you home.”

“Sir,” Jackson grits out, trying to be respectful. He fails, but Stiles gives him points for trying. “I drove here, my car's right there.”

John flicks his eyes to the Porsche, lets out a disbelieving huff, and looks at Jackson again. “You're in no shape to drive, son. And that car sticks out like a sore thumb. Wait for the Hales. Ride with them. I'll bring you back for your car, or take you home and pick you tomorrow. You hear me?”

He doesn't wait for an answer, turning to Linda. “Let's go. Issac’s been locked away for far too long as it is.”

Jackson wilts at that, shaking his head and stepping back, muttering an apology. John pauses long enough to clap his shoulder. “Nothing to apologize for. You did the right thing, coming down and reporting this, and I’ll make sure to tell your parents and anyone else who'll listen that you did good.”

Jackson actually blushes; Stiles blinked, not quite sure he was really seeing that, then shook it off. They had more important matters to think about.

“I'm sorry that he's railroaded you, but not very. Mr. Lahey scared the shit out of me, and I ran all the way here.”

“Wait...” Jackson looks horrified. “That's two miles, Stiles, and then you went to lunch.” Stiles winces, and Jackson waves his hand sharply, cutting him off. “No, I get it, you were scared, you had to work up to it. It took me fifteen minutes to get up the nerve to come down here. I’ve only been here a couple minutes, though.”

“I... I recorded that at like ten...” Stiles is whispering again.
Jackson whispers, too. “It's after eleven. I left the house like ten minutes ago.”

Stiles moans, shaking, and Jackson isn't much better off.

Rémy comes outside. “Stiles, Whittmore, get inside!”

The scramble to obey, shell-shocked and scared.

Rémy takes Stiles' phone to a computer, and points at a desk phone. “Call the Hales, Batman. You two are stuck here until they come get you.”

“Y-yeah. Yeah. I just... I’m gonna...” Stiles dashes for the bathroom, fights a losing battle with his stomach, then rinses his mouth and washes his face. He passes Jackson on the way look, looking as green as Stiles feels.

He goes to the phone furthest away from both Rémy and the bathrooms, punching in Talia's number by memory.
She answers quickly. “Talia Hale.”

“Tee?”
“Stiles?” Her voice morphs from professional to loving and worried instantaneously. “What's wrong, cutey?”

“Tee... Alpha...” Stiles whispers, trying not to sob and failing. “I'm... dad told me to call you, said you or Peter only, me and Jackson have to go and wait there, at your house. Can you come, he was screaming and so scared and Jackson heard him still screaming an hour later and dad was freaking out and it's my fault I should have said something sooner but everyone told me I was overreacting and gods Tee, he screamed and screamed and I don't know if he – “

“I'm on my way Stiles, you're at the station? Where's your dad?”

“He's gone to try and rescue Issac.” Stiles shudders hard. “Him and Linda. I recorded some of it, him screaming at Issac, and they're going to try and get him, he's scared, Alpha.” Stiles whispers, his throat hurts and people can't hear him calling Talia 'Alpha', he needs to stop saying it. “He's scared Mr. Lahey is gonna come after me or Jackson, that's why we have to go with you, Rémy's copying the recording I made, I thought he was going to follow me because I heard it and recorded it...”

“Shhh... it's okay, pup, I’m coming for you.” Something about her calling Stiles 'pup', like she calls all the younger kids, lets Stiles stop crying. “I'm literally on the road already, I'll be there as soon as I can, and the Sheriff's busy so screw the speed limit, right?”

“Thank you Al – Tee. Thank you, Tee.”

“No problem. But I need to hang up, if I’m driving this fast, okay. Sit tight, pup, I’ll be there soon.”

“Yes, Tee.”

“Good boy. I love you.” She hangs up before Stiles can even process it.

He puts it aside; it's not important right now. Jackson’s still in the bathroom, so Stiles goes in to check on him. “Jackson?”

“I'm right here, Stilinski.” He's bent over the sink, forearms braces on either sides, breathing hard.
“Are you... no, that's stupid. Neither of us is. What do you need?”

“Nothing you can give, kid.” Is the tired reply. “Just... someone coming?”

“Yeah. Tee's on her way.”

“Tee?”

“Talia. Mrs. Hale.”

Jackson nods slowly. “Right. You tell her I’m supposed to tag along?”

“Yeah.” Stiles shrugs, tries to be calm. “She didn't seem worried. Said screw the speed limit, since the Sheriff's busy anyway.”

He snorts. “Yeah. Yeah, he is. He's... was he serious?”

“What?” Stiles steps closer, like proximity is gonna make that question make more sense.

“He said I did good, was he serious? Cause dude's been limping off and on for weeks, and I coulda –”

“I said the same thing. That it was my fault, I coulda said something months ago. Dad said the only person who's fault this is, is Mr. Lahey's. Maybe it's self-serving to believe him, but he's my dad, you know? He's almost always right. Maybe we could have said something sooner... but maybe we'd have been wrong, and it was nothing, or maybe it wouldn't have been enough that Mr. Lahey would get in trouble, but if we'd reported it, maybe he'd have done something worse. We can't know.” Stiles actually pauses to take a breath. “And that may be bullshit, but. We're kids, Jackson.” looking at his face in the mirror, Stiles is struck by how Jackson is barely two years older than Stiles, and how right now he actually looks younger than Stiles, scared and a little lost. “It's not our job. I mean, it is, we're his friends, but where were the adults? The teachers who should have seen it? Fuck, dude – you called dispatch, what the fuck was up with them? What was up with the cop who was sent out? That's who job it was, and my dad's gonna come down on that asshole like, like Thor's hammer thrown by Superman, if you'll forgive me crossing the streams that way.”

Jackson gives Stiles a shocked look. “Dude, The Hulk can't pick up Thor's hammer, and he's technically stronger than Supes, straight up.”

Stiles lets out a startled, strangled laugh. “True, but any true hero with a pure heart can pick it up, and who's true-er and pure-er than Superman?” Jackson thinks for a second, then gives a reluctant nod of agreement. “And don't worry, dude, I’ll go to my grave before I tell anyone that you know any of that.”

Jackson opens his mouth, closes it, then shakes his head and pushes himself upright. “I don't even care if anyone knows. I don't. Whatever. I just hope...”

“Yeah.”

They stand there in silence for a few minutes, then Rémy pokes his head in. “Mrs. Hale is here, boys. Here's your phone, Batman. I didn't erase it, because they might decide they want the phone itself as evidence, we'll see what happens, but do not share that recording. You hearing me, Stiles? I’ve made a copy, that better be the only copy that gets made, I know how to check for that.”
Stiles pales. “Why the hell would I make a copy, Rémy? That's... I can't believe you – “

“Nope.” Rémy cuts him off. “I don't think you'd try and do something nasty, no. Wouldn't post it and make fun of someone. But others would, they've done it before. You know Erica Reyes?” Both Stiles and Jackson nod. “She's my niece. Last year, some asshole senior took video of her having a seizure and posted it on YouTube. Listed her full name and all, saying shit like 'look at her, bet she'd be a freak like in the sack'. It's why they moved back up here from San Jose. So don't let anyone touch it and make a copy, got me?”

“Erica has epilepsy?” Stiles shakes his head. “I'll try and remember to talk to her about that, see what I'd have to do if she has trouble and I'm around, but...”

“Yeah, c'mon, Mrs. Hale is here.”

She grabbed both boys in a fierce hug, not letting Jackson escape. He didn't try too hard, anyway.

“Good boys. That was brave of both of you, Rémy gave me the basics. Let's get you back to the house, get some soup in you, okay?”

“Alpha.” Stiles whispered so softly even he couldn't hear it, and she squeezed his hand.

“Good boys. Issac'll be okay.”

January 7th, 2012; 5:00pm

“That was your dad, again.” Talia steps back into the great room, and Derek meets her gaze. Of the four teens in the room – himself, Cora, Stiles, and Jackson, he's the only one who's even approaching calm. “Issac's awake, freaking out some, but awake. None of the cuts are serious, but his right leg has a hairline fracture.”

“What's that?” Cora demands, voice wobbling. Derek feels a burst of pride; not once had she started to lose control of the wolf in front of Jackson. It was amazing. She was amazing.

Stiles was amazing; he'd gone over to Issac's, recorded his asshole father, and gone straight to his dad. Derek feels another burst of guilt for the way he'd dismissed Stiles concerns, forgotten them.

“Dude!” Stiles whispers softly, chiding, and kicks Derek’s leg.

He sighs.

“It's – “ Derek tunes out his mother's explanation, studying Stiles face. He was calmer than he'd been when he'd gotten here, along with Jackson, and that was good. The pace of his heart had been, frankly, terrifying – Derek had been half convinced that it was going to leap right out of his chest.

Peter had made all four of them some tea, making them drink it, and that had probably helped at least Stiles and Jackson. Though being with Pack had helped Stiles more, and Jackson seemed to be unconsciously following Stiles cues.

“ – so we're going to bring him back here, tonight. Hopefully, he'll be able to stay here; I'm going to file for it on Monday.”

Stiles nods, an 'of course, why wouldn't you', nod. Cora tries to beam through her tears and rage. Derek can only stare at his mother in shock.
She nods him towards her office, while continuing to speak to the other three. “So we're going to go in a few minutes, all of us. Jackson, the Sheriff is going to take your statement there, then have a deputy take you to your car or home, your choice. And yes, you can see Issac before you go. Stiles, your dad needs to have a deputy take your statement, I don't know where that will be.”

“Can I come back, after?” Stiles sounds... fuck, poor kid. Talia gives him a soft smile. “That'll be up to John, but I think it's a good idea. If you'll excuse us a few minutes – Jackson, you need anything else before we go?”

“No, ma'am.” He mumble as politely as he was able. Derek thinks he might be in mild shock.

Talia leads her oldest son into her office.

“Not a word. I’ll tell you why – he doesn't now, but when Stiles first remembered, he remember Issac as being Pack.”

He stares for a minute before he realizes his mouth is open. He closes it, then thinks better. “No... no I think he does remember. Did you see his reaction when you said we were bringing Issac here.”

His mom exchanges a glance with Peter. “That's... that's a point. He may unconsciously remember more than we thought.”

“Did he travel through time or something? You make it sound – “ Derek cuts himself off with a strangle noise at the looks identical shock on his mother and uncle's faces. “Oh my gods, he actually somehow traveled through time?”

“Yes and no.” Talia says slowly. “The boy out there? No. An older version, from a future very different from this one did. And that's all you need to know. At least for now.”

Derek sat before his legs could give out.

“No wonder he makes all those Heinlein jokes. Lords, gods and minor powers! That's...”

“Not to ever, ever been brought up by you again.” Talia's eyes flashed red; he doesn't think she's ever used Alpha power on him before. Derek tilts his head and bares his neck without thought.

“No, of course, mom, you didn't need to, I wouldn't have anyway. I was just...”

“I'm sorry.” Talia sighs, scrubbing her face. “I probably did over react. I'm just... older-Stiles would, of course, have known what Issac’s father was doing. I don't want this Stiles to think about it. He was here barely five minutes, and spent two of them unconscious, but you know the pup; he'd blame himself for not, somehow giving me the information when he was giving me so much other information, or for not remembering that bit in between all the years of monster-fighting he draws on.”

Derek blinks hard at that. “He was – “ He chokes, unable to even think of Stiles fighting some thing creatures he so blithely talks about.

“Oh, yes.” Peter says sadly. “Every single one, he helped fight in some way or another. As a human. Frightening, isn't it? That, by the way, is the true origin of of 'Little Red' – his older self told me it was a joke I started, when I first met him, so fierce in defending his father, his friends and this town, against anything. Wearing a red hoodie, as I told you before. He later expanded it a bit, from something else he said; he'd called you and I both, at different time, the Big Bad Wolf. I was 'Uncle Wolf' or 'Uncle Creeper'. You were... well, let's see if he remembers those names on his own as you both age, shall we? He remembered his for me on his own. I think it means more.”
Derek nods mutely, trying to compose himself. Talia lets him, studying him. “I'm proud of you, you know.” She says abruptly.

“Me?” He stares at her incredulously. “Why? I’m the one who didn't take Stiles seriously enough, last week. If I had – “

“No. John wouldn't let Stiles or Jackson do that, and I’m not going to let you. The only person to blame for Lahey's crimes is Lahey himself. As it is, you took Stiles seriously enough that he continued to think about it, continued to observe, and you went with him last night to talk to John. It's no one's fault that you weren't able to do so.”

“I should have gone with him today.” Derek berates himself harshly.

“Did you know he was going?” Peter manages to sound merely curious.

“No, but I should have guessed!”

“Yes, of course; you're seventeen now, you should be able to know everything another person who you've known for less than a year is thinking.” Peter rolls his eyes at Derek.

“Peter.” Talia reproves her brother. “Though he's right, eldest boy. Why would you consider Stiles going to the Lahey's? It's, what, six miles from his house? If he was going to go, he'd have called for a ride, wouldn't he? That's what I would have thought, if I was you. No, that's not why I’m proud of you. Though it's close.”

“I... I don't understand.”

“Ah, therein lies the beginning of true wisdom, admitting that you don't understand.” It sounds like a quip, so Derek makes note of the saying, to think about later. For now, he focuses on his Alpha.

“You've opened up, and not just to Stiles. You're not the mess that he or Cora, or even Jackson, is. But you're worried about Issac. Whatever may happen tomorrow, right now, Issac isn't Pack; he's just a kid you go to school with. But you eat lunch with him, help him with his schoolwork, you've gamed with him and even gone to the movies with him. This time last year, I despaired of you ever looking around and seeing the people around you for what they are. Today... well, let's just say, I can see the man you've almost become, and he's a man who bears enough resemblance to your father it's like looking at a picture of him.”

Derek widens his eyes, partly in shock, partly to keep the tears that came from nowhere from falling. “I... I don't know what to say to that. Except, mom, it wasn't me. It was Stiles. Being loud and annoying and funny and caring. I didn't have any choice.”

“There's always a choice.” Talia points out, while Peter says, “You're even smarter than you look, aren't you, pup?”

Derek feels his ears heat, embarrassed, confused and pleased.

Talia clears her throat. “That's neither here nor there, and this isn't the time for it. Just know; I see you growing, and it makes me proud. Just remember – your uncle and I are both here for you, should you need us. For anything. You may be growing, but you're still a pup. No matter what the law says, eighteen doesn't mean adult, it just means 'old enough to go to jail instead of being grounded'. Alright, pup?”

Derek blinks rapidly, trying to not fight the pleased smile like he would have last year. “Yeah, mom. Yeah. Thank you.”
“Nothing to thank me for. Now. Let’s go and collect our wayward pup. You think about ways to disclose our secret to him. Just so you know – he wants the Bite, he can have it once he’s eighteen and graduated. Not before than, unless it’s an emergency. We know he can live through it.”

“That’s... that’s really cool.” Derek breathes. Then he stands decisively. I’ll talk to Cora and Stiles while Jackson's giving his statement, see what they think.”

“Good boy. Let's go.”

**Interlude: Gold is Dross**

*John banged his fist against the door, noting the broken window Stiles had described. There a hole in the middle, and it spiderwebs from there, looking for all the world like someone's head had been slammed right into it.*

*John's pretty sure someone's head was.*

*He bangs on the door again. “Mr. Lahey, you there? Open up, this is the Sheriff.”*

*After a couple more minutes, the door opens about four inches. “What can do ya for this morning, Sheriff?”*

*Stiles was right; the man was drunk as hell. “Got a couple reports of a domestic disturbance, Mr. Lahey. Gonna need to talk to both you and your son.”*

*Lahey gives an exaggerated sigh. “Someone's done that prank again? And this time, they bagged the Sheriff himself. I’m sorry you got dragged down here for nothing, Sheriff, but there’s no disturbance here.”*

*“Uh-huh. I’ll need to speak with your son. Issac, right?”*

*Lahey gives him a confused look that barely masked a deep rage. “I'm afraid he isn't here right now.”*

*John shakes his head and sighs. Of course he’d play it that way, of course. John nods at the window. “Your handiwork?”*

*“What?” Lahey opens the door slightly wider, then leans forward, eying the window. “Oh, that. Issac told me he tripped and fell into it. He's working, earning the money to replace it.”*

*“He's working, is he? So if I go over right now, he'll be there and I can talk to him?”*

*“He better be. He keeps ditching work.”*

*“Know where he might be, if he's not at work?”*

*“You know kids today, Sheriff. Got no respect for their parents or the rules. You should understand that; wasn't it your boy that came by this morning, looking to play with mine?” The way the man said the word “play” made John want to be sick; bad enough the man was a child abusers, but he had to heap bigotry on top of it?*

*“My boy came by to try and drop off homework and class notes for Issac, like I told him to.” John replied evenly. Lahey's eyes widen, then narrow in thought. “Then, of course, he couldn't help overhear you yelling at your son, calling him worthless. Or your son screaming.”*
“You mean it’s your boy who’s been making these pranks calls?”

“Pranks?” Lets out a soundless laugh. “Could be. I need to search your house.”

“You got a warrant.”

“Domestic disturbance, two separate calls, I’ve got probable cause, Mr. Lahey. Please step back and open the door.”

“I’ve got the chain on. Just a moment.” The door slams as much as it can, being only five inches open.

John steps back and off the porch to the left; Linda steps to the right, just as the door goes flying open and Lahey fires off a shot from a shotgun. “You ain’t coming in here and telling me how to raise my son, you liberal faggot-lover!” He roars over the blast of the shotgun. ”The boy's mine, to do with as I please, and he will honor me as his father if it kills him!”

Linda leans around the edge of porch, calmly firing her taser into Lahey's chest.

Lahey screams, rage and pain, and tries to pump the shotgun. John unconsciously shrugs, and fires his own taser next to Linda's. Lahey convulses and drops the gun, screaming and cursing as he goes flying.

“Mr. Lahey, lie on your stomach with your hands behind your back.”

“Fuck you, you Godless faggot-lover!”

“I will give you one. More. Warning. Lie down on your stomach, hands behind your back.”

“Go to Hell!”

Linda sends another charge down her taser, and Lahey slumps, unconscious.

“Vile creep.” She mutter, making a face.

John toes the shot-gun out of reach, then they gingerly detach the leads from their tasers. “Call it in, Linda. Ask for two ambulances, got me?”

“I hear ya, boss.” John steps over the man, pulls his wrists back and handcuffs him, being careful that they’re too tight for him to slip without being tight enough to cause problems, then turns Lahey's head to the side, ensuring he has can breathe properly. “Watch him. Draw your piece, I don’t trust this piece of shit. I’m gonna look for the boy.

Mentally, John flipped a coin; it came up tails, so he went to the basement first.

Washer and drier, table with most of a load folded neatly. The place was insanely clean, especially given that it was an unfinished basement, with a bare cement floor. The only other thing down here was an old freezer... wrapped in chains.

John frowned at that. “Issac?” He yelled at the freezer. “Issac, you in there, son?”

“Hello?” It was so faint, John wouldn’t have heard him if he wasn't standing right next to the freezer. “Hello, can you hear me? Please, get me out, I can't breathe, get me out!”

“I hear you son! I’m gonna get you out, soon as I can! Just hold on, okay?”
John looks around, almost frantic. Where's the key for the lock?

“John?”

“Linda! Don’t let them take Lahey, yet, search him for keys!”

“On it, one sec.”

John doesn’t stop searching, just in case, until Linda come back with a keyring. John lets out a sigh of relief that turns into a sob, nodding his thanks as he snatches the keys and runs back to the freezer. “I’ve got the keys, Issac, one minute, okay? You doing okay?”

“Daddy, daddy please let me out, I’m sorry, I’ll be good, just tell me what I did and I promise – “ John had to tune him out or he’d start crying hysterically himself, hearing Claudia screaming almost the same thing, twenty years ago.

John just keeps talking, trying key after key. “It’s okay, son, just have to find the right key, who needs so many damn keys anyway? We’re gonna get you out of there, and take you to the hospital, don’t you worry.”

John glances up at a noise, Linda's still on the bottom step, hand over her mouth and tears streaming down her face; behind her are a couple of paramedics with a stretcher, faces masks of horror and rage. “There we go, finally, the right key! Here ya go, c’mon, Issac. Let's get you out.”

“Sheriff?” He sounds lost, scared, confused. “Where's my dad, sir?”

“Oh his way to jail, son.” John pulls Issac’s arm, trying to him upright, but the boy buckles back down; there's something wrong with his right leg.

“Jail?” Issac doesn't react to the pain, focused on John. “Why would he be going to jail?”

“For this.” John waves his hand over Issac, then the freezer. “For doing this, son.”

“But he – you – he said – what? How?”

“Two different people heard you, kiddo. Stiles, he recorded some of it and brought it to me. And Jackson, he tried to call it in, but they wouldn't take it, so he came to the station.”

“Yeah.” Issac starts shaking, grabbing onto the Sheriff like he's drowning. “Yeah, dad paid off the other guy, when he came from a call. He said I wasn't worth anyone's time. He said – “

“He was wrong. The only one not worth anything is him, he doesn't deserve you, Issac. These gentlemen are gonna get up out of there, and we're gonna get you to the hospital. You've got cuts on your face, and something's wrong with your leg.”

“What's wrong with my leg?” He looks down, puzzled.

“We'll figure it out, Issac.” Karl, one of the paramedics, says. “Up we go.”

“No! No, Sheriff, don't let them take me!”

“I'm right here, son.”

“Please don't go!”
“I'll stay with you.” He met Linda's eyes, and she nods. He nods back, letting Issac strangle his hand; Linda will call Talia, let Stiles know what's going on, let Jackson know. He'll call once they're at the hospital, reassure him.

John gives orders through the radio; to Rémy and Bob and Diane, people he knows he can trust, and goes with the boy his son had all but begged him to save, trying hard not to see his dead wife in place of this live boy.
January 7th, 2012; 6:00pm

Stiles hates the hospital.

But he squares his shoulders and does his best to look calm, because he needs to see Issac, see with his own two eyes that he's okay.

He doesn't know why he thinks that Issac – and Boyd and Erica, sometimes, and sometimes even Jackson, if that's not perverse – are Pack, but Talia and Peter had believed him when he told them that they were. It feels like it, anyway, even if he can't figure out how to talk to Erica.

Right now, though, Erica wasn't who he was worried about.

Cora was clinging to his arm, nails digging in hard enough he was starting to worry about bruises, and Jackson was starting to look green again. Derek wrinkled his nose, then bumped his shoulder into Jackson’s.

“Relax, Whittmore. You didn't do anything wrong.”

“Fuck you, Hale.”

Derek snorts. “I'm too good for you.”

Stiles almost chokes at the mental images that flood his mind, and his face heats. Jackson and Derek look at him, then give him identical smirks, which leads to Cora rolling her eyes and easing her death-grip on Stiles arm, so he's gonna count this as a win.
And then Lydia's throwing herself on Jackson, and Danny takes Stiles shoulder, looking him straight in the eye. “You okay?”

“Me? Dude, I’m not the one who was locked in a freezer.” Stiles starts to shake again just saying it; if he'd been faster, would 'Zac have even been in the damned thing? If he'd said something sooner –

“No, you're just the guy who saw what was going on and made sure he got out. Risking life and limb, because Coach Lahey is psycho.”

“He's a coach?” Derek asks, because if Derek isn't involved in things, he doesn't notice them.

“He coaches the swim team,” Danny explains, giving Derek a strange look. “Or rather, he did. It's why I’m not on it anymore; I quit before I came out. Some of the stuff he said...”

“I'm so sorry he did that to you, Danny.” Stiles reaches a hand up, covering one of Danny’s where he's still holding his shoulders.

“He didn't do anything; I just didn't want to hear his bullshit. I should have put two and two together, when somehow Issac of all people turned into a klutz.”

“We all should have.” Derek agrees softly, staring at Danny’s hands. “All we can do is be better. Make sure it doesn't happen again.”

“Anyone know where Issac’s going tonight?”

“With us.” Talia says, making everyone but Derek and Cora jump; freaking werewolves, might as well all be ninja, for how quiet they are.

Danny gives her an easy nod. “Just so you know, my parents said they'd take him for a few weeks. If you don’t... I mean, you've got a pretty full house. Not that he's not great, Issac’s great, but if you feel crowded... well, he's got options.”

Talia studies Danny for a moment before giving him a reassuring smile. “That is good to know, that people care. But we've got him.” She gives a meaningful nod to Cora. “Not like I'm not used to having him around as it is.”

“True.” Danny looks at Jackson for a moment, then seems to come to some sort of decision. “I want to thank you for looking after Jackson, Mrs. Hale – I know he can be abrasive, but he's a good guy underneath. He's just really bad at showing it. Especially after what happened at the Homecoming Dance, it was really cool of you.”

Talia raises a brow at Danny. “Something happened at the Homecoming Dance?”

“Yeah?” Danny’s eyes flick from Stiles to Derek to Jackson, then return to Talia. “Didn't Derek and Stiles tell you?”

“Pshhh. There wasn't anything to tell, Danny-boy.” Stiles squeezes Danny’s hand, hard, hoping he'll drop it. Danny gives him a startled look, and drops his hands.

“What didn't you tell me, Derek?” She narrows her eyes and turns to Stiles. “Well?”

“No-nothing, Tee! It was just flared tempers, you know how us teenage boys get, it's no big deal!” Stiles is actually pretty sure this is going to pass muster, as much as it can; it was just flared tempers, and it wasn't a big deal.
Derek snorts. “I'll tell you about it later, mom. It's been handled.”

Jackson pales slightly, and Lydia cackles. “Yeah, Mrs. Hale, I’ve already punished Jacks enough, never fear.”

“Alright, then, since the Sheriff's on his way.”

True to Talia's word – and her wofly-super-hearing – the Sheriff entered the waiting room from the back of the hospital. “Son, Jackson. The Hales I understand, but why are Ms. Martin and Mr. Māhealani here?” He was giving Danny a speculative look that made Stiles want to melt into the floor, remembering the conversation he'd pinned, gods.

“Jackson's been texting us; he and Stiles were both scared as hel – as heck. We didn't want to impose on Mrs. Hale, so told him we'd meet him here. Plus, we both want to make sure Issac…” Lydia gulped; it was the first time Stiles had ever seen her look unsure. “I don't understand.”

That was a shocking statement, and Stiles had talked about Lydia enough for his dad to know it. “No one can understand, Ms. Martin. Behavior like this, it isn't something a sane person would do. I’d frankly be worried about you if you did understand it. Maybe when you take over the world, you can institute tougher laws against child abuse, yeah?”

Her chin lifted. “Of course I will, Sheriff. And I’ll put you in charge of making sure they're enforced.”

“Deal.” John gives her a tired, but real smile. “I need to talk to Jackson alone, if that's okay, Jackson? I’ve got an advocate who can only be here for the next half-hour.”


“You're only 16, son. Legally, I can't do much without your parents here, but since you're not being charged – you're a witness, only – I’ve got some leeway. This'll only be a preliminary statement, we'll have to talk again with your parents present, but I’d like to get as much as I can while it's still fresh in your memory.”

Jackson swallows. “I don't think it's going to fade anytime soon.”

John shares a sad look with Talia, and sighs. “Likely not, and we've got a list of counselors for you to take with you. I know it's not what 'real men' are supposed to do, or some bullshit like that; but this was traumatic for you, too. Anyway.” John eyes Lydia, clearly wondering if he's going to be able to separate her from Jackson. “Soonest begun and all that. You ready, son?”

“Yeah.” He hugs Lydia tightly for a second, eyes closed and looking the calmest Stiles can ever remember. “Yes, sir. I’m ready.”

“Good. Stiles, Linda's finishing some paperwork, but once I’m done with Mr. Whittmore, she'll take your statement. Then you guys can see Issac.”

“Thanks, dad.”

“No problem, kiddo.” Stiles is treated to a Stilinski Hug. “You okay, son?”

“Comparatively?” Stiles scoffs at his dad.

“Yeah.” He leans into his dad hand, ruffling over his hair. “I'll be as quick as I can.”
They watch John and Jackson walk into a small office, normally used by some financial person by the sign on the door, and Derek clears his throat.

“I don't want to be rude, but I need to speak with Cora and Stiles. Logistics.”

“You do?” Stiles asks blankly. Derek is standing behind Lydia and Danny, and they're both facing Stiles, so the only ones who see Derek flash blue eyes are him and Cora. “Oh, oh, right. Yeah, um... you guys hang with Issac almost as much as we do. Maybe you can tell Tee about some of the other stuff he likes?”

Lydia and Danny exchange looks, and Lydia shrugs. “Whatever, Stilinski.” She then turns the full force of her charm on Talia. “So, Mrs. Hale, it's good to see that only Derek has a problem with color. Where did you find that blouse?”

Stiles shudders at that potential fire and follows Derek and Cora to the other corner.

“Mom wants me to talk to you guys about telling Issac.”

“Telling Issac what?” Stiles blinks at Derek, then feels heat creep across his face. “Dude, don't look at me like that, I forgot, okay?”

“How can you forget, Stiles?” Cora sounds annoyed, tapping her foot and glaring.

“Go easy, Graceful, you know how Stiles memory works. He remembers Issac as already Pack.”

“You do?” Her eyes widen, and a grin splits her face. “Really? That's so awesome! Wait, does that mean he really is gonna be Pack? Dude, how are we gonna tell him?”

“That's what I'm trying to talk to you about.” Derek growls, growling a bit.

“This isn't a deal.” Stiles throws out, watching Talia. “It's simple. Tee just tells him that she knows you guys can protect him, because you're... yeah. And she has Derek demonstrate. Not her, she's kind of... overwhelming. And not you, Cora, that's a little... emasculating, and he's already going to be at a disadvantage, seeing his girlfriend and her mom after his dad...” Stiles shudders again, this time with real feeling.

“How is it emasculating?” Cora demands, leaning forward on her toes like she's about to plant one on Stiles' face.

“Dude, you could bench press him. Our culture's full of all this sexist bullshit, about how men are supposed to protect women and shit, you know? Issac's cool, he'd never consciously treat you as less just cause you're a girl, but it's still there.”

“Not for us; Mom's in charge and no one cares that's she's a girl, and she'd kick the shit out of anyone who tried to say anything! Not for the Argents, they're matriarchal, and work better for it, and I'd like to see the asshole who treats Allison like that! She'd break his arm!”

“Yeah, Cora, but you're talking about werewolves and Hunters, not normal people. And right now, no matter what my feelings say, Issac? Is normal people. He isn't some sort of chauvinist dick, we all know that, but he's still got the societal programing the rest of us have, and he hasn't had to examine it. So just go a little easy on him, alright? Especially because, from some hints my dad dropped, and some of what he said, I think he's dad's already called his masculinity into question enough?”

“What do you mean?” Derek growled.
Stiles sighs, scrubbing at his hair. “I guess he... insinuated that I went over, earlier, to get some action.”

“What!” Cora shrieked. “Is that man insane? No offense, Stiles, but why would Issac mess around with you when has me?”

“I know, right?” Stiles placates her. “I don't get it either, Issac never hit my 'dar once, and you guys have been together all year. But he called me a faggot to my dad's face, told my dad I was there today for... for that, and seems to think that any time Issac goes anywhere but school, he's messing around with guys. I don't know why the man thinks that, I mean, no one knows I'm bi but you and Lydia and Allison, so why would Mr. Lahey?”

“Maybe because the way you and Danny flirt?” Cora cocks her head at Stiles and gives him a challenging look, and his cheeks flame again. Was he ever going to escape awkward conversations about Danny? Ever?

Derek clears his throat, looking uncomfortable. “That isn't the point, Cora. The point was a plan, and I think Stiles has a good one. And some good points. Mom?”

They all three turn so they can see Talia, still entertaining Danny and Lydia. She gives a minute nod and smile, and Stiles huffs out a breath of relief. “Right, good. If that's all, better rescue Tee from Danny and Lydia. Or rescue them from Tee.”

Cora snorts. “Is that what they're calling it these days?”

Stiles shrugs and refuses to look at her. “Whatever.”

It's another ten minutes of uncomfortable – for Stiles, everyone else seems to be enjoying it, except for Derek – teasing and insinuation before John's done with Jackson and comes to fetch Stiles.

“You up for this, kiddo?” John looks worried, and Stiles does his best to give him a reassuring smile.

“It can't be worse than living it was, dad.”

“You just tell us if you need a break.” He squeezed the back of Stiles' neck, a solid presence that warmed him through, and nodded at Linda to begin.

“What time did you arrive at the Lahey house?”

“It was right at ten; I know, 'cause I tried to call Issac before I knocked on the door.”

“And why were you there?”

“Issac had missed school again yesterday; I brought his work, and notes from the classes we take together. He's been missing a lot of school, and been worried about keeping up...”

It was exhausting, but also somewhat cathartic, talking to Linda and a recorder. It took longer than Jackson’s had, because Stiles had heard so much more, and recorded a lot of it.

It was finally over around seven thirty, and the group of teens, plus Talia, trooped back to see Issac. He looked... better than Stiles had feared. There were huge circles under his eyes, and he still look pale and wan, but he mustered up a smile for them.

“My heroes.” It was quiet, but there was real feeling behind the phrase. “You dad told me, Stiles.
How you came by, and recorded it. And Jackson,” Issac turned to face him. “How you heard us from the house behind us, went down the station and everything. That means a lot to me, thank you.”

Jackson kicks at the floor, seemingly embarrassed. “Didn't want to lose a good player, is all.”

Lydia snorts and Danny elbows Jackson, but Issac just smiles. “I’ll try not to let you down.”

“So you're okay?” Stiles could barely hear Jackson, and he felt a burst of pity; Jackson seemed to be genuinely worried about Issac, but had no clue how to act, how to show it.

“No.” Issac said bluntly. “But I’m not there, anymore. Living on the street's better than that. I owe you one. Both of you.” He gives Stiles a significant look.

“You don't owe us anything, 'Zac. Anyone would have done what we did.”

He snorts. “No. No they wouldn't. They already haven't.”

Talia clears her throat. “The Sheriff assures me that that situation is being dealt with. Heads will roll, metaphorically. In the meantime... they say you can go home, now that that cast is set.”

“Yeah?” Issac sounds miserable. “That's... good.”

“So if it's okay with you,” Talia ignores his misery, likely guessing that it's because Issac thinks he has no place to go. “I'd like you to come home with us.”

His mouth opens in shock. “What? With...”

“With us.” Derek repeats firmly. “You aren't just Cora’s boyfriend. You're Stiles friend, and mine.”

“If you don't want to, the Māhealani's have offered, but I think you can be happy with us.” Talia's voice is soft, and she's looking Issac in the eyes, treating him like an adult. “It's up to you.”

“But... I mean, why?”

“Oh, sweety...” Talia shakes her head. “My kids love you; how could I not? Of course I want you to come home with us, I feel like you're already family.”

Stiles has to repress a hysterical giggle; Issac doesn't know how true that is.

**January 9th, 2012**

Monday morning was subdued. Talia hadn't wanted Issac to go to school, worried about his stamina. But he was insistent, saying he needed something normal, to keep him sane.

“Between my dad losing his mind over the summer, and now, well, you guys... I just need something that's the same as it's always been, okay?”

Talia had conceded easily enough, but she'd extracted promises from him and Cora both to take care of Issac.

Like that wasn't going to happen anyway?

She'd probably also gotten to Stiles, but Derek couldn't swear to it; he was thrown all out of balance, between Issac suddenly being Pack, and Stiles all but living his room this weekend.
Issac was given the room that Stiles normally stayed in, when he spent the night, and the only real
options for the weekend were Derek’s or James’ rooms. James was a slob, things thrown
everywhere, so it was easier for Stiles to stay in Derek's room. It wouldn't require a dozen hours of
cleaning first, at least.

But it meant that he woke up, two days in a row, smelling nothing but Derek-and-Stiles. And that
made his wolf very happy, for some reason.

So Derek did was he always did; accepted without questioning and moved on.

Stiles didn't seem to notice anything amiss; he was wrapped up in making Issac feel comfortable, at
home, like Pack. Derek could only approve, and try to help, awed by how accepting Stiles was.

For once, Stiles and Cora didn't fight over who was going to ride in the front seat, silently climbing
into the back, ceding it to Issac seemingly without thought.

Derek wondered if he should check them for possession, then decided it was too early on a
Monday to think about it. Maybe if they continued to act like pod-people.

Time seemed to drag; Derek kept getting whiffs of hurt-Issac, making his wolf whine and making
him want to go and give Mr. Lahey a taste of his own medicine. Plus, it seemed all anyone could
talk about; how Coach Lahey had snapped, started beating his son, and how Stiles and Jackson had
saved Issac.

At least some of the rumors were amusing, if utterly improbable – Derek was especially enamored
of the one that had Jackson and Issac secretly engaged, and Coach Lahey only trying to protect his
poor, innocent son from the rich asshole Junior who was taking advantage of him.

The worst was the one that had Lahey raping Stiles, and that's what got him in trouble at all. Derek
had gripped his chair when he heard a couple of girls at the back of the class whispering about it,
digging his claws in and keeping his eyes closed.

Issac was pale at lunch, almost shrinking into himself. Derek sat next to him without comment,
glad to see Cora on his other side, Stiles sitting across the table. Within minutes, the table was full;
Stiles meant Scott, which brought Allison. Lydia plopped down on Stiles' other side, Jackson and
Danny following her like baby ducks. Boyd and Erica took the last seats, with Erica handing Stiles
a pamphlet.

“My uncle said you wanted this, Batman.”

Stiles looked at her in confusion, then glanced at the pamphlet. “Oh, right! Yeah, if you're gonna
be my Catwoman, I need to know things like this.” They share a smirk, then drag Issac into a long
discussion about... something to do with Batman and Green Lantern, with Scott and Danny
occasionally throwing in comments and quips of their own.

Derek relaxed, for what felt like the first time since they got to school, and just basked in being
with Pack.

P.E., and everyone got a shock as Coach gave them a speech that seemingly wasn't taken from a
movie at all. “I know everyone's probably heard a dozen rumors. Sorry, Lahey, but I got to say this.
First off, no one give Lahey any grief. You do, if you're on a team, you'll be off it so fast your
head'll spin. No questions, no second chances. You're not on a team, well, say hello to summer
school. You heathens hear me? No teasing, no asking rude questions, nothing. This school as a
zero-tolerance policy, and it will be enforced. That ain't just from me; Principle Argent feels the
“Second. Here's what you need to know. Coach Lahey went off his damned rocker. There's no better way to put it; what he did, it's got no reason, no excuse. It's never okay to hurt the ones you love. It's less okay to hurt those smaller than you, weaker, especially those who you've got power over. It was not in any way Issac's fault, and if I hear anyone even a hint that it might have been, you'll be suspended for a week. At least.

“Third. If you, or someone you know, is going through something similar? I hope you feel like you can trust me, but tell someone – another teacher, the principle, the school nurse. Hell, follow Bilinski and Whittmore's example, and go to the damned sheriff! But you tell someone. You're kids, and you deserve to be kids, and a safe atmosphere where you aren't being betrayed by those who should be loving you. Oh, hell, Lahey, I didn't mean... Yeah, take him to the nurse, Bilinski. Tell Mrs. Argent I put my foot in it, if she asks, no worries. The rest of you, I mean it. No one has the right to something like that to you – not a parent, or a teacher, or a family friend. Not even a girlfriend or boyfriend, you hear me?”

Despite Coach's misplaced foot, Derek was impressed. Not just by his speech, though it was impressive that he was able to get through the whole thing without a single movie quote.

No, what really impressed Derek was how obviously he meant every word. He was... impassioned, actually, that's the only way to describe it.

Derek was still in a reflective mood when he got to English.

He walked in and almost tripped.

This was Ms. Dewitt?

Soft and pretty and blonde? Derek flushes at his mental description of her, but it feels accurate, even if a second glance throws her in a new light, allowing him to actually see the lean muscle cording her arms and proving Ms. Dewitt was anything but soft.

He hastily took his seat as she called roll, and didn't bother to stop himself from smiling at her in return when she asked him to stay after class. After all, he knew she'd be asking for help, and he'd promised Ms. Granada that he would.

It was a struggle for him to stay focused on the conversation after class; his wolf whined and clawed at him, wanting out of the classroom. He must be more worried about Issac than he thought, if his wolf was giving him this much trouble...

“No, I don't mind, really. I love this class.” Derek shook his head, wondering if he'd somehow offended the teacher. “If you'd rather someone else, I can give recommendations, but...”

Ms. Dewitt smirked at him. “No, why would I want someone else? Brains and looks, what more could a woman ask for?” Derek scratched his neck, trying to hide his blush. “I'm just saying, it's a lot of work, and I'm sure a guy like you has a dozen girls on strings, right? You sure you want to take the time?”

Derek ignores his confusion and deepening flush. “I... I don't have any girls, Ms. Dewitt. And I don't mind the time; I promised Ms. Granada that I'd help, and I want to. Like I said, I love this class.” She opens her mouth, probably to say something else to make him blush, when Derek catches sigh of the clock. “Oh, gods, is that the time?”

“See? Told you.” She teases, moving back, when had she gotten so close.
“No, it's just I’ve got to get the kids home, I didn't expect this to take so long. If you can tell me how long it'll be, most days, I’ll make arrangements.”

“Kids?”

“Cora and Issac.” It was Monday, meaning Stiles was going home with the Argents.

“Cora's your sister, right? But why do you have – oh. You guys took him in, huh?” At Derek looks of surprise, Ms. Dewitt shrugs. “It's a small town, and it's all anyone could talk about, all day. So Issac is going to stay with your family? Is that a good idea?”

Derek tries to hide his automatic bristling. “Why wouldn't it be?”

“You know...” Ms. Dewitt says slowly, then grimaces at his blank face. “Your sister?”

“I don't think that's a concern.” Derek tells her stiffly, trying to not get angry; she doesn't know, how could she? All she sees is two fifteen year olds, who've been dating for months and are now living under the same roof.

“I hope it's not. Anyway... it'll probably be a half hour to an hour, every day. You able to handle that, hot stuff?” She winks at him.

Derek’s wolf whines louder, and he finds himself nodding just a bit harder than he normally would. “No problem. I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Let me get your number, and email, in case I have questions or problems?”

That taken care of, Derek hurries to the car, hoping Cora and Issac aren't too upset with him.

**January 16, 2012**

Having Issac in on the 'Masquerade' was awesome. At least, once he got used to it.

At first, he'd been utterly disbelieving, but it's kind of hard to disbelieve visible proof; there's was nothing more visible than Derek’s lack of eyebrows. Then, he'd wanted to see everyone wolfed-out. That had been amusing, watching his reaction as first Peter, then Sarah, Jon, James and Laura shifted. He hadn't been afraid, trapped in a room with a bunch of 'monsters', he'd been fascinated. A little scared, maybe, when Talia shifted, but she could turn full-wolf.

The only bobble was when he asked Cora to do it.

“Are you... maybe that's not such a good idea?” She'd scuffed her toe on the carpet, embarrassed and worried.

“What, you think you're gonna scare me?”

“No, I just...” She shot Stiles a glance, and he shrugged. So Cora sighed, and shifted.

Issac grinned. “Damn, girl.”

“What?” It came out a bit growly, which just made Issac grin more broadly.

“Just... you're beautiful.”

Sarah snorts and Peter rolls his eyes, but the rest of Pack seemed impressed with Issac’s sentiment.
“I... what?” Cora, on the other hand, couldn't seem to wrap her mind around it.

Issac grabs her hand, studying her claws. “This is awesome, seriously. But where do your eyebrows go, huh?”

Derek huffs out a laugh and returns to human form, the rest of the Pack following his lead. “Why is it that that's the first thing everyone asks?”

“It's kinda the first thing we see, maybe?” Stiles doesn't bother to hide his mirth.

“Shut it, brat.”

He stuck his tongue out at Derek, and sat next to Issac, helping him ask, and understand the answers to, all the questions he had.

The biggest question, obviously, was, were they going to let him become a werewolf? And Talia hadn't minced words, explaining the risks involved, but letting him know if he still wanted it once he was eighteen and graduated, it was there.

“We have reason to believe, thanks to Stiles, that you will survive the transition. So think about it seriously; once you get the Bite, there's no going back. There's Hunters who don't follow the code, there's magic-users who think they need our organs and blood for dark magic, and other dangers... but there are even more rewards. It's up to you. None of us will pressure you.” This last was said with a stern look to her younger daughter, who nodded seriously in reply.

“Don't think you have to, 'Zac.” Cora had said earnestly. “Would I like it if you could be a wolf with me? Sure I would. But I like it right now, when you're a guy with me, ya know?”

Issac had blushed, and Stiles had quickly moved the conversation on.

In fact, things were going pretty damn good.

Last Thursday, Danny had come to Game Night, folding himself into their current Shadow Run campaign pretty seamlessly. And after it was over, he'd asked Stiles out.

That had been nerve-wracking, because Stiles had to tell Danny he'd have to talk to his dad about it, that his dad would want to talk to Danny – but Danny had surprised him, he'd just asked when a good time to meet with his dad would be.

So Stiles had his first date this coming Saturday; it was a double-date, at dad's insistence, with Scott and Allison, but it was still a date!

In fact, the only thing wrong in Stiles world was Derek, being extra grumpy.

He'd been moping, off and on, whenever Stiles saw him. Which was less than normal; Derek was working with his AP English sub, helping her adjust to the requirements of the class. It seemed to take a lot of time, but Derek was happy, so Stiles was happy.

Except he was being so grumpy.

“I'm serious, I want to know what's making you such a, a... sourwolf!”

Derek snorts at the epithet, then sighs. “Let's go sit in the corner, yeah?”

Mystified, Stiles follows him, and sits next to Derek on the bleachers in the gym.
Derek sighs again, more heavily, and looks down at the rest of the class, goofing off because Finstock was fighting with a TV and VCR for some reason.

“Look, I like Danny. Everyone likes Danny.”

“Wait, this is about – “

“No, just listen, okay?” Derek flicks his eyes to Stiles, then looks away again. “This is... you've heard something about Paige, right?”

Stiles nods slowly. “I know you dated a girl named Paige, and it didn't end well. That's all I know.”

Derek slumps. “You couldn't pry like normal? Right, well... I thought I loved her. And it was... it was scary. All the normal things, of course, but also, you know, me. But I eventually got permission to tell her about us, about the Pack. It should have been amazing; should have been like it was with Issac.”

Derek turns and faces Stiles, pensive look on his face. “I never got the chance to tell her, she wanted me to choose her over my family. It was insane, Red; here I am, trying to bring her into my Pack, and all she's hearing is that my family is more important than she is, so that must mean I don't love her. Or something, I don't claim to understand it. I loved her enough to try and make her Pack. And she just... threw it in my face, not even understanding it.”

“That really sucks, Der.” Stiles says quietly.

“Yeah.” Derek lets out an explosive burst of air. “Yeah, it does. Then later, she... it doesn't matter. With Issac, thanks to you, we were pretty confident that he wasn't going to act like Paige. But, even if we didn't have you... he needs us, you know? Danny? He doesn't need anyone, he's got everyone.”

“Wait.” Stiles struggles to think through his shock. “You're worried that Danny's gonna try and make me choose between him and the Pack? Are you serious?”

Derek winces. “I keep telling myself I’m being an idiot, all right? Danny isn't anything like Paige; he's a nice guy, and he doesn't need to make you do anything like that. I know it's stupid, it's just...”

Stiles flushes, finally getting what Derek’s trying to say. “It's just that it feels like the same thing, and you don't want me to have to go through it.”

“I... yeah.” Derek looks away.

Stiles bumps his shoulder into his. “That's really cool of you, dude. Thanks for worrying about me.”

“We're Pack, Stiles.” Derek growls, rolling his eyes but smiling a bit. “And don't call me dude.”

Stiles grins at him. “Sure, dude.”

**January 23rd, 2012**

Derek felt ready to claw his skin off, nervous and edgy for no good reason.

That's what he's telling himself, over and over.

After all, if Stiles date had been a disaster, he'd know about it by now, right?
He growled at Cora to hurry up, herding her and Issac to car a good ten minutes earlier than normal. He could hear his mom and Peter laughing at him, heard Sarah say, “Don't bruise Stiles too badly during your interrogation, Der!” Then they were off, speeding towards to school.

“Sheesh, Derek, slow down before John pulls us over. I think you've been more worried about this than Stiles was, it and it was his date.”

Derek growls, but slows down a bit. “Whatever. I’m allowed to worry about Pack, Cora.”

She softens. “He's not Paige, Der. It'll be okay.”

He takes a deep breath. “Yeah. I know. I just...”

“Who's Paige?” Issac asks.

“I'll tell you later; no need make Derek even more grumpy, yeah?”

That makes Derek snort. “You're all heart, sis.”

“I know.” She says serenely. “I'm the queen of empathy or some shit.”

“Way to sell it.”

Derek parks and looks around, eying the mostly empty lot like it had betrayed him. Cora just laughs at his disgruntled look and pushes him at his door. “C'mon, we'll set up an ambush on the steps.”

Issac chuckles and hauls himself out of the car, letting Cora take his backpack, and Derek follows them both to the steps.

Stiles shows up about ten minutes later, dropped off with Scott by Mrs. McCall. “Hey guys!” He waves, smiling brightly at their trio. “You're here early.”

“Derek was in a rush this morning.” Cora says dryly, the rat.

Stiles smile morphs to a shy grin. “Aw, sourwolf, were you worried about me?”

Scott gives Derek a curious look, but he's thankfully distracted by the arrival of Allison, saving Derek the humiliation of whatever explanation Stiles would come up with for the nickname.

“Maybe a little.” Derek ignores the way his ears are burning. “You know. We talked about this.”

Stiles sits next him, bumping their shoulders together. “I do. And I repeat, that's really cool of you. But no worries. I mean, it was only a first date, you know?”

Stiles tries to shrug nonchalantly, failing miserably. Derek and Cora both snort, while Issac pretty much giggles. “Sure it was, Stiles.” Issac pokes his side. “So spill!”

Stiles turns red so fast, Derek wonders if it makes him dizzy. “What's to spill? We went bowling, saw a movie. Danny and I won, because Ally may be awesome, but I'm not bad, and Danny? He kicks ass.”

Derek studies Stiles' face, trying to repress his grin. “Uh-huh. And that's it, right? Nothing else.”

“Nope.” Stiles says blithely, like if he says it confidently enough, he and Cora would miss the skip of his heart that says he's lying.
Cora gives a mock gasp. “Stiles Stilinski, you dirty liar! What else!”

Somehow, Stiles managed to turn even redder. “A gentleman doesn't kiss and tell.” He proclaims with faux dignity.

“He kissed you!” Cora all but shrieks, clapping her hands excitedly.

Stiles ducks his head, hiding a dopey grin that somehow managed to make Derek really happy for him, and feel sort of sad. Left out, maybe?

“Like I said, Graceful...” Stiles lets it trail off, and Derek bumps him like he'd done when he first sat down.

“Ignore her, she was raised by wolves, you know. As long as you're happy.”

Stiles lifts shining eyes to Derek’s, still grinning like an idiot, blush finally fading. “I... yeah, Der, I am. It was really great, you know? Even if we don't... I mean, if decides he wants someone better, I still got to go on my first date, you know?”

Derek narrows his eyes, but Cora beats him to it. “None of that, Stilinski! There is no one better than you, you hear us? Danny’s been giving you these looks for weeks, now. I’m surprised it took him this long to ask you out. Don't go breaking up before it happens.”

“Breaking up?” Stiles gives her a blank look. “It was one date. It's not like we're already boyfriends or something.”

“Do you not want to be?” Issac asks idly, watching Jackson’s typically showy turn into the parking lot.

“What? Of course I do. I don't know if he does, and I don't want to – “

“Oh my god, Stiles, do you live under a rock? What were you doing yesterday? Danny’s already changed his relationship status on facebook and everything!”

“He did?” Stiles turns wide eyes to Cora. “Really? You aren't fucking with me?”

“See for yourself.” She says smugly, nodding to Danny, walking to them from Jackson’s car. Jackson just rolled his eyes and walked the other way, seemingly annoyed that his best friend was dating Stiles.

“Hey,” Danny gracefully slid in next to Stiles, his arm going around Stiles waist like it belonged there. “Missed you.”

“I-me, too.” Stiles stammers, blushing again.

He blushes more when Danny kisses him, making Cora squeal and Issac mutter, “Get a room!” Derek just rolled his eyes, determined to be happy for Stiles.

By the end of the day, Derek wasn't thinking about Stiles at all.

Ms. Dewitt had been nice to him ever since she'd arrived, but this...

This was something else.

She was flirting with him. And it wasn't subtle.
“I just... it's hard to believe you're seventeen. You act like you're my age, and you certainly look old enough, you know?” She grins at him.

“I... thank you?” He's not quite sure what to do. It's flattering, but confusing. Ms. Dewitt is really pretty, and she's smart, and funny; she could have pretty much any guy she wanted. But she's flirting with him, kind of pushing, even.

“Oh, I’m not giving you empty compliments, Der. They're full, trust me.” She winks. “I was wondering... I know originally the deal was that you wouldn't be grading anything, but what do you say to coming over to my place, Friday night, I’ll make dinner and you can help me go through all these essays? There's a lot of them, you know?”

The looks she's giving him is predatory and sure, and he's... honestly unsure how he feels about it.

“I... um. Is it okay, for me to be grading my classmates papers?”

“Who's gonna know? I won't tell if you won't.”

He was about to tell her no, massively uncomfortable with the whole thing, when he heard Danny and Stiles walk by outside the classroom, Stiles chattering happily about the movie they were going to go see this next weekend.

So Derek shrugs and says yes. Why not?

February 11, 2012

This dance seemed like it should be a lot different than the last one Stiles went to. For one thing, he actually has a date this time!

But it's... mostly just the same. Same people, same music... the decorations are still cheesy, just cheesy hearts instead of cheesy snowflakes.

Still, it was more fun to be at a dance with a date.

And Danny picked him up, instead of Stiles having to ride with Grumpy Derek.

Speaking of, where did Derek get off to? He'd been right here, silently glowering at the world, as per Derek norms, and now he's...

Oh, he's off talking with his substitute English teacher.

“C'mon, let's dance.” Danny whispers right in Stiles ear, making him shiver just a bit. Danny smirks at his reaction, but doesn't push it.

That's what's so great about Danny, Stiles thinks. He doesn't care that Stiles is only fourteen, doesn't push Stiles for more than he's ready for. They'd kissed, yeah, but Danny's hand barely even wandered.

“Can I ask you something?” The question comes from nowhere, especially for Stiles, even though he asked it.

“Sure.” Danny snugs Stiles' body against his own, sounding content and unconcerned.

“Just... I don't want you to take this wrong, or anything...”
Danny pauses, pulling back to look him in the eye. “Okay. Now I’m getting worried.”

Stiles can feel his face heat. “I don’t want to... damn, I always do this.”

With a small chuckle, Danny rests his forehead against Stiles’. “I know how your lack of filter works. It’s okay. Ask your question.”

“Why don’t you push?” Stiles doesn’t give Danny a chance to respond, just keeps babbling. “I mean, I’m not wanting you to push or anything, it’s awesome that you’re not, but I know you’ve done a lot more than you’ve done with me, and you don’t even really get handsy. Everyone gets handsy, right? But you don’t. And I don’t know if that’s just ’cause you’re that cool or ’cause you don’t want to get handsy with me...”

Horrified, Stiles slaps his own hand over his mouth.

Danny’s mouth is hanging slack, which isn’t helping Stiles mortification. “I’ll just go shoot myself, now. Excuse me.”

Danny doesn’t let him go, tightening his arms in automatic protest when Stiles tries to pull away.

“You think I don’t want to?” Danny sounds as horrified as Stiles feels.

“I... maybe? I don’t... I mean, I’m only fourteen, so... ugh!” Stiles bangs his head against Danny’s shoulder, there being a distinct lack of walls for him to brain himself on.

“No, hey, stop that. Stop. Look at me.” Danny cups Stiles’ chin and pulls his eyes up to meet his own. “Yes, you're only fourteen. And you're right, I don't push; but trust me, it's not because I don't want to. It's...”

Danny sighs. “I want you to set the pace. I don't ever want to pressure you, make you feel like you have to do something to keep me. If all we do for the next year is what we’ve done for the past month, I’ll be happy, okay?”

“But after that year, all bets are off?” Stiles quips, poking Danny in the side. “And I know, that's not what you mean. I just...”

“Have less self-esteem than a flea?” Danny nods as if he's agreeing with something Stiles' said.

“Hey! That's not what I...”

“But it's true.” Danny sighs. “It's one of the few things about you that bugs me. It's not your fault, and please don't freak out about it, okay? But it's so very, very true. You've got zero self-esteem. You don't see yourself very well at all.”

Stiles swallows, throat gone dry. “I think I see myself quite clearly. I’m this skinny, mouthy kid who survives on caffeine and Adderal. I make it through the day thanks to Google and sarcasm. The only thing to recommend me is my brain, and and even it's weird.”

“You're funny, and kind, and loyal to a fault.” Danny says serenely, apparently unconcerned with anything Stiles had said. “Skinny? Not really. You've got muscle tone, you just tend to hide it under layers, and I can see how you're going to fill out. Yeah, you're mouthy, but I like your mouth. In, uh, all senses. Sure, you've got ADD, but you've also got it under control, and thanks to that, you know more things about more things than I’d even know to list, which I find strange but sexy. Your brain is sexier than your body, which is sexy enough to get me trouble if your dad learns how to read minds. And don't knock Google, I own stock.”
“Oh.” Stiles breathes the word, unable to process everything Danny just said.

“Yeah. Oh.” Danny traces a finger around Stiles' lips, making him shiver again. “Please tell me your dad can't read minds?”

“I'd be nailed in a barrel already, dude.” Stiles licks Danny’s finger, then sucks on the tip.

It's Danny’s turn to shiver. “Tease.” His voice has gone husky, and he takes his hand back, ignoring Stiles disappointed whine. “All that said? I like you, like being with you. I can wait. I’d rather go slow, and keep you, than rush and scare you off.”

“I'm not scared.” But Stiles doesn't recognize the breathy tone of his own voice.

“I don't ever want you to be scared. Not of me.” Danny stares into Stiles eyes intently, and he can't help but notice that Danny's pupils are looking a bit blown.

“I did that,” Stiles thinks, in wonder. “I made him look at me like that.”

It's a scary thought, but not the way Danny means; it's scary like a roller-coaster, not a monster.

“I'm not. I couldn't be.” Stiles assures him. “So... we're going my speed?”

“All the way.” Danny smiles at him.

“Let's try second gear, then.”

A shocked second goes by, then Danny's laughing. “You mean second base?”

“Well, yeah, dude. But it didn't fit with the driving analogy, so...”

“You are such a dork.” Danny informs him fondly.

Like he doesn't know that. “Is that a no?”

Danny snorts. “No, it's not a no. How could I say no to such a charming offer? But I’d rather not get suspended.”

“Well, I didn't mean 'let's make out in front of everyone', gods. But you drove us here...” Stiles winks.

Danny's eyes widen, and he nods, then presses his forehead back against Stiles'. “You sure?” Stiles nods eagerly. “Okay. But promise you'll stop, if you – “

Stiles kisses him to interrupt. “I promise.”

Derek has to fight to not scowl at Kate when Stiles and Danny sneak out of the badly-decorated gym.

He hadn't been trying eavesdrop on their conversation; before tonight, he'd have sworn he wouldn't have been able to eavesdrop, not in a place this crowded, with music this loud, with so much distance between them.

But he'd heard every word of the conversation. He'd ached for Stiles, still feeling so insecure about everything, despite all the efforts of the Pack and his friends. Maybe not despite, actually; Scott had
mentioned, earlier that week, how much more open Stiles was, and less apt to dive straight towards defensive sarcasm.

So maybe they'd done some good, but it obviously wasn't enough.

And he wanted to beat Danny, for knowing exactly what to say, to make Stiles feel better. For being a good guy, and being honest when he says he's waiting for Stiles. For...

Gods, he doesn't know what for. If Derek didn't know better, he'd say he was jealous over Stiles. Which is just... stupid. Stiles is the cool brother he can study and play with. Not that James is a bad brother, but he's so much younger than Derek is, they aren't really friends.

No, it's... since Paige, Derek hasn't had anyone. And yes, that had been his choice, but seeing Stiles so happy with Danny was rubbing it in, how lonely he was sometimes. Made worse by the fact that, lately, it was most often Stiles that he hung out with, to alleviate that loneliness.

Kate hip-checked him, bringing him back to reality. “That's a big-brother glare.” She grins, clearly amused. “Relax, papa-bear, I doubt the kid's gonna maul your sister on the dance floor.”

Derek gives her a startled look. “That's not...” How can he explain that he's worried about Stiles? To most of the world, he's Cora’s friend, and it'll look weird for him to claim anything more.

Kate just rolls her eyes, ignoring his abandoned protest. “Sure. I have a big brother, too. I know how you guys are, all growly at any boy with the balls to act like we're as hot as we are.”

Derek doesn't bother to hide his snort. “You met my sister? She'd have my balls, if I went all, uh, 'growly' at her Issac. She thinks the kid walks on water.”

Truthfully, Derek agrees with her. He had even before all this shit about his father came to light; now that he knows, Derek’s honestly in awe that the kid went through all that, and managed to never take it out on anyone. He would probably have put people in the hospital, even without wolf-strength.

“She'll learn.” Kate says smugly.

“She'll learn... what?”

“Boy that pretty? He's for playing with. She'll learn. To look for men.” Kate ducks her head so that she's looking up at Derek through her lashes, clearly trying to let him know she thinks he's a man.

He doesn't know how to respond, as usual, so he just shrugs.

Kate laughs. “I swear, you've got no ego at all, do you, Hale?” Her eyes glitter with something Derek can't name, it's uncomfortable but exciting, confusing. “And still playing hard to get, why?”

“Honestly? I’m confused.” Derek tells her bluntly. She's had him over at her apartment half a dozen times, dropped hint after flat-out suggestion, and hadn't backed off once.

“Confused by what?” She sounds incredulous.

“By why you're chasing me, when you...” Derek makes a small motion, trying encompass everything Kate is. “You can have any guy you want.”

“Except, it seems, the one I want.” This is thrown out with some heat, and her eyes blaze. Derek winces. “That's not... I just don't get it.”
“What's to get? You're the first man I’ve met that I’ve found even remotely interesting in this town. I follow my instincts, and they're telling me... well,” The grin on Kate’s face is one Derek recognizes from the inside, one he has when the hunt's almost done and he knows he's about to bring down his prey. “You want to help me sort outlines tomorrow?”

“I can't.” Derek doesn't have to fake regret; she might be crazy, but she seems fun, and Derek could use a little adult fun. “We're going to a wedding, it's on Sunday, but we're leaving in the morning, coming back Monday. But maybe next weekend?”

“That's too bad, but I accept your counter-offer. Come over next Saturday, say ten am? Then we'll have all day and most of the night?”

Derek licks lips suddenly dry. “Sounds like a plan.”

“Good.” Her grin morphs to that of a cat with cream.

“I better check on my sister. Don't want to get you in trouble.”

Kate pats his cheek. “That's really thoughtful, Der. I should go scare some freshmen out of the shadows.” She winks at him, then saunters away, hips swaying.

She throws a single look over her shoulder, grinning at him when she catches him looking, like she's walking just for him to be able to watch.

Derek smiles back, then turns away, not sure if he should be happy or scared. Danny’s voice drifts through his mind, ‘I'd rather go slow, and keep you, than rush and scare you off.' But Derek isn't Stiles; he's not a fourteen year old boy still trying to believe anyone likes him at all; he's seventeen, maybe not a man like Kate insists, but a hell of a lot closer to one. She's not worried she's going to scare him off, she's worried she's never going to get him at all.

He's not sure why.

He'll just have to prove that she's wrong.

Interlude; Strings of Silver

*Victoria toyed with the necklace holding one of the microphones she'd acquired specifically for this meeting until Chris caught her hand. He shared half a wince with her, hoping none of their new allies were too hurt by the noises it had to have caused.*

“Sorry.” She muttered, contrite. “Just nerves.”

“I understand.” He did, truly. As much as Chris loathed his father, Vic was in an even worse position. Hunters had always been matriarchal, so the responsibility rested on her shoulders; at the same time, Gerard was an egotistical, self-serving ass of a man, who cared nothing for anything but his own fanaticism, and paid only the barest lip-services to either the Code or the Traditions. They were lucky he'd bothered to call ahead and tell them he was coming into town, that he was bothering to try and include them in whatever plans he'd created, at all.

*Chris was going to hold onto that luck with both hands, and hopefully ride it to a sane destination.*

*Gerard struts into the dinner, followed by Kate, both of them looking down their noses at the plain furnishings, the friendly waitresses, and their two family members.*
“Why are we meeting here, Christopher? What's wrong with your house?” Gerard doesn't even bother to greet his son and daughter-in-law, he just dusts off a chair with silk handkerchief and holds it for Kate, before repeating the action and taking his own seat.

Chris shoots Mellie, the owner of the dinner, an apologetic look, and lets Victoria answer.

“Our daughter is only eleven, and I don't want her near any of this yet.” Her voice is firm and almost emotionless, certainly nothing to trigger the matching sneers that spring to life across Gerard and Kate's faces.

“Another example of your weakness, coddling your daughter so. Chris and Kate had already both participated in parts of our vocation by the time they were Allison’s age.”

Chris bites his own tongue, can see the effort Victoria expends controlling her own. “If I wanted your opinion on how to raise our child, Gerard, I’d... never want that, actually. What I want is to know why you're here.”

His sneer grows. “I know that you're both soft, but I’m trying to give you some respect. Thought you'd want to be involved in this, since it's your territory and all.”

“Involved in what?” Chris isn't sure how Vic manages to keep her tone so even. She always had been better able to play to the audience of his father.

Gerard shares a conspiratorial look with his daughter, and Chris suppresses a shudder. Kate was more Gerard than Gerard himself, even more psychotic and unbalanced. Frankly, the two of them together were enough to make Chris want to run far, far away.

“We know you like to think the monsters can be tamed, big brother.” Kate's sweet baby-doll wisp of a voice was incongruous, yet another honed weapon in her arsenal of deception. “But this time, your local Pack has gone too far.”

“What do you mean?” Victoria managed to sound merely curious.

Gerard looks gleeful and a bit vindictive. “You know how the Alpha was killed last month?”

Chris snorts, but it's Vic who answers. “We know that the Alpha's mate was killed last month.”

Gerard waves the correction off. “Well, the Hunters responsible have gone missing. So we're here to punish those responsible for their deaths.”

Victoria levels a calm look at her father-in-law. “So long as you remember that Allison is to go to my family, punish away.”

“Excuse me?” Gerard's voice is blanked by shock.

“I won't.” Victoria says harshly. “Do you even understand why Chris and I live here?”

“We thought you were keeping tabs on the Hales?” Kate's voice rises belligerently. “That's what you told the Conclave.”

“Keep your voice down.” Vic snaps. “And that's true. But it's not all of the truth. Think about it. A town like this is perfect for raising a family – small enough for everyone to know everyone, by extension anyway, but big enough to have all the services you'd get in Seattle or L.A. That means that it's also prime feeding territory. You know what keeps all the other monsters away? What keeps this town safe?” It was his wife's turn to sneer, and Chris has to own, proudly, that she looks
“You're hiding from monsters behind monsters?”

“See, Gerard, this is where your fanaticism blinds you. Most of the Crypto people are harmless – “

“Werewolves are never harmless!” Gerard hisses, slapping the table.

Victoria raises her brow. “Please do not interrupt me.” She speaks softly, but something in her tone causes Gerard to flush. “As I was saying, most of them are harmless. And most of those who are not necessarily harmless are aware, they know we could – would – destroy them in an instant, if they step so much as a single inch out of line.

“That's how it is here. The Hale pack is stable, and has been for over a century. It's big enough to control the territory, without being large enough to seek to expand it. They keep this town – and by extension, our daughter – safe, allowing Chris and I to do our job in the rest of state, secure in the knowledge that everything is at it should be, here on the homefront.”

“Or, we could.” Chris doesn't bother to mask the bitterness in his voice. “Before your puppets came waltzing into town and almost destroyed the delicate balance we've spent the past decade building.”

“What are you implying?” Kate demands, eyes narrowing at her brother.

Victoria snorts again, pulling Kate’s gaze back to her. “Implying, hell; we're flat out stating. We both know that neither of you give a fuck for the Code. That's bad enough, but you're both adults, and until and unless the Conclave reins you in, not our problem. Normally. But you two just can't resist trying to manipulate everyone, can't resist trying to pull Chris and I into your over-inflated crusade. So you did what you always do, like the narcissistic egotists you are.”

“What, exactly, is it you think we did, daughter?” Gerard’s voice was level, but his glare was withering and cold.

“You sent your puppets in to kill a man whose only 'crime' was one of genetics. I often wonder,” Victoria's voice turns musing, as she pretends to ignore the look of shock on both of her in-laws faces, “if you're not related to Hitler. You have the same ignorant attitudes.”

“Ignorant?” Kate's voice loses her normal baby-wisp tones, turns hard and steely. “They killed our mother!”

“Yes.” Chris agrees calmly. “Some werewolves killed our mother. Those wolves have been killed.”

“Yes.” Chris agrees calmly. “Some werewolves killed our mother. Those wolves have been killed.”

“Any wolf will kill.” Gerard spits.

“Anyone would kill, you back them into a corner.” Victoria points out with implacable logic. “So. You sent in your goons. To our territory. They broke the Code, they broke our territory. So we removed them for their crimes. And reported all of it to the Conclave, which you would know if you'd bother following the regulations you drilled your children in.”

For less than a second, Gerard looks stunned, and for the first time, Chris can see his age. It's so easy to forget that the man was rapidly approaching seventy, with the way he ruthless kept himself fit, and the reckless way he acted. Then it smooths away, and he looks almost... proud?

“I didn't realize you were capable of such ruthlessness.”
“Your lack of perception is not my problem.” Victoria informs him with cloying sweetness.

Gerard has the gall to laugh at that. “True, true. It's just a bit of a shock; I've gotten used to considering you both soft.”

“Your mistake, sir, and it has been for decades.” Chris forces his voice to hardness, but manages to repress his loathing. “Just because we follow the Code doesn't mean we're weak. I’d argue that it's our adherence to the Code that lends us our strength.”

Gerard studies his son's face. “I'd been cursing myself since you were a teen, for letting your mother have so much responsibility for your education. It's why, when she died, I didn't remarry, and raised Kate myself, despite the Conclave throwing every eligible bitch and matron they had at me. Color me shocked, Christopher, that she didn't manage to yank your spine out all together. Or,” His eyes cut to Victoria's, malicious delight turning the brown ugly. “Do I have your lovely wife to thank for that? If I’d known you were this ruthless, Vicky, I might have stolen you from my son.”

Victoria smiled sweetly. “And I'd have killed you for the attempt, Gerard.”

Gerard throws back his head and roars in laughter. “You'd have tried, I'm sure!” He wheezes out, once he's brought himself back under control. Kate is merely sitting there, face empty, staring at her brother like she'd never seen him before.

“One of us would have succeeded.” Chris shrugs, as if it doesn't matter.

“Oh, to be sure. That's neither here nor there, almost twenty years later. Still, good to find something to laugh at, since I'm getting the feeling you're going to deny me my Hunt.”

Victoria’s eyes narrow. “This is our territory, old man.” Gerard holds his hands up, placating, but she doesn't back down. “Not a single member of the Hale Pack has done anything to deserve a Hunt. If they do – “

“When they do.” Kate mutters.

Victoria speaks right over her. “ – Then Chris and I will organize said Hunt. Until such a day, any action against them will be treated as the last one had been. Except,” She pins Gerard with her most steely glare, “This time? I won't stop with just the puppets.”

Chris wants to cheer as visibly Gerard actually pales at his wife’s threat. “It's your territory, Vicky. We've already conceded that.”

“It took you six deaths to concede that.” She points out angrily.

“Only five of the matter!” Kate spits out.

Chris opens his mouth to retort, but is stopped by a man's voice. “Chris, Victoria?”

Chris pastes on a fake smile, turns to smile at Deputy Robert Davis. “Deputy.”

“We were just talking about you.” The deputy says cheerfully. “Last year's hunting was phenomenal, the boys've been wondering if you were gonna help us out again this year? And it's always a pleasure, to see a lady shoot with such skill!” He winks at Victoria, who gives him a small nod, polite but cold.

“Hunting, eh?” Gerard cuts in.
"Oh, please excuse me. Deputy Davis, this is my father, Gerard, and my sister, Kate. As for the hunting, Father, well, you know that I need to test a certain percentage of the weapons I purchase. It can get tedious, but last year Vic had the bright idea for me to farm it out. Let some of the local hunters test the stock while bagging their points. Doesn’t hurt, to get some word-of-mouth advertising, either."

“It was, literally, the best season I’d had since I was a boy.” Davis shakes Gerard’s hand enthusiastically, then lifts Kate’s and places a sloppy kiss on the back of it. She grimaces in distaste, surreptitiously wiping her hand on the paper napkin she’d automatically placed her lap when she’d received her coffee. “You folks going to be visiting long enough to join us?”

“I’m afraid they’re merely passing through, Deputy.”

“Now, Chris, I done told you – no need to be all formal. Any man can shoot like you, he can call me Bob. I’d worried, when you and the Mrs. first moved here; said we didn’t need any more sissy city-men. Proved me wrong, and I’m not ashamed to admit it.” He grins hugely at the Argents, seemingly missing the tension still thick enough to cut swirling around the table.

“I thank you for that, Bob.” Chris gives him a cold little smile. “Can I call you about organizing it, early next week? My father and sister don’t have much longer, and tomorrow I’m off to San Diego. Demonstrating a new cartridge at the Naval base, you know.”

“That sounds right fine, Chris. I’ll be looking for your call. It was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Argent, missy.” Bob gives Kate a leering wink. “And it always brightens my dad to see you, Mrs. Argent.”

“Yes, you always bring color to a day, yourself, Deputy.”

“Why thank you, ma’am!” He tips an imaginary hat to her. “I’ll just leave you folks to your family dinner, then. You know how it goes, work, work, work. New Sheriff’s like to work us to death. Not that I’m complainin’ – John’s a good man, he knows what he’s doin’. Hope you folks can join us some season soon!” He nods around the table. “And I’ll be talking to ya, Chris. Have a good evening.”

“Thank you, Bob. Be safe out there.”

“Thanks, Chris. Drive careful, all. Don’t make ticket you!”

The deputy wanders out, exchanging loud good-byes with the few other patrons, waving his to-go cup of coffee every direction as he goes.

A small silence hovers over the table, as all four wait for the boisterous man to be gone; if Chris didn’t know better, he’d say his sister was actually afraid that he’d return. Which was an amusing thought, and one he’d cling to.

Once the bell had rung over the door, signaling Bob’s departure, Gerard cleared his throat. “What a... singular individual. I can’t believe you trust him with your stock.”

“He may act the idiot, but Bob’s a damn fine hand with a gun.” Chris shrugs. “I know, shocked me silly, but there you are. And it keeps the locals happy, which makes our lives easier.”

Gerard shakes his head. “You can keep your small town and rustic neighbors. I’ll stick to Seattle, if it’s all the same to you.”

“Suit yourself.” Chris snorts. “You will anyhow.”
“That I will. Well, I believe I’ve had enough of the local air. I think I’ll return to our hotel, and pack. Since it appears Kate and I will be leaving in the morning.” Gerard stands, and glances down at his daughter. “Coming, my dear?”

“In a minute, daddy.” Kate’s voice was back to wispy, causing Chris to brace himself for whatever she was going to demand next.

“I’ll be in the car.”

Again, silence hovered as the table watched Gerard leave.

Once the door shut, Kate leaned forward imploringly. “Please, big brother. Let us come visit!”

He shakes his head once, hard, frowning. “No, Kate.”

“Damn it, Chris, this isn't fair! I know daddy's... zealous, but does that mean we aren't your family?”

“You say he's zealous, Katie?” Chris can’t help the incredulous tone of his voice. “You're even worse than he is. Don't think I don't know what you pulled in Santa Fe, last year.”

She actually had the audacity to preen, as if Chris were complimenting her. “It was a nice tactic, wasn't it? Too bad it won't work again.”

“In law enforcement, it'd be called 'entrapment', and would end not only with the supposed perpetrator walking free, but the official who did it going to jail themselves. What were you thinking, Katie?”

“They're animals, Chris. I was thinking that it's utter bullshit that we have to follow some outdated rulebook, written centuries ago when we didn't have the firepower to take 'em all out.”

“Three of the people killed in the cross-fire of that snafu – the snafu that you single-handed orchestrated, mind – were human, Katie.”

She brushes that aside impatiently. “Not like they were innocent, hanging around with a bunch of were-jaguars like that.”

“This is why I won't let you visit. You can see Allison at Conclave over Easter. With supervision.”

Kate glares at Chris, then turns to Victoria. “You really gonna let him cut me out of my niece's life like that, Vicky? She needs her aunt!”

“Don't call me Vicky.” Victoria says tiredly. “And I agree with Chris. We have a Code for a reason, and you're too close to the situation to see it. Until you get a handle on yourself, get away from Gerard and his fanaticism, you should count yourself lucky we let you see her at all.” Then Victoria’s face softens. “I know it's hard, he raised you, trained you. But he's only getting worse, sis. When you're ready to try this the sane way, let us know. We're here, and waiting.”

Scoffing, Kate shoves her seat back angrily. “You're the ones who aren't being sane about this.” She snaps. “I just hope you don't teach my baby niece any bad habits I'm gonna have to break her of. It's been charming, as always. See you at Conclave.”

They watch her stomp to the door, slamming it open, and angrily getting into the car with her father. Chris lets out a silent sigh of relief, shoulders relaxing with the car's movement, then pulls out his phone when it's no longer visible.
“Yo, Chris.”

“Bobby.”

Bob snorts into his phone. “Yeah, I feel ya, man. Your family, I don't know how you came out sane.”

“Flattery, sir, will get you an appointment with my wife.”

“Yeah, yeah. You're both clean, by the way. Neither of you touched either of them, and I’m not picking up any signals I didn't give ya. Trix is waiting in your SUV to wand you, just in case. You think they noticed us?”

“I'm fairly certain they didn’t. Are you getting anything?”

“Feeds are strong; your sister's cussing you and Vic something fierce.”

Chris rolls his eyes. “Let her. If you can, keep them monitored until they're back in Seattle. If not, at least until they're out of state.”

“No skin, man. We got it covered. Trust, we got it covered; that old man gave me the chills, just looking at me. I’m serious, how the hell did you come out sane?”

“I was saved by a pair of lovely ladies.” Chris smiles at his wife, who rolls her eyes and elbows him lightly. “Sadly, my so-loving father drove my mother to an early grave. She'd have liked you.”

“I'm sure I'd have loved her. Unlike that sister of yours.”

Chris just sighs. “It's not her fault, Bobby.”

“I know better than to argue with you. We're monitoring. Oh, you interested at all in their tail?”

Victoria raises her brow, and takes the phone from Chris. “They brought a tail?”

“Half dozen, pretty much. Bunch of big, stupid types. Trix talked to ‘em while you were playing patty-cake with the family. She managed to plant bugs in both in their SUV and in a couple coats. Charming gents; I won't share what they've had to say about sister.”

Victoria winces at that; Trix – her name was Beatrice, which she loathed, and had insisted on being called 'Trix' from the young age of five – was a lovely girl of twenty three, a seasoned Hunter who was steady both on the field and in planning. She also looked like a Penthouse centerfold, and had no qualms using that to her advantage, to her brother's annoyance.

“I wish I understood why the man insists on hiring idiots. Yes, they're easy to manipulate, and they're expendable, but if he'd work with reliable people he wouldn't have to expend them.”

“Want my opinion?” Bobby doesn't stop and see if she does or not, knowing Victoria wouldn't have said anything to begin with if she wasn't at least somewhat interested. “He knows he's breaking the Code in every fashion, knows no respectable Hunter would do even a tenth of the shit he gets into. And the ones who would, well, they'd sell him out to save their own hides just as fast as he'd sell them. He's thinking it's safer to hire zombies who wouldn't be capable of double-crossing him even if it did occur to 'em. The only person he trusts, besides himself, is that daughter of his. Of whom I’m not saying another word, since I like my balls where they, thank you.”

Victoria huffs out a laugh. “Keep them where they are, Bobby. I've got no use for them.”
“Aw, babe, I’m hurt. Anyway.” Bobby turns serious and professional. “We've got 'em locked; bugs on both Gerard and Kate, bug and tracker on their car. It's registered to Gerard, so we're fairly sure they won't abandon it and come back in something else. Plus, we got bugs and trackers on the SUV and in three meat-head coats, like I said; I doubt they'll come back without their posse, now that they know you won't back anything up.”

“Thank you, Bobby. As always, an exemplary job.”

“Hey, babe, that's what you pay for – exemplary and colorful.”

Chris and Victoria both chuckle at that. “So we do. See you tomorrow, 1900.”

“Roger, boss-babe. Out.”

Husband and wife exchange looks, grim but hopeful. “We better hurry; we're supposed to be at the Hale house in twenty.”

Chris nods. “I'll just pay Mellie for the coffee; you call Talia and tell her we're on our way.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Things are... scary.
And more scary.
And WHY?
Still, Pack is love

Chapter Notes

NON-CON, oh jesus.
sorry... but this is the story.

Posted early, for those who caught the error before i could fix it. this will NOT be
changing my normal posting schedule [such as it is] -- don't expect another update
until late Tuesday night/early Wednesday morning [Eastern Standard Time]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

February 15th, 2012

Stiles ducked into the chem lab, praying to every god he could remember the name of that Harris
wouldn't be there.

His prayers were seemingly answered; the lab was empty.

He lets out a sigh of relief and heads to the back, spreading his stuff out on the floor so he can cram
during lunch.

The wedding was awesome, even if Stiles thought they were crazy to get married two days before
Valentine's day, but it had eaten pretty much the entirety of the three-day weekend. (Not that Stiles
blamed them for the romantic timing, not really - they'd been waiting for forever to get married,
and were so excited that it was finally, finally legal! But it was the busiest time of year for
weddings, it seems, and only the fact that Trista was Alpha of the Monroe Pack and Jen was a
high-powered attorney had enabled them to pull off the date.) And yesterday, where normally
Stiles would have studied his ass off for this test, well... it had been Valentine's Day, and he'd
actually had a Valentine. His dad let him have Danny over for dinner and then watch movies until
curfew – dad had even actually extended the curfew from nine until ten, just this once.

And it had definitely been worth not studying as much as he normally would. It had even been
worth his embarrassment, though Danny had been utterly cool, if a little smug. All he'd said was
“Good. I really hope you liked that.”
Stiles takes a deep breath, feeling his face flame just thinking about it.

Okay, the problem isn't the extra blood flowing to his face, but he can't think about this right now; he's got a huge test in... fifty three minutes, and Mr. Harris hates him, and he is not losing his perfect hundred percent in class – he enjoys the sour look on Harris' face too much to risk it.

So he shoots a text to Danny, letting him know he'd found the lab empty and was staying here, like he'd said, and puts his earbuds in, ready to get started.

Just before he hits 'play', he hears someone else at the front of the class.

“I've found an empty room, it'll be safe to talk here.”

That's Ms. Dewitt, Derek's substitute English teacher. Why is she in here, instead of her own classroom?

Stiles wasn't an idiot; he'd seen the looks Ms. Dewitt gave Derek, like she'd love to just gobble him up. And Derek looked at her like he knew he was prey, sometimes.

And Ms. Dewitt gave Stiles a bad feeling. Like he knew something, but just couldn't remember what it was. It had been bugging him for weeks, so he decided to stay hidden on the floor and eavesdrop on her phone conversation.

But he wasn't going to be stupid. He typed out “HELP 911 CHEM LAB”; cued it up to send to both Derek and Cora, just in case, and hit record. Then he bent over his chem book and notebooks, bobbing his head as if he was listening to music, and spied to his heart's content.

“No, it's going really well... yeah, we're getting along fine... she's a great girl, a little soft and naïve, but what do you expect, when she's being kept... no, I know... I think Allison'll surprise you, daddy.”

Allison? Allison Argent?

“No, they still have their stupid fucking treaty with the damned wolves.” Stiles tightened his grip on his pencil, suddenly almost rigid with unexplained fear. “But they don't seem to suspect a thing; they've bought my sad little quest for redemption hook, line and sinker... Yeah, the plan's solid, and starting to move, now... no, the boy's finally coming around... this weekend, he's coming to my place, I'll spin him so hard he doesn't know which way is up, let alone what Pack means.” She all but spits the word 'Pack', making it sound like something vile.

“It's not a hardship, daddy; baby Hale's grown into a scrumptious piece. Too bad he's a fucking monster. Well, maybe I can keep as a pet? You remember you promised me a dog for my thirteenth birthday and never gave me one; you can let me have him for my thirtieth. Once the rest of his family's dead, I mean; it'll be assumed he died with the rest of the Hales if he just disappears, right?”

Stiles bit his lip, trying to hold back all the things he'd say, if he were an adult and able to take on a Hunter – because she has to be a Hunter – without being worried he'd die two seconds later.

“Yeah, think about having a test subject, please. Either way, daddy, it should be all set. I've got the accelerants we need from the idiot chem teacher, enough ash and wolfsbane to circle the Hale house three times over; I've got a couple firebugs to set it... yeah, if everything stays on schedule, we'll light the whole Pack up the full moon of April, after they're back from their monthly monster-marathon and exhausted. We just need a couple more guns, in case any of the humans try and get out. You, me, Sven... maybe bring Marty and Jack?”
Holy gods, she was planning on murdering the Hales, burning them to death in their own home.

Stiles hits 'send' on his phone, makes a random note about something in the notebook on his knees. Absolutely does not panic.

“Yeah, sounds good daddy. I'll see you then. Love you, too.”

“Make sure you've got extra, Kate.” She mutters to herself. “Because I’m not the one who planned this whole thing? Ass.”

Stiles lets out a mental sigh of relief as he hears the door at the front of the room open and close, and flips his notebook to the next page of notes. He's about to make a list of what he needs to do now, when a hand lands on his shoulder. He jumps and shrieks, flailing away and knocking his books to the ground. Only the fact that they're in the pocket of his hoodie prevents his phone and iPod from following everything else down.

“What are you doing here?” Ms. Dewitt snarls at him.

Stiles blinks at her rapidly, then pulls out his iPod and pretends to press 'stop'. “Excuse me?”

“I said,” She visibly attempts to compose herself, pasting on a fake smile. “I didn't see you back here. What are you doing?”

“Oh! Um, we've got a huge test today, and there's some club in the library, and the cafeteria's loud as he – as heck, and it's too cold outside...”

“So you're in the chem lab?”

“Well, yeah, since it's a chem test.” He blinks at her some more, wondering why it seems so odd for him to be in here – after all, he has a class here next period; she, on the other hand, has no reason to be in here at all.

“You're... “ Ms. Dewitt cocks her head and studies him. Stiles focuses on not freaking out, which is actually going pretty well for him, all things considered. Any weirdness on his part can easily be written down to the fact that she'd just scared the shit out of him, as she'd obviously bought that he'd been listening to music and hadn't known she was there. “How old are you?”

“I'm fourteen, ma'am.”

She rolls her eyes. “Don't call me ma'am. And don't lie to me, either.”

“Lie? What?”

“It's AP chemistry next period, and freshmen aren't allowed to take it.”

“Oh! Yeah, no; I skipped a grade. So I’m a sophomore.” Stiles shrugs. “This is the first time I’ve ever regretted it, actually, because I had a date last night, first time I’ve had a date for V-Day, you know?” Stiles isn't sure how the words are even as coherent as they are, but he isn't going to complain; he's going to just sit back and let them flow. To quote, 'dazzle 'em with bullshit', it might be the only thing that keeps this crazy Hunter-bitch from killing him. “But I didn't study like I normally would, because, well, date, so now I’m here, trying to not freak out because Harris? Absolutely loathes me, he makes it a point to make fun of me for being ‘a brain’ at least once a week, like he thinks we're all on the set of the Breakfast Club or something, and tries to make sure I've got detention at least three times a week, so in turn I make sure to maintain my perfect
hundred percent average on all tests and quizzes, but today I might be a little off my game. It was totally worth it, though.”

Ms. Dewitt studies him as he babbles, her fake smile slowing morphing into a smug smirk. “And then I come in and interrupt, scaring the hell out of you when you're listening to whatever, and making you drop everything. Let me help you clean all this up.”

“Oh, no, that's okay...” She ignores him, picking up his highlighters and pencils, and setting them on table at Stiles' back, then kneeling in front of him and picking up his book and notebooks, standing back up slowly and kind of showily, giving Stiles a nice view down her top if he wants it.

He doesn't.

She stacks the books next to his pens and stuff, then offers him a hand. “I feel bad about startling you, let me help. C'mon, I may be only be a sub, but I promise, I kick ass at chemistry.”

'I'm sure you do, especially if it helps you kill innocent werewolves who haven't done anything wrong,' Stiles thinks bitterly, biting his tongue to keep the words inside. But like he always says, he's not an idiot, so he lets her grab his hand and pull him up with more strength that it looks like she'd have.

Her eyes widen appreciatively once he's upright, and her smile this time is more real. “What were you listening to, anyway, that you didn't hear me calling for Adrian?”

“Adrian?”

“Mr. Harris.” Ms. Dewitt corrects herself, and holds out her left hand.

Reluctantly, Stiles pulls the earbud from his right ear out and hands it to her. “It's set really loud, so...” He kind of flails his arm at her, not-so-coincidentally dislodging the other earbud from his left ear, and hits play.

Her mouth drops in shock, then she flat-out grins at him, seeming impressed. “I never would have guessed! I love Violent Femmes, didn't know anyone still listened to them!”

“Yeah, they're awesome.”

“And no wonder you didn't hear me.” She's got her hand wrapped around the bud, but can clearly hear the music, since she's humming along with it. “Well. I’m impressed all around.”

“Im-impressed?” Stiles kicks himself mentally for stammering, but she's beginning to scare him again.

“Very.” It's almost a purr. “You've got those shoulders, and these hands,” She offers him his earbud back, but takes his hand instead, tracing over his palm.

Stiles feels frozen, unsure what it would be safest to do, so he does nothing for the moment. Or maybe he's just unable to act.

“You know what they say about a man's hands, don't you?” She... she simpers at him, and licks her lips. Stiles slides a step to the right, unconsciously, and pivots to face her fully again, unwilling to give her anything resembling his back, and takes another step back.

“I... don't... they get callouses?”
Ms. Dewitt lets out a fake giggle. “Oh, no, I mean the size of his hands. Certain measurements are relative, you know.” She winks.

He keeps easing back, trying to get away. “I don't think there's actually any correlation – “

“And that's impressive, too. You're only fourteen, but you look years older, and you're obviously much more mature, because you've had to be. Skipping a grade and still taking APs? Being so good that you piss your teacher off? That's really impressive. I love impressive things. I like impressionable things. You? Are the best of both worlds...”

Stiles hits the wall between the classroom and the hallway; it's glass from about his waist up, and he has the hysterical thought that he might be able to dive through it, because breaking and bursting through and swimming in all that glass? Would still be safer than this conversation with Ms. Dewitt.

“I-I, thank you? um.” When had her hand gotten on his chest. And why was she moving it down?

“There's better ways to thank me.” She gives a throaty chuckle, and her hand slides further south.

“Um, Ms. Dewitt, your hand is in my pants...” Stiles is too terrified to moved.

It's her left hand, for some reason this seems very important, though not as important as the fact that he wants it out of his pants right fucking now.

“I know, I put it there. Although... Huh.” She blinks at him. “That's all you've got for a pretty lady?”

“I-um, that's the problem? I mean, you are a pretty lady, you're frakking gorgeous and you know it, but um, you're a lady, you know?”

She doesn't remove her hand from his pants, but Ms. Dewitt rears back just a little, frowning the slightest bit. “What's that supposed to mean? You can't get it up unless I’m a slut?”

“What? No! Why would you – no, it's just that I, well, I like dudes.”

She goes rigid, face utterly expressionless, her hand clamping down around his dick hard; Stiles lets out a pained little squeak, which seems to reboot her. “You fucking tease,” She hisses, slapping him hard, his ears are ringing and somewhere in there she'd retrieved her hand from his pants, thank gods.

And the door, a mere two feet to his left, opens and Stiles doesn't think he's ever been as happy to see anything as he is to see Derek’s face, as rage-filled as it is.

Even if that rage seems to be aimed at him; Stiles knows better, knows Derek had to have heard most of the past few minutes, at least, where it was obvious Ms. Dewitt was coming on to him and –

“Kate! Are you okay?”

Instantly, Ms. Dewitt turns what she probably thinks is a 'brave look' towards Derek; to Stiles, it just looks smug. “He didn't hurt me, no. But he said I was asking for it, called me a tease.”

Stiles gives her his most incredulous look, still straining backwards, wishing he could meld with the glass or something, because she's still too close.
Derek growls and steps forward, looming admirably. “You little shit.”

Stiles knows Derek loves him, that he calls Stiles a little shit all the time; it’s the only thing keeping him from fainting in fear. And even still, he can’t help but start to defend himself. “But I – “

“Not a word.” Derek’s still growling, moving forward aggressively enough that Ms. Dewitt gives ground, ceding Stiles’ person to him. “I’ll take care of him... Don’t worry.”

Derek clamps his hand on Stiles’ neck and makes a show of jerking him forward. “Oh, Der.” Ms. Dewitt gives a little sigh, shaking her head and fluttering a hand in the air. “I know you will. Thank you. But don’t be too hard on the boy. If only to keep yourself out of trouble.”

“Oh, I won’t get into any trouble.” Derek shoots her a feral grin, and her eyes light up with malicious glee. “I promise.”

“Thank you.” Ms. Dewitt all but moans it; even to Stiles, it sounds like a promise of something.

“Let’s go.” Derek pushes him out the door.

“Derek – “

“Not a word.” He growls back.

**February 15th, 2012**

In truth, it’s only Stiles obvious and boundless faith that allows Derek to keep himself from turning around and rending that bitch limb-from-limb.

That, and the fact that Cora might still be recording.

When both he and Cora had gotten the same text – ‘HELP 911 CHEM LAB’ – Cora had been amused. “Maybe he spilled acid or something.”

Derek had been annoyed as hell. He was supposed to meet Kate in her classroom in a few minutes, and he didn’t want to be late because Stiles had made a mess. Or worse, had hurt himself. Again. Kid could get into more trouble...

But he was Pack, and he was Stiles, so Derek went, trailing in Cora’s wake and cursing the entire Stilinski line under his breath.

Until they were close enough to hear what Stiles was saying; close enough to hear his heart, zipping along fast as a hummingbird’s.

Derek’s whole body went cold, and he froze, for just a few seconds. So did Cora, and they exchanged looks of equal horror.

“... what they say about a man's hands, don't you?”

“That's Kate. What's Kate doing, flirting with Stiles? And why is it scaring the hell out of him?” Derek’s thoughts repeated uselessly. “That's Kate. What's she doing?” The same thing over and over.

“What the fuck? What do we do?” Cora whispered, even though they were still two hallways over,
and snapping Derek's brain out of its fugue.

“Get your phone out, and starting taking video.” Derek whispered back, not even caring if it was silly to whisper; it felt right. “I'll get him out of there.”

“I... don’t... they get callouses?” The sound of Stiles' terrified voice prompts Derek and Cora back into motion.

A high pitched giggle that has to sound fake even to normal-hearing. “Oh, no, I mean the size of his hands. Certain measurements are relative, you know.” Cora gags.

“I don’t think there’s actually any correlation –“

They can see into the chem lab now, and Cora grabs Derek’s arm, digging claws in. He jerks towards her, shocked that she'd stop him when the can both see Kate stalking Stiles across the classroom, see his obvious terror of the woman.

“Control yourself!” She hisses at him, aiming her phone to get a better angle. “You want her to see you like this?”

Derek takes hold of himself, because Cora’s right. She's not the only one with claws out; hers were out to get his attention, but his were out to tear that bitch apart.

“She's molesting Stiles.” Derek hisses back anyway.

“I know, but she's also digging her own grave. Let her dig some more, yeah? She's not hurting him, so. Just... keep it together, Derek.”

Cora removes her claws, trusting Derek to follow her lead. He... he's not sure. On the one hand, he knows what Cora’s doing, she trying to get as much evidence as possible, to make sure the bitch goes to jail. On the other, Stiles is terrified, and every second Derek lets it go on...

Cora gasps, and Stiles says, “Um, Ms. Dewitt, your hand is in my pants...” Derek closes his eyes, balling his hands into fists. Takes a deep breath, and another. Ignores whatever she says back, reminding the wolf that it can not come out right now.

Derek opens his eyes, in control if not truly calm; beside him, Cora is absolutely rigid with rage.

Derek walks, at the speed any normal teen would, towards the door.

“... just that I, well, I like dudes.”

There's a silent beat, where it seems like the world holds its breath, then Derek hears, “You fucking tease,” From Kate, and a slap!

And Derek’s opening the door.

Stiles recoils minutely from his rage, which forces Derek to pull it back, channel it. He says something, he's not sure what, and Kate's giving him this smug look. Like, of course Derek’s here to 'defend her honor' or whatever bullshit she's writing in her head...

Derek doesn't hear a word Kate says, but the look Stiles gives her – one that says she is clearly full of it, and Stiles both knows it and will call her on it – is a dangerous look, one that needs to stop.

“You little shit.” He can't help the growling; she's too close, too close, it's all he can do to not launch himself at her throat.
Stiles, being Stiles, opens his mouth. “But I – “

No. It's not safe, damn it! “‘Not a word.’ Stiles shuts up like Derek had hit a button. “I'll take care of him.. Don't worry.” Derek assures Cora. If Kate wants to think he's talking to her, well...

He reaches forward and wraps his hand around the back of Stiles' neck, pulling him forward gently while trying to make it look aggressive and harsh.

“Oh, Der.” Why had Derek ever liked her voice? It's grating against his psyche now. “I know you will. Thank you. But don't be too hard on the boy. If only to keep yourself out of trouble.”

She's got to be fucking joking. “Oh, I won't get into any trouble.” Derek can't help that his grin is feral, so he doesn't try; not when he knows what she's going to assume he's saying versus what he actually means. “I promise.”

Her eyes glitter with that strange something Derek hadn't been able to identify before, but now can; pure malice. “Thank you.” Derek represses his shudder.

“Let's go.” Derek guides Stiles out the door. “Principle.” He mutters too low for either human to hear. Cora will hear, and that's what matters, she'll know what he means.

“Derek – “

“Not a word.” He growls. “Sorry. Barely have control.”

Derek pushes Stiles at a fast walk down the hall, trying to put as much distance between them and Kate as he can. Every step allows him to relax minutely, keeping his ears focused behind, making sure that she isn't following them.

She doesn't; she turns and walks the other way, towards the classroom that is, for the moment, hers. Once they turn the corner, Derek stops and jerks Stiles to him, wrapping him tight as he dares.

“Fuck, Stiles!”

He's shaking like a leaf.

“I... it's actually so much worse, sourwolf.” Stiles swallows, trying to repress tears. “We've got to get to Vict – to the principle. I recorded it. More than just that.”

“What do you – no, never mind, let's go. Can you go?” This wasn't an idle question; Stiles was white as milk and still shaking. He just lifts his chin and nods.

“This is – ” Stiles' had dropped his voice so low, Derek had to strain to hear it and was fairly sure he couldn't even hear himself. “This is about Pack.”

Derek stiffens, then forces himself to relax; he's about to loose claws again or something. So he takes yet another deep breath and studies Stiles' face.

The boy's resolute and determined, so much so there Derek thinks he'd insist on going even if he were bleeding, and since there's no physical damage, well.

Cora’s standing in front of the door to Victoria’s office, shifting from foot to foot. “What took you so long?” She snaps at them.

“Some of us are only human.” Stiles says with less than a tenth of his normal humor.
“Are you okay?” Cora stares at him, looking like she's seen a ghost.

Stiles just shrugs. “Think she can see us?”

“I think she will.” Derek can't repress a snarl, but doesn't let it grow into anything more, just knocks on the door. “Where's her secretary?”

“Who cares?” Cora shrugs. “I'm just grateful she isn't here to glare at us.”

Victoria opens her door. “Yes, may I – dear God, what's happened?”

“May we come in? We really need to talk to you.” Derek says grimly.

“Yes, of course. What is it? Is someone hurt?” Victoria flips the switch for her white noise generator, which would keep anyone from overhearing them. “A rogue?”

Stiles snorts. “You can say that. Ms. Dewitt.”

“What did she do?” Derek doesn't understand the resigned look on Victoria's face, is confused by her immediate acceptance of Stiles' calling Kate a rogue.

“I...” Stiles starts shaking again. “I recorded it. She didn't see me, she was talking to her dad – I mean, she called him daddy, I think she meant her dad, but bitch is cray-cray, I'm not wrong or anything, I recorded it, she was talking about burning the Hale House, Vic! About how she had mountain ash and wolfsbane to circle it, and tricked Harris into giving up accelerants, and needed more people in case any of the humans tried to escape – “

Derek finds his tongue. “How does you hearing that lead to her sticking her hand down your pants?”

Victoria flinches backwards while Stiles wails, “I don't know, I was sitting on the floor and she came over and she started flirting and she was being really pushy and then she – “

“Breathe.” Derek cuts in. “Give me your phone.”

He fumbles it out, starts the recording, and hands it to Derek. Derek sets it on the desk.

“.... No, it's going really well... yeah, we're getting along fine... she's a great girl, a little soft and naïve, but what do you expect, when she's being kept... no, I know... I think Allison'll surprise you, daddy.”

Two minutes into the recording, Victoria sends a text.

When recording of the phone call ends, Stiles starts fidgeting. When Kate gets to her line about hands – she'd said the same thing to Derek once, word-for-word – he starts shaking again.

When Stiles' recorded voice tells Kate where her hand is, Stiles croaks out, “Trashcan, now!”

Cora moves with all her speed, barely gets it under Stiles in time.

Derek hates feeling helpless.

By the end, Victoria is shaking as badly as Stiles is.

“Why did she do that?” He whispers, probably not even aware that he's speaking out loud. “What did I do that made her think she could do that?”
Derek moves to crouch in front of Stiles. “Hey. Little Red. Look at me. Up here, look at my eyes.”

Slowly, Stiles moves his head, drags his eyes up, and Derek’s heart breaks. For himself, because he’d thought Kate was harmless. But for Stiles, the poor, brave kid who was smart enough to play dumb and get the info to save his family, his Pack - yet got caught in the cross-fire and wounded in the worst fucking way.

“What? Since when do you ask, sourwolf?” Stiles blinks rapidly, trying to disperse the tears in his eyes.

“Since some bitch touched you like that without permission.” Derek says it as calmly as he can, doing his best to not let his rage spill onto Stiles.

“Yeah, good point. But, yeah, yes, actually please...”

“Gods, Stiles.” He wraps the kid back up in his arms, lets his own tears flow; fuck the world, he’s man enough to cry. “You did nothing. That's just... this isn't your fault, it's mine.”

Stiles snakes an arm out and whacks him on the head. “How the hell is this your fault, Derek?” For the first time since Derek got that text, Stiles sounds like himself.

“She's been hitting on me since she started here, Red. I didn't report it. I just enjoyed it.”

“She what?” Victoria demands from behind him.

“Remember how Ms. Granada asked me to act as a TA for the sub?” Victoria nods slowly. “I stayed after class, the first day Ms. Dewitt was here. She said things then that were similar to what she said to Stiles, though it was less... pushy? I don't know – I wasn't smart enough to record it. I wasn't even smart enough to really think it was a problem.” He confesses bitterly.

“What sorts of things?” Victoria asks quietly.

“She said something about how she couldn't believe I was only seventeen, how I both looked and acted older. That if she didn't know better, she'd think I was actor on some TV show just pretending to be a high school student. Then she asked me to stay after, every day.”

“It... escalated. She invited me to her apartment to help her deal with papers.” Stiles makes a wounded noise, and Derek just sighs. “I know, Red, I know. I shouldn't have gone. But... but all my friends are paired up, somehow, and I've been... it was nice, you know?” Derek can't really look at anyone, settles for staring at the wall above Victoria. “And I didn't really think it was anything, until the dance last week.”

“What happened?”

“She... she asked me to go to hers the next day. Implying...” Derek trails off. Not sure he wants to be at all explicit while holding Stiles.
Who convulses slightly, then pushes on Derek’s arms. “I'm gonna vomit again.”

Thankfully, Stiles doesn't make any effort to move away, just to hit the trashcan. Cora wrinkles her nose, but doesn't say anything.

“We've got two separate issues here, that sadly intersect.’ Victoria runs her hands through her hair, destroying her careful hairdo. ‘Though, Derek, I have to tell you – you're as wrong as Stiles. It wasn't your fault any more than it was his. If anything, this is my fault.”

“You get to pick the subs?” Cora asked with sympathy.

“If that was all it was, I’d feel guilty enough. No, let's start with the fact that her real name is Kate Argent.” Derek’s hands spasm around Stiles' arms, and Stiles jerks backwards, almost breaking Derek’s nose.

“What?” It's Cora who voices it.

“She's Chris' sister. She came to us a few months ago, like you heard on Stiles' recording. We were – I was – stupid enough to believe her.”

For a second, all Derek sees is red, hears is that Victoria let this predator into his territory to prey on him and his pack.

“Of course you did.” Stiles says without pause. “She's family – of course you wanted to believe that she was being honest, that she wanted to rejoin the land of the sane!”

Derek's heart restarts and the rage recedes; he buries his face in Stiles hair and takes even breaths, reminding himself that Stiles was safe, and would be safe, that he'd made sure of it.

“Yes.” Derek winces at the self-loathing and remorse in Victoria’s voice. “Yes, we wanted to – but if –“

She's cut off by Talia and Chris, walking in together, smiles fading as they take in the scene.

“What did Kate do?” Chris asks with a defeated, resigned air.

Stiles closes his eyes. “They've got to hear it before you call my dad.” He won't look at anything but the floor. “But... Vic, I can't. I can't listen to it again.”

Cora clears her throat. “I got video. So I'm staying.” She gives Derek a look.

He nods. “I'll sit with Stiles right out there. We won't leave the front office.”

“You don't have to – “

“You think I can stand to listen to it again?”

He snorts. “Okay, point.” He climbs off Derek's lap, brushes his cheek over Talia's shoulder as he passes. Derek pauses long enough for her to rub a hand over his neck, worried eyes asking questions he's not sure he'll ever be able to answer.

The door shuts, then the generator comes back online.

After a minute of watching Stiles all but bounce in place, Derek tries again. “I meant it, you know.”
“What?” Stiles flails in place, then turns wide eyes to Derek. “Meant what?”

“That it wasn't your fault, and you did nothing to deserve that, nothing to make her think it was okay. You want my take on it?”

“Yeah…” Stiles chews his lip, then nods more decisively. “Yeah. Why do you think she went all vamp?”

Derek snorts. “Yeah, that’s a good…” And shrugs. “Never occurred to her that you might be recording it. No, but she was worried that maybe you had overheard something. So she was doing everything she could think of to make you forget… and leave with a ‘positive’ impression. If she’d yelled at you or something, you'd have been looking for problems, but if she made you, uh…”

Stiles cheeks flame and he looks away. “But she was all... all rape-y, Derek.” Stiles' voice is small and miserable. “That's not ever gonna leave a positive impression.”

“I agree with you, but... you remember what you told Cora about our society, the night we discussed Issac and all?”

Stiles looks at him blankly for about five seconds, then it clicked. “You're saying she, what, assumed that as a guy, I’d take any action I could get, no matter what?”

Derek, feeling a little sick himself, swallows and nods. “Yeah. Yeah, I think that's what she was thinking.” His voice is hoarse, raw, reflecting the tears that have returned. “If I’d just told someone what she was saying…”

“Dude, no!” Stiles jumps at how loud he's gotten, and lowers his voice. “The way you described it, she was... well, she was seducing you. No less creepy, in the end, but less... obvious?”

Derek nods jerkily. “Yeah. I... it was uncomfortable, kind of scary, but the good kind, you know? I think at one point I told myself it was like a roller-coaster.”

Stiles leans over, and this time it's Stiles wrapping his arms around Derek. “How the hell were you supposed to know? Any of it?”

“I should have known that no twenty eight year old woman is going to chase a seventeen year old boy just because she likes him.” Derek points out, letting his voice be as bitter as it wants.

“Really? It never happens? You've never heard of a teacher going to jail for, oh, sleeping with her fifteen-year old student and getting pregnant?”

Derek pauses, then looks at Stiles. “I... it was uncomfortable, kind of scary, but the good kind, you know? I think at one point I told myself it was like a roller-coaster.”

Stiles leans over, and this time it's Stiles wrapping his arms around Derek. “How the hell were you supposed to know? Any of it?”

“Shut up, sourwolf. You did, now it's my turn.” Derek raised a challenging brow, and Stiles made a face in return. “Okay, so you did for now. Just like I’m sure I only made you feel better for a little. It's gonna take work for either of us to really get better – me from trauma, you from betrayal.”

Derek opens his mouth, then just shuts it again; when the kid's right, he's right.

“You're lucky you're Pack.” He mutters.

Stiles offers a wan smile. “Nah, you're lucky I’m Pack.”

Derek snorts, then nods. “I knew it was one of those.”
Talia storms out of the inner office, shaking with rage, and sweeps them both into her arms. “My babies! My poor, poor babies.”

Derek and Stiles share a look and an eye roll, but neither protest.

Sometimes, when the boogeyman rears its head, you need to be babied.

Stiles lets Talia hold them for a few minutes, but eventually squirms away. “We need...” He can't say anything out here. “Can we go back into the office, please?”

Talia raises a brow, but nods.

Returning to the office means coming face to face with Chris, who isn't bothering to hide his horror – or his tears.

“Stiles...”

Stiles flinches at the naked pain on Chris’ face. “Don't.” He says, as harshly as a fourteen year old can. “Don't blame yourself! It's not your fault, it's not Derek’s fault, it's not Vic's fault!”

“You know it isn't your fault, Stiles?” Victoria asks urgently, causing Chris to turn pale.

“Jesus, Stiles, please tell me you don't – “

“I...” Stiles swallows bile. “At the front of my head, yeah.” He offers his mentors a tremulous smile. “I think it's going to take a fair bit of therapy for me to believe it, but. Yeah.”

Chris runs a shaky hand over his face. “Hell, I need therapy, and all I did was listen to it!”

“That's... why I asked to come back in here.” Stiles takes a deep breath and pans across the small group gathered in Victoria’s office. Victoria, of course, the school principle and one of his trainers; Chris, his other trainer; Talia, his Alpha and, in some ways, his second mother; Derek, his other best friend; and Cora, his friend and packmate. The fact that they were, one and all, angry on his behalf and believed that he was not at fault did so much to reassure him.

He just wasn't sure they were going to agree with his next statement.

“We need to tell my dad.”

Victoria gave him a puzzled look. “Of course we do! Not only is he your father, but he's the Sheriff, the one who will be arresting her for sexual harassment and molestation of a minor.”

Stiles flinches again at her words, but shakes his head. “No. I mean yes, of course, but that's not what I mean.” He looks at Talia.

She studies his face, thinking, head tilted. “Explain your reasoning.”

“What? Cora looks between them, clearly confused. In fact, it seems Talia was the only one to follow Stiles' statement.

“Tell him about, well...” He motions to Cora. “You guys. Think about it, Tee – we've got her, on tape, talking about the various plans she's put into motion to kill your Pack. To kill your family, and she named the family... and,” Stiles remembers with a shudder, “She was also talking about taking Derek prisoner, so add conspiracy to kidnap a minor to conspiracy to commit arson and
murder!” Stiles lets his voice do whatever it wants, as loud as it wants, because the hardest part hadn't been Dewitt damned near raping him, it had been acting as if he hadn't just sat there and listened to her talk about all of the above. “So what if she mentions wolves and monsters and magic ash? That just makes her sound crazy on top of murderous, you know?

“But if we let my dad hear that – and we really, really should – he's... eventually, he's going to come to realize that she isn't crazy, at least not about there being werewolves and such. And if he figures it out, instead of us just telling him, well.”

Talia's eyes had slowly turned red as Stiles talked; now she closes them briefly. It's the first time Stiles can remember seeing lose any control over her wolf at all.

“It's not that I don't think you're right. It's just... not how I wanted to introduce him.” She meets Stiles gaze. “But you're correct. On the other hand, I don't think we should tell him here and now. I think we should let him arrest Kate for what he did to you, and tell him the rest later.”

Stiles thinks quickly, and realizes she's right. “It's too much, yeah. But we can't wait long.”

“Or.” Chris sounds wrecked. “I could just kill her and hide the body.”

Victoria snorts. “Tempting as that is, we both know if you do, Gerard will come. He'll ignore other Hunters, but Kate? No matter what we say or do, he'll blame the Pack, and take it out on them.”

Talia huffs. “Of course. The man... I’m sorry, Chris, but I continue to believe your mother must have had an affair.”

Chris rolls his eyes. “Sorry to disappoint.”

“What the Pack does with the rest of the information is up to you, Alpha Hale.” Victoria says formally. “But I approve of your attempt to find justice through mortal means, and the Argents officially support this; i will report it to the Conclave as a supported action. Let us know how we can aid you.”

Stiles blinks at the formal tone and language, then shakes his head. “Hate to say it, but for the moment? The best thing you can do is have Chris leave. And pretend he was never here. And make sure Ms. Dewitt doesn't see him.”

Chris nods, looking twice his age. “Stiles...” He moves to stand in front of the boy, looking grave. “If you won't accept an apology, accept praise.”

“Huh?” Not very eloquent, but Stiles feels he's entitled to be off; Chris never just gives praise. Not to say he doesn't encourage, but it's always leavened, carrot and stick.

“I'm serious. That was quick-thinking of you, to get the recording. You were so quiet, I couldn't hear you on it at all, until Kate spoke to you. And your acting was top-notch. You aren't the best student when it comes to hand-to-hand, but when it comes to wits? You're fourteen. I couldn't have pulled that off, and I don't know many who could.”

Stiles could only gape at the man, not sure how to react

Chris smiles a little at the look on Stiles face. “Don't let it go to your head.” Then he turns to his wife. “I'll be at home, ready to act shocked and appalled. Talia...”

“Don't, Chris. Stiles already said it, and he's right – this is no more your fault than his.”
“I'll call the Sheriff.”

Stiles gulps and sits down next to Derek, leaning on him without thought.

He must have zoned a bit, because the next thing he knew, he was all but climbing Derek to get away from the person touching him.

Victoria made a small noise of distress. “Damn, I wasn't thinking. Are you okay, Stiles?”


She holds up a hand. “My fault; I should have known better, considering why you're here. I was trying to let you know, your father is here.”

His heart finally starts to slow back down. “Good. Yeah? Oh, how are we going to explain about Tee being here?”

“Cora and Derek brought you; I naturally called their mother as well as your father. She was already in town running errands.”

“Oh.”

Before anything more could be discussed, John walked into the outer office.

“Stiles, get off Derek.” Cora hissed.

Startled, Stiles shot up in his seat. “Sorry!”

“It's fine.” Derek says quietly. “You can lean on me all you want.”

“It's just not really what you should show your dad right now.” Cora explains herself.

Victoria’s secretary – when had she come back? – leads John into the office, followed by two of his deputies, Rémy and Linda.

John nods and offers Talia a rueful smile. “What kind of trouble did our kids cause, that I needed to bring some deputies with me?”

“I'm afraid it's not trouble they caused, but harm done to them, Sheriff.” Victoria says mournfully. “Please sit, Sheriff.”

Frowning, he does. “What do you mean, harm done?”

“I mean...” Victoria takes a deep breath. “I mean, I need your deputies – but not you – to go and arrest Kate 'Dewitt', for molesting Stiles.”

John starts to shoot up out of his chair when Talia grabs his hand. Somehow, she manages to get him to sit back down. “John, you know you can't be directly involved. That's why Principle Argent asked you to bring deputies with you.”


Stiles blinks back tears, seeing how rigidly his father's holding himself. “Honestly? No, no I’m not. I’m... I feel dirty.”

Derek whines at that.
“Gods, Derek, I didn't mean – “

“I know, that's not – I'm more worried about you than me, Red.” Derek says quickly. Then bitterly adds, “I'm the one who didn't try to reject her advances.”

“Damn it, Derek, you didn't know!”


Shaking, Stiles looks up.

“I'm sorry. I just... please, tell me what happened.”

“I was studying for my test in the chem lab – gods, my test!”

“It's fine, Stiles. I promise.” Victoria interjects. “If Harris has a problem, I'll beat it out of him.”

“I, yeah, okay. So, I was on the floor in the chem lab, and then she was... she, at first, was just asking what I was doing there, but then she... she... it's recorded, can you just listen while I sit out there and don't listen to it again? Please!”

Derek stands, shaking slightly. “I'll sit with Stiles in the front office.”

John studies Derek, then Stiles, and nods. “Can... Talia, can you sit with them? I don't want them alone. They both need... something.”

“Thank you.” Stiles whispers, all but fleeing the room.

Talia follows them out.

Less than five minutes later, Rémy and Linda exit the inner office, grim-faced and determined.

“Go on back in, boys.” Linda says gently as they pass. “Mrs. Hale, can you bring Derek down to the station later to give a statement?”

“Of course.”

Stiles runs back into the office, throwing himself into his father's arms. “I'm so sorry, dad.” He almost wails it; he'd spent most of the preceding minutes thinking of nothing but how his father was going to take hearing a woman all but rape him. “I didn't know what to do, she kept following me, and I – “

“Stiles, no, shh... it's not your fault, kiddo. Listen to me, you did good. It's okay, she's going to jail for this, for a really long time.” John soothes his son for several moments, then looks up. “I got the impression that Ms. Dewitt didn't start with Stiles?” He directs the question to Victoria, but it's clear that he's asking Derek.

He squares his shoulders but looks at the ground. “No, sir. If I’d... if I’d thought, at all, she wouldn't have been here – “

“Derek.” John says his name firmly. “You are not responsible for this. Not legally, not morally.”

Derek doesn't reply, and Stiles twists in his dad's arms to face him. “Derek! We already covered this! The only reason she scared me was how hard she pushed; if she'd been delicate, like she was with you...”
Shuddering, Derek nods once. “I know. I just…”

“The only one at fault is Kate Dewitt.” John says firmly.

“Have I mentioned that her name used to be Argent?” Victoria puts in dryly.

John turns a blank look on her. “I don't understand.”

“She's Chris' sister; she changed her name – she said – because she was trying to escape from their father. The man is...” Victoria frowns, trying to find a way to explain it. “To be blunt, he's a fanatic. She told us she was here trying to start over, away from him and his insanity. We thought the name change was to keep him from easily finding her.”

“Wouldn't this be one of the first places he'd look?”

Victoria shakes her head. “The schism in the family is old and bitter; Gerard wouldn't consider Kate coming to Chris, or that Chris would be willing to help her.”

“Still... seems...”

Sighing, Victoria nods. “We shouldn't have believed her.”


Stiles tightens his grip on his father's arms, worried about how hard he's shaking.

“We should take you to the hospital.” John says abruptly.

“What!” Stiles rears back and looks at his dad in shock.

“Need to have you checked over.”

“Dad, she didn't hurt me.”

“Yes she did!” John says fiercely.

“But she didn't. Not physically.”

John gives him an anguished look. “That doesn't mean you aren't hurt!”

Talia speaks up. “He needs to see a counselor, John. Not a doctor.”

She and John share a look that speaks volumes, and John slowly nods. “It's not that I don't hear you, but it's standard in rapes and attempted rapes for there to be a physical exam.”

“I don't think she was trying to rape me.” Stiles protests in a small voice. Then he shrinks away from the looks of disbelief on the adults' faces.

“Son, legally, that was attempted rape.” John says as gently as he can. “I know it's hard to think of it that way, and I won't make you say it, but we need to follow the regs exactly on this. There's no way in hell that woman isn't going to prison, but you're my son, and it'll look very bad if we don't. So we're going to the hospital, and while we're there, Blair will come in and take your statement. Talia, will come with us? And Derek?”
The question leaves Talia a bit nonplussed, but she doesn't argue. “Of course, if that's what you and Stiles need.”

“Thank you.” Derek says at the same time as John; John gives him a questioning look, and Derek shrugs uncomfortably. “I'm worried as hell.”

John nods sharply. “Yeah. Yeah, I get it.”

“What do you need from me? Not just as principle, either.” Victoria leans across her desk, speaking earnestly. “What can I do to help?”

John's face twists a bit. “You don't need to – “

Victoria holds up her hand. “I'm not just asking because I feel guilty, John. You're friends. I am asking as your friend – how can I help.”

John sighs. “I... I don't blame you, Vic. That said... right now, I don't know. Get Stiles' work, for one. Because he's not coming to school for the next few days.”

She nods. “I can do that. I'll get everything for this week. Call me when you get home and I'll bring it by.”

“No.” Stiles shakes his head. Victoria looks hurt for a second, and Stiles rushes to reassure her. “I mean, please. Get my work. But dad, I'm not going to feel safe at home when you're at work...” He sends Talia a pleading look.

She nods. “You can always stay with us, you know that. In fact, you both should. Just for a few days, John. You've had a shock; let us take care of you.”

Something in her voice seems off, and Stiles doesn't miss Victoria’s raised brow or Derek and Cora’s confused looks. John simply shrugs. “I don't know, Talia. I don't have a problem with Stiles staying with you, of course I don't. But it seems a large imposition for both of us to do so.”

“It would be – let's discuss it later.” Talia closes eyes that are starting to turn red, and turns to face Victoria so that John can't see them. “Is there anything you need from us? And can you also get Derek’s work?”

“No, at least I can't think of anything. And of course.”

“Sheriff?” Comes over John's radio.

He grimaces and puts it to his mouth. “Go.”

“We've got her in the car, but I think she broke Linda's arm.”

“What!” John all but roars the word.

“Once we got her outside, she went insane, Boss.” Rémy sounds apologetic. “She'd been calm up until then, so it took us off guard. Policy says I can't transport her alone, but you can't come. Who do you want me to call?”

“I...”

“May I recommend Bob Davis?” Victoria spoke up. “He knows of Kate. It never occurred to me that she'd be so stupid as to attack police, or I'd have warned you she's know several martial arts.”
“Stop beating yourself up, Vic.” John orders gently. “I think we’re all in shock.” Then he goes back to the radio. “I’ll call it in. Leave her in the car, watch her, taser drawn. I’ll call a unit for Linda, and watch for Davis.”

He then relays orders, rubbing soothing circles on Stiles' back the whole time.

“I don't want to see her.” Stiles says as soon as his dad is done. “Can we wait here until after they've taken her away, please?”

“Of course.” John says instantly.

So they wait; thankfully, it isn't long, as Beacon Hills isn't very big. The ambulance arrives about five minutes later; John goes out to speak with Linda and the EMTs; when he returns to the office, it's to tell Stiles that Davis has arrived, and that he and Rémy have taken Dewitt to the station to be processed.

Stiles sighs in relief.

Derek is worried.

Stiles has barely spoken since they left the school.

Thankfully, he didn't have to wait to be seen for very long. John took preliminary statements from both Cora and Derek while they waited, then sat through Stiles’ exam, and his statement.

Then Blair, the rape advocate for the county, wanted to talk to Derek.

He didn't want to, and it wasn't Talia who changed his mind, it was Stiles.

“We both know why she was seducing you, sourwolf.” The boy had whispered from his seat in the waiting room, knowing Derek would hear but his dad wouldn't. “How isn't that rape? You need to talk to her, probably more than I did. Please?”

Somehow, Stiles convinced him.

It was just as agonizing and humiliating as Derek had thought it would be. Well, not really; Blair was a soothing person who made, so far as Derek could tell, absolutely no assumptions about anything. She listened as he halting described how Kate had been flirting for the past month, how it had changed from light to heavy to her flat-out asking him for sex, and she didn't interrupt once.

“Then, I got Stiles text, and walked in on her with her hand down his pants, and I just...” Derek had to stop and swallow hard. “My first thought was I'm going to kill whoever that is'. Then I saw it was Kate, and there was this... this skip. I suddenly realized that most of what she'd been saying, about how I seemed older and everything, was utter bullshit – just bait for her trap. Then I realized, if I’d just given in, she wouldn't have gone after him.”

For the first time during their interview, Blair seemed taken aback. “Do you truly think that if you'd had sex with her, she wouldn't have gone after Stiles?” Her tone of voice left little room to doubt what Blair thought of that.

“Not – I don't know, maybe? It's just... if I’d...”

She shakes her head at Derek. “There's two different patterns being shown here. Ms. Dewitt is obviously skilled at seduction, and patient with it, as shown by her behavior with you. Her attempt
on Mr. Stilinski shows completely different fingerprints; if I read these as case studies without names, it would never occur to me that these were the acts of the same person. Further, I have to admit, I know Ms. Dewitt socially.”

This non sequitur confused Derek. “What does that have to do with...”

Blair nodded and gave Derek a wry smile. “By which I mean, I know that she's been dating a friend of mine, and that it's a sexual relationship.” Her smiles disappears. “People like this tend to prey on those they feel they can control, and I believe that explains the difference in approach between yourself and Mr. Stilinski – you were, in her opinion, more easily controlled by your heart, by being led to believe there were deeper romantic feelings; she probably believed he would be more easily controlled through fear and intimidation. I believe, in his case, it was a whim – she saw a boy alone, in circumstances that seemed to say he was isolated socially. Neither instance was about sex, Mr. Hale.”

“Does Stiles know?”

“That she had a boyfriend?” Blair had nodded, understanding why he asked. “Yes, and for the same reason that I told you – so that you both can see how she was attempting to prey on you. And never doubt that she was trying, and that you were strong in resisting.”

“But I wasn't.” It came out low and harsh, self-loathing twisting through Derek’s gut. “I'd told her I’d go to her place this weekend.”

“You resist her almost daily advances for a month, Mr. Hale, despite being tempted. I don't know of many men your age – or any age, truly – who would have resisted an attractive woman who they liked if they weren't already in a relationship. Some part of you recognized that there was something wrong, and I firmly believe that you would have found reason to continue to put her off. But even if you hadn't, you need to realize that you did nothing wrong. She is the adult.”

Derek was glad when it was done; she didn't understand, Kate had been gunning for his Pack, and trying to use him to do it.

Stiles had attached himself to Derek the second he sat back down again – they had to wait for Blair to finish speaking with Talia and John – and whispered “You keep telling me, I’ll keep telling you.”

It was essentially the last thing Stiles had said.

Somehow, Derek ended up riding with John and Stiles back to his house, and the quiet in the car was positively unnerving. John asked a couple questions of Stiles, but gave up after the third monosyllabic reply. He then tried to talk to Derek, but he wasn't good at normal small talk at the best of times. Finally, he turned on the radio and they listen to eighties hits until they got to the Hale house.

For once, it was empty.

“Where is everyone?” John asked, looking confused. The house was never empty.

“Peter and Sarah are at Jon and and Terry's for dinner. Laura took Issac and James to a movie.” Talia led everyone inside.

“It's a school night.”

“I know. But this is more important. Can I get you anything?”
“I’m fine, Talia. Just...” John sighs wearily, sinking onto a couch. “I just can't believe... I’m glad Vic was smart enough to ask me to bring backup. If they hadn't been there, I might have torn that woman limb from limb. You doing okay, son?”

“I'm fine, dad.” Stiles repeated. “But... there's something else.”

John pales. “What do you mean, there's something else. What else could there be?”

Talia clears her throat. “Please understand, this isn't Stiles' fault.”

“Of course it isn't his fault!” John almost explodes. “How could it be? He's fourteen.”

“No, that's not... John, please. Sit and listen. Try to keep calm. Remember who we are. Please?”

“I'm listening.” Suspicion drips from every syllable.

“Dad. I heard something before that start. I recorded it, too.”

John's gaze snaps to Stiles. “What? Why didn't you say anything before now?”

“Because it involves the secret of my family.” Talia tells him simply.

“Secret? What the hell kind of secret can you have, that would end up with – “

John's cut off by Talia's eyes glowing red.

“They're... listen to me, dad. Okay? That's Talia, you know Talia. Talia loves us. All the Hales love us. But the Hales, dad, they're werewolves.”


“Show him the rest, Tee.” Stiles suggests, moving to lean against his dad and not incidentally getting in the way of John drawing his gun.

Talia morphs into her full-wolf form, wiggling out of her clothes as she goes. She has to kick to get her bra off, making Cora giggle.

John stares at her with wide eyes, then looks at Derek. “Go ahead, show us.”

“The rest of us... only the Alpha can turn into a full wolf, John.” Derek speaks softly, trying to keep John calm by acting calm. “But this is my Beta form.”

He shifts slowly, so that John can study he the change.

“Cora?” She nods at John's request and shifts, much more quickly than Derek had.

John turns to Stiles. “Son?”

He turn comically wide eyes on his father. “What? No, dad, I'm not a werewolf!”

“Then... why. How do you know they are?”

“It's... it's a long story. Tee, I need you to tell the time travel bits, so maybe Cora can gather your clothes and you can change back in the kitchen?”

Talia huffs a wolf laugh at him, but acquiesces, returning shortly to sit across from John.
“Most of the family are wolves, John, but we do have humans in our Pack. Jon's wife, Terry, is human. And Rose, my brother Brian's wife, and two of their kids, are human. Issac, now. And, of course, you and Stiles.”

“Wait. We're Pack?”

“Of course we're Pack, dad.” Stiles rolls his eyes.

“How did we become Pack?” Derek thinks John must be in shock, to be as calm as he is.

“That's the story Stiles wants me to tell you. August 20th. Seven and a half years ago..”

Derek listened as attentively as John, because while he knew that there had been some sort of visit, he didn't know any of the details of what happened with this future-Stiles.

From those basics, Talia and Stiles explained how Talia became friends with Claudia, how Stiles woke up remembering things that hadn't happened, many of which now never would.

Derek tried to pay attention, but he found himself distracted by the thought of an older Stiles; one grown into himself, more confident and mature.

“... Chris and Vic were floored by me, dad.”

Derek snapped out of it, confused by his thoughts.

He must be more tired than he thought.

“Hunters, as in they Hunt you? But they were here for Thanksgiving, and you were a their house for Christmas!”

“Well, for one, we have a treaty with the Argents. Because not only do they follow the Code, but they actively enforce it in their territory.”

“The Code?” John can't seem to decide if he's outraged or just astounded.

“What it boils down to, John, is that they only Hunt those who are a danger to humanity.”

“When you say they 'enforce' this Code...”

“I mean they stop Hunters who hunt indiscriminately. Because there are Hunters who do so. And, it seems, Kate is one of them.”

John has his mouth open to ask another question when that statement processed. “What?” He asks weakly.

“We think that's why she... did that.” Stiles tries to be calm about it. “I was telling the truth, I just left out the first half where I overheard her having a phone conversation with someone about trapping the Hales in here and burning the place down.”

Derek finally speaks up. “Yeah, turns out that Kate was chasing me to use me.” It comes out as bitterly as it should.

It's easy to see when John gets it – his eyes narrow and he balls his hands into fists. “You've got to be joking. Please tell me you're –“

“Dad?” Stiles sounds worries.
He probably should be; John's heart is racing, and the smell of rage is almost over-powering. Derek shifts, unsure where to look, because John was enraged on his behalf.

He doesn't deserve that sort of support.

John shakes his head weakly and turns his gaze back to Talia. “Do you know any shrinks in the know? Because I’m pretty damn sure sending them to someone who isn't would be a waste of time. Probably just make things worse.”

“Alan does.” Talia sounds unsure, which just makes Derek feel worse. “He's getting me a list.”

“Right.” John scrubs a hand over his face. “Right. You... and...” He starts laughing

“Dad?”

“So many things make sense, now.” His eyes closed, head tipped back to rest on the couch, John just absolutely loses it – laughing hard enough tears pour down his face.

Talia seems to come to a decision. “Derek, Stiles is sleeping with you tonight. Go make sandwiches or something. John can sleep in Issac's room; Issac will bunk in James'. Go.”

Slowly, Derek, Cora and Stiles shuffle out of the great room, Stiles still mostly quiet. Aside from talking to his dad about the wolves, and checking that he wasn't losing his mind...

It was beginning to scare Derek.

Once they hit the kitchen, he decided to brace it head-on. “Stiles?”

He turns around, eyes on the floor. “Yeah?”

“You're beginning to scare me.”

“What?” Stiles looks up, startled. “How am I...”

“He's right, Red. You're being too damned quiet.”

“I...” Stiles blinks, slowly. “I just. My brain is sort of... empty?”

Derek frowns at that. “Okay, no, that's wrong. It's only like seven pm. You should be bouncing off the walls, playing some idiot game with Scott or flirting with Danny or... I don't know.”

Stiles pales, swaying in place. “Danny! Holy shit, how did I not – ”

Derek smacks himself on the head. “How did I not? Call him. Ask him to come over. We can, at the very least, tell him the public version of what's going on.”

“But – Tee, can I?”

“Call him!” Talia yells back. Derek listens as she explains to John why she's suddenly yelling across the house, John's fascination with what they can do...

Must be a Stilinski trait, to be curious but unafraid.

“Then call Allison and make sure she knows you aren't mad at her.” Cora suggests.

“If I do that, I need to call Scott...” Stiles chews his lip. “I'll text Danny, then call. But... will you
guys help me?”

He sounds so lost, it breaks Derek’s heart. He slowly reaches his hand out, giving Stiles time to notice, to stop him if he doesn’t want to be touched; Stiles moves into him, and Derek rubs his back soothingly. “We’ll do whatever we can, whatever you need.”

“Yeah. I’ll text Danny. You call Scott, then Allison.” Cora puts her words into action.

Stiles follows suit.

**Interlude: Silver Eyes**

*Laura opens the door, puzzled. No one ever comes to the house, especially not during the week, when the kids are in school, dad and Peter and Sarah at work.*

*Laura should be in school herself, but she just couldn’t deal today. Mom said it was hormones, that becoming a teenage was often just overwhelming, but sometimes mom was full of it.*

*So she was here, alone, when the doorbell rang.*

*She opens the door, and gasps.*

*Laura’s straight, she knows she’s straight. She’s had The Talk with her parents, she’s looked and thought about it, wanting to be ahead of the game – the wolf makes control harder, after all, and if she’s going to have trouble in the locker room, she needs to know. She’s not – she’s straight.*

*She can still honestly say that the woman standing there? Is the sexiest person on the planet.*

*Totally platonically.*

*The woman rolls her eyes. “Hi, Laura. I’m guessing we haven’t met by the look on your face.”* Laura feels her face screw up in confusion. “Um. Should we have?”

*She looks contemplative. “I don’t think so? You’re thirteen, right? What did you tell me about you at thirteen... hrm, you like My Little Pony but don’t want anyone to know, because it’s for kids, and you keep stealing James’ Magic Cards because you worry he’ll get weird ideas. You started Alpha training the day after your birthday.”* Laura interrupts this litany of her life. “What did I tell you? I’ve never met you, so...”

*“I don’t get it.” Laura*. “Yeah. I’m a bit temporally challenged. Sorry, call me Star.”

“What does that mean?”

“No, ‘temporally challenged’? It sounds like when people say 'learning challenged' or whatever."

“Close enough. I don’t go through time in the same way you do. The first time I met you, you were seventeen. You walked up to me in Redding and said “Star? Oh, damn, you’re running backwards again, aren’t you. Well, I’ve known you for four years, so just pretend.” It was actually one of the best second first meetings I’ve had.” Star grins, at the memory and Laura both, looking pleased.
“Wait – you live backwards?” Laura knows she isn’t lying – her heart’s steady, as is her scent – but she doesn’t think she’s quite followed correctly.

“No. Well, sometimes. Mostly, I live for a few years, then skip forward or back. I get the whole decade, but not in order. It’s... well, it’s because I go when I’m sent. If that makes sense.”

“Sent by who?”


“Oh.” Of course, Laura’d be the one visited by the crazy lady.

Star sighs. “I know that ‘oh’. I promise I’m not crazy. Let’s start – first, you’re a werewolf. Don’t bother denying it, you didn’t even blink when I said you started Alpha training. Second, I’m half-fae. What do you know about the fae?”

“Depends on which fae you mean.” Laura answers, feeling a bit philosophical. After all, the fae were philosophy incarnate, if Uncle Peter was to be believed.

Star smiles proudly. “Good point. True Fae.” This time, Laura can hear the capital letters... and can feel her heart stutter, just a bit.

“They... they're essentially arch-angels.” Laura says slowly. “So... wait, does that mean you're nephilim?”

Star’s eyes widen, then she winces. “Oh, don't you ever, ever say that again! Do I look angelic to you?”

“Well, let's see – succubi are demons, which are fallen angels, so...”

“Laura Hale!” Star yells in a faux-mom voice. “I know for a fact that you're straight.”

“Doesn't mean I'm blind.” Laura snorts.

“Gods save me from brats with lunar-growth spurts.” Star mutters.

“Hey!”

Star grins, unabashed. “You started it.”

“I start – how old are you?”

“Forty... forty three, I think.”

Laura blinks; she doesn't look a day over twenty. “Really?”

She shrugs. “Give or take a year. It’s hard keeping track. Look, you gonna let me in? It’s Wednesday, so I know that there’s snickerdoodles, and I love your mom’s snickerdoodles.”

Laura examines Star minutely. “Let me call my mom.”

“Damn, knew I forgot something. Tell Tee I say hi.” Star smirks and leans against the door frame, seemingly willing to wait forever.

Laura pulls out her phone. “Mom? There's this weird lady named – “
“Star's there?”

“How'd you – “

*Her mom sighs. “Check and make sure her eyes are silver. If she can make her eyes go silver, she quite literally cannot lie. Then ask her when she first met me. If she says anything other than my wedding, don't let her in.”*

Laura looks up, trying to see Star's eyes. Probably knowing what she's looking for, Star tilts her head down and shows her gray eyes.

*Then something sparks, and they glow – bright enough to read by at night, a bright, luminous silver.*

“That's so cool.” Laura breathes, then clears her throat. “When did you meet my mom first?”

“She made a beautiful bride.” Star says vaguely. “I really enjoyed her wedding.”

Laura eyes her suspiciously. “Please speak precisely when you answer the question.”

A proud smirk flashes across Star's perfect cupid's bow. “As you say, little Alpha. That first time I met your mother was at her wedding. Which isn't the first time she met me, of course. But I don't know when that is, I haven't lived it.”

“That's so weird. Why don't you tell me about it. Milk?”

“What kind of heathen doesn't drink milk with their snickerdoodles?”

Chapter End Notes

It's always, ALWAYS bugged me that Kate got zero punishment for what she did to Derek.
that was rape, people. Not just statutory rape due to his age, but...
I grant, only SOME state in the US would call it rape legally [I have no clue about other countries, but i know that, at least socially, most European countries - especially the Scandinavian countries - would call it rape, even if it doesn't hit the legal definitions]

No, really -- she lied to Derek from day one, led him on. She told him she loved him and DIDN'T tell him she was a Hunter. She used him; their entire relationship was for the sole purpose of making it easier for her to *KILL HIS FAMILY*.
Actually, this may be one of the VERY few things that are WORSE than rape.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The year continues...

Chapter Notes

so. months do get skipped over. it's sort of what needs to happen, because who wants to follow every single boring thing?
we want the LESS boring things. i hope.

February 17th, 2012

He wasn't going to move.

Maybe ever.

“Wake up, son.” John tries again.

Stiles groans and rolls over, half onto Derek, and that's what finally woke him up. “Oh.”

“Hi there.” Derek grins down at him, much too awake for whatever time it is.

“Why'm I all fuzzed?” It seems to be the most reasonable thing to ask – it might cover why Derek was in his bed, and get him the time, and may be even the day...

“After yesterday afternoon, we took you back to the E.R., they gave you a sedative. You've been asleep for close to sixteen hours, kiddo. It's noon. On Friday.”

“Friday. Wait.” Stiles closed his eyes, trying hard to remember. “We... Ms. Dewitt had her first arraignment. The D.A. isn't going to go after to her for anything but me and Derek, and... she kept saying how we 'asked for it'. It was making Derek mad...”

“Me?” Derek looks at him in astonishment. “I thought you'd figured out how to give a death-glare, Red.”

“She... you believe her, Derek. You can't believe her!”

Derek sighs and won't meet his eyes. “I don't. I don't know what to believe. I just wish I knew why she came after me – I hate that she did that to you, but at least there was sense to it. Why chase me?”

John clears his throat from the doorway, and Stiles jumps a little – he'd forgotten his dad was there. “It seems pretty obvious to me, son.” He tells Derek. “She wanted an 'in' to your family's movements.”
“So why not go for Laura, who's at least legal?”

“Laura's straight.” Stiles points out.

“She could have been friends with her or something...” Derek shrugs. “I just... it kept bugging me, why she was chasing me. I even asked her, at the dance.”

“What'd she say?”

Derek flicks his eyes to John then away again. “That I was the only person who interested her in this town.”

“Did you listen to her on that recording?” Stiles doesn't smack Derek – that would lead to Stiles hurting his hand – but he wants to. “She thought you were hot. And didn't have any problem mixing business and pleasure.”

“She does seem to get entirely too much enjoyment out of hurting others.” John muses.

“Why did I get sedated?” Stiles returns to the earlier topic; it was going to take months to convince Derek he wasn't at fault, and pushing too hard would only make it harder.

“When they were taking her out,” Derek looks sick, having to repeat what happened. “She blew you a kiss, and told you to come visit her when you decided to stop playing at being a girl. You were mostly calm on the surface, but then she told me to come visit when I was tired of children, said she’d – “

“Make a man out of you, as much as that was possible for an animal.” Stiles finishes, disgusted.

“And you dove at her.” John finished. “Derek grabbed you, she laughed, you went...”

“A bit berserk. Sorry.” Stiles picks at the sheet beneath him, embarrassed and...

“Hey, Little Red.” Derek pulls Stiles into his side, forcibly cuddling him. “There's nothing to apologize for. It was... you're Pack, that's what Pack does, defend each other.”

“Which is why Derek kept you from going to juvie, or messing up the case.” John tells him matter of factly. “And why we took you to the E.R. when the panic attack didn't go away.”

“I had a... wow. Okay. New plan – I don't go to her next arraignment.”

“That's a good plan.” John says solemnly. “Wish I could avoid it.”

“Mrs. Hale?”

Talia smiles at the receptionist and stands, dragging Derek with her.

“Mom...”

“Hush, eldest boy. You need this.”

“I don't – “

“Don't argue with me.”
Derek isn't sure, at all, how his mom had managed to get him an appointment with someone already. Someone who knows things, even.

“Is Stiles going to come here, too?”

“Of course.” Talia was serene as always, if you didn't know her; honestly, Derek isn't sure why Kate is still alive, because Talia was perfectly capable of breaking into the Sheriff's office and killing her.

“Mrs. Hale. And Mr. Hale.” A tall, thin Japanese man stood and gave his mother a small bow. “It would be a pleasure to meet you, under other circumstances.”

“Dr. Nagato.” Talia bows back. “Thank you for seeing us on such short notice.”

“Of course. If you could just shut the door, Mr. Hale?” Derek silently does so, and the man – Dr. Nagato? That can't be a real name, can it? – relaxes.

“As your mother knows, I am oni. Do you know what oni are, Mr. Hale?”

“Call me Derek.” He says, trying to remember what Stiles had said. All he could remember was that Stiles thought they were some sort of ogre, but that wasn't right. “All I can remember is that oni aren't ogres, but...”

“That is more than most know.” Dr. Nagato seemed pleased. “We are spirits – some malicious, some benevolent, some neutral.”

“So... you're possessing that man?”

Dr. Nagato looked down at himself in bemusement. “I forget, sometimes. Yes, in a sense. The man whose body this was died eight years ago.”

Derek took a sniff of the air, surreptitiously as possible. Talia noticed and gave him an approving nod, though she was also laughing at him.

“The body doesn't smell dead.” Derek blinks at the man, confused.

“It isn't. I moved it before it died. It was a pre-arranged deal, actually; the original occupant made a Deal with me. It isn't common, but not impossible. According to the terms of the Deal, he was to live out his normal span.” The oni frowns. “I hadn't realized that Hunters in this country knew the signs which mark one who has made a deal with a Yokai. They killed him.”

Derek takes a step back, not sure what to feel, what to do.

Talia cups the back of his neck, smiling reassuringly. “Not Chris and Victoria. Actually, it was probably Kate and her father, from what Dr. Nagato says.”

“Was there a reason to kill him?” Derek asks quickly enough the words almost blend.

Dr. Nagato smiles sadly. “His daughter had leukemia. I pushed it into remission. That was the Deal.” He looks away, blinking rapidly. “They did not ask what the Deal was. They did not care.”

“I'm...”

“It is not your fault, young wolf.” Dr. Nagato says quietly. “Nor is it my fault, or the original gentleman's. The only ones at fault are these false Hunters, who chase anything that is different. Anyone. Any way they can find, no matter how reprehensible that way may be.”
“Like they were planning...” Derek can't say it.

Dr. Nagato sighs. “Yes. That is how they got him, too – Kate seduced his son.”

Derek clenches his fists, rage filling him for a breathless second. “She's done this before.”

“More times than we'll know.” Dr. Nagato agrees. “That is why I agreed to see you, on such short notice. Now, please sit, Derek.”

February 20th, 2012

Stiles was able to, mostly, ignore the looks and whispers in class. It's not like he wasn't expecting it; Ms. Dewitt had been arrested during a class, he knew people would be talking.

He just didn't like people looking at him.

But mostly, it was fine.

Until chemistry.

It took a major effort of will to even force himself into the classroom; even then, he's late to class, he'd loitered in the hallway, gathering himself for the effort to go in, and he can't look at the back of the room, where the lab tables are.

This leaves him stuck, the only seat left is next to Jackson, and he slowly sits next to the Junior, waiting for the vitriol.

Instead, he's handed a neatly stacked sheaf of papers – Jackson’s notes from the prior week. He doesn't say a word, doesn't even look at Stiles, just pushes the stack at him silently, then starts copying from the board.

Stiles mutters a thank you and follows Jackson’s lead, feeling the huge knot in his stomach loosen somewhat at Jackson’s unexpected silence.

Then Harris was outlining the day's lab, and Stiles started shaking. The rest of the class moved to the lab tables, and Stiles couldn't move. He felt frozen.

“That lab won't do itself, Stilinski.”

“I... I’m sorry, Mr. Harris.” Stiles hates how shaky his voice is. “I can't go back there.”

“Mr Stilinski. I have very little patience today.”

“I can't, Mr. Harris. It's...” He must be shaking hard enough for it to be visible. “May I please – “

“What, Mr. Stilinski? What do you think I’ll give you?”

Stiles gapes at the teacher. “I what?”

Harris sneers at him. “Do you think that we're stupid, Stilinski? Easily led?”

“I don't know what you're – “

Harris talks right over him. “Not all of us are so easily charmed by your wiles, Stilinski; I won't let you manipulate me as you manipulated others.”

“I think you've gotten above yourself, you spoiled, self-centered brat!” Harris is yelling in his face. “You're the first student I’ve had, in over twenty years of teaching, that I’ve actually been tempted to hit! That poor woman, led astray by your – “

“That's enough, Harris!” Jackson is suddenly standing between Harris and Stiles, a bulwark against insanity that Stiles can't help but hide behind.

“Mr. Whittmore?” Harris sounds puzzled, like it's beyond the pale that Jackson would even consider defending Stiles.

“Look at the kid – he's white as a ghost and shaking hard enough I don't know how he hasn't fallen over. I’m taking him to the nurse. And you better watch it, Harris.” Now it's Jackson that Stiles is gaping at, confused by the defense, by the acrid tone he's leveling at Harris, who seems to adore Jackson, who lets Jackson get away with almost anything.

“Watch what, Jackson?” Harris sounds as confused as Stiles feels.

“The victim-blaming.” Jackson spits out, then wraps his hand around Stiles arm, steering him out of the classroom, muttering under his breath.

“What – what are you – “

“Shut up, Stiles. We're going to Argent right now.”

Silently, Stiles lets Jackson drag him along, listens to Jackson explain what happened to Victoria. He's vaguely shocked when Jackson explains that he recorded Harris' unprovoked attack, because he always records his lectures; he feels sick when Jackson explains that Harris had fallen in love with Ms. Dewitt.

And somehow they're sitting in the nurse's office. He's... really not sure how or why they're here. He's not sure what Jackson’s doing, not really. “Jackson...”

“What, Stiles?” He doesn't look up from his chem book, sounds annoyed.

“Why... if you... why are helping?”

Jackson sighs and closes his book. “Look. I don't – Danny adores you, you know? And, well, you've been less annoying this year.”

“So... I’m less annoying, and you – what, hate me a little less?”

“I don't... okay, yeah, I hate you, but it's not personal.”

It must be Stiles' day to gape. “What do mean, it's not personal? I can't think of anything more personal than hating someone!”

Jackson stares at the wall, looking a million miles away. “You know what my parents tell me? All the time, it seems, it's almost every day.” Stiles opens his mouth, but Jackson doesn't pause. “They say, 'Be more like that Stiles kid, Jacks.' Or 'Why can't you be more like Stiles, huh?”

“What?” Stiles doesn't know what to say. “Why would they – “

“And your dad. God, Stiles, I’m surprised Dewitt is still alive! That he hasn't torn her to pieces, for
hurting you! That man loves you so much it hurts to see it, and you just... you blow it off, like it's not a big deal that your dad loves you.”

“I don’t – I know he loves me – “

“Then act like, don't... if my parents loved me, I’d – “

“Whoa, wait a minute.” Stiles holds his hand up, feeling sick for a new reason. “Your parents love you, Jackson.”

“No.” Jackson looks away, jaw tight. “They. They mean well, I guess. That's why the adopted me. But I’m an obligation. You can't love an obligation.”

“I don't know where to start.” Running his hands through his hair, Stiles shakes his head. “I didn't know you were adopted. But doesn't that mean more, that they love you more, because they wanted you?”

Jackson shakes his head stubbornly. “I'm an obligation, they never wanted kids.”

“Dude. You have eyes. You have to have seen – my gods, you really don't, do you?” This is more horrifying than Dewitt ever was. Stiles can't imagine not knowing, in his blood and bones, that his dad loves him. Jackson really doesn't think he parents do, and it's killing him. “Trust me, Jackson, I’ve seen your parents talk about you. They're proud of you, they love you.”

“If they're so proud, why do they want me to be like you?”

Stiles shrugs. “Maybe they mean they want you to be a little nicer, a little looser? You have to admit, you tend to be an uptight douche.”

“You'd be too, if you were in my shoes.” Jackson snaps.

Stiles takes a deep breath. “I'm sorry, I didn't mean... just. I think you're missing the obvious.”

“I think you were dropped on your head as a baby.” Jackson throws back, still fuming.

“Probably.” Stiles nods. “But. I know what I see. They suck at showing it, but they love you.”

“Sure.” Jackson looks at his book pensively, then cocks his head. “Nurse is here. See you in class.” He leans over, bumps his shoulder into Stiles in a strange show of... something, and takes off.

“Stiles?” He looks up at the nurse, smiling cautiously at him, and follows her.

**February 25th, 2012**

This was not a good idea.

But it's the only idea he has left.

Danny wasn't helpful; he wasn't convinced, like Jackson was, that Jackson’s parents didn't love him, but he did think they were bad parents.

Lydia didn't see the problem; her parents actually didn't love anyone, and she was just fine.

For a popular guy, Jackson didn't have many friends.
So Stiles sucks it up. He'd have to do it himself.

He got Derek to drop him off at Whittmore's.

Mrs. Whittmore opened the door with a blinding smile. “Stiles. Good to see you, but I’m afraid Jackson isn't here.”

“Oh. That's okay, actually. I came to speak with you and Mr. Whittmore, if that's okay?”

“Come in.” A worried frown creased her face. “Is everything okay?”

“I... not really? It's... um. I don't know how to...”

Mr. Whittmore comes into the front hallway. “Stiles? What brings you by, son? Jackson isn't here.”

“He says he wants to talk to us, honey.” Mrs. Whittmore says, sounding concerned.

“Everything okay at home?” Mr. Whittmore asks sharply.

“What? Oh, no, nothing like... can we not stand by the door? This is sort of weird, I know, but...”

“Of course. Come sit in the living room. Can I get you anything?” Mrs. Whittmore sometimes reminds Stiles of 50's and 60's TV housemoms, for all that she's a kick-ass high powered defense attorney.

“I'm good. It's... I came to talk to you about Jackson.”

Mr. Whittmore's eyes close, and Mrs. Whittmore presses her lips together. “What is it?” She sounds a little hysterical, ready to start crying.

“Nothing like you're probably... it's just, we were talking the other day, right? And he said...” Stiles sucks in air, and lets it blurt out. “He said that he doesn't think you can love him because he's adopted and only an obligation and it's driving him insane because he thinks he won't ever be good enough for you and won't listen to me when I tell him that that's bullshit, that you guys obviously love him, and so I thought I'd let you know so you could talk to him.”

They're both staring at Stiles like he's grown another head. “Wait.” Mr. Whittmore says slowly. “Jackson knows that he's adopted?”

“Yes? Wait, you didn't tell him?” No wonder Jackson was having problems, then.

“We didn't want him to...” Mrs. Whittmore shakes her head. “But how does that... he thinks...”

“I guess you tell him to me more like me?” Stiles asks, uncomfortable with the thought – who the hell would want their kid to be like him? He's spastic and hyper and... sort of strange, all around.

“That's not...” Mr. Whittmore sighs. “He doesn't hear us.”

“Yes I do.” Jackson spits from the door. “Every time you say it – ‘why can't you be like that, Jackson?' Why can't I be sunny and bright and smarter than everyone?”

“That's not –” Mrs. Whittmore starts.

“And nosy, sticking my nose everywhere, I guess that I can do. Why did I bother helping you, Stilinski? What the hell do you think you're doing?”
“Trying to return the favor.” Stiles says, sounding a lot more calm than he feels.

“Well, screw you, returning the favor would have been not using a secret against me!”

“It was a secret?” Stiles stares at Jackson. “Everyone knows you don't think they love you, how was that a secret?”

“No, that I'm adopted, no one knows that!”

“Jackson, you aren't supposed to know that.” Mr. Whittmore puts in. “How do you?”

“Funnily enough, from the same sub who damn near climbed into Stilinski's pants. She told me back in eighth grade, when she was subbing her first year.”

“Wait. Kate Dewitt told you, and you know about her now, and it didn't make you back up and question her motive for doing so?”

Jackson sneered at Stiles. “I know what her motive was, I just have more spine than you.”

“That's nice of you Jacks, really.” Stiles rolls his eyes. “Unlike you, I've never had anyone really flirt with me, except Danny. Of course I was thrown off. Stop being a dick!”

“I'll act however I want, you little prick!”

Mrs. Whittmore picks up a vase and throws it between Stiles and Jackson; it crashed into the wall and they both turn to her, shocked.

“Let's try this.” She says, voice tight. “Stiles, you know your dad loves you?”


“Really? You know he'd die for you, he'd kill for you? You know?”

“Of course I know!” Stiles says defensively. “He's my dad!”

“And that is what we mean, Jackson.” Mrs Whittmore says flatly. “When we say, 'why can't you be more like Stiles', we mean, why can't you believe us?”

“You – what?” Jackson sounds almost broken.

“We love you!” Mrs. Whittmore insists, tears running down her face. “But you don't believe us!”

“I'm this random adopted kid that you couldn't find a home for!”

“Who told you that!” Mr. Whittmore roars.

“Dewitt – she – “

“She told you a damned half-truth.” Mrs. Whittmore says venomously. “We couldn't find a home good enough for you. We couldn't find anyone who'd love you like we do.”

“But you never wanted kids.” Jackson whispers, like he's afraid to hope.

“That doesn't mean we don't love you, Jacks. Just that we don't know what the hell we're doing!”

Stiles laughs, can't help it, and Mr. Whittmore turns his angry face on him. “No, I'm sorry. I just – dad tells me all the time, he doesn't know what he's doing. And I was planned. Don't think
you're different from other parents just because you... I mean, it's just... even Talia sometimes admits she isn't sure what to do as a parent, you know?"

All three Whittmores stare at Stiles now, and he offers his best supportive smile.

“Anyway. I, um, I think I’ve accomplished what I came here for, so I’m just gonna...”

He starts to move towards the front door.

“Wait.” He freezes at Mr. Whittmore's command. “How did you get here, anyway?”

“Oh. Um, yeah, I had Derek drop me off.”

“You can't walk home in this weather. I’ll take you.” Mr. Whittmore says gruffly. “When I get back, Jacks, we're going to talk.”

“I – yeah. I'll just...”

The two stare at each other for a minute, then Mr. Whittmore shakes himself slightly. “C'mon, kid. Let's get you home.”

“Thank you.” There's not anything else to say, really.

The car ride is tense, but Stiles had expected that. What he hadn't expected was the story of how the Whittmores had ended up with Jackson.

“My wife and I were coming home from court, I don't even remember the case. It was a day like this, storming off and on. We found this car wreck, and it was... odd. Old honda, it'd been t-boned by a huge SUV. But the SUV was empty, driver's door left open. There was a young couple in the honda. She was huge, ready to deliver any second. So much blood...”

“Where... where was this?” It hadn't happened in Beacon Hills, that was for sure.

“Up near Seattle. We called nine one one, of course, but Mary couldn't stay away. We could see the young woman breathe, but not her young man. Mary crawled under the door, didn't touch her, but talked to her. Tried to keep her anchored, I guess you could say. She was... she was so young, just twenty two, they'd been married a year. Janice and Bryant Jackson.”

Stiles feels tears well in his eyes. “Oh! That's... “

Mr. Whittmore sighs. “Yeah. He was baby Jackson, so... Janice, they tried, but once she heard that Bryant was dead, she just sort of gave up. Mary kept talking to her, saying she had to hold on for the baby, but Janice just smiled at Mary. Told her, 'I know you'll take care of my boy.' Mary cried, asked what we could do. She said, 'make sure he has the best home you can.' I don't know how Janice managed to hang on long enough to sign him over to us, but... We tried to find him... but, the people looking to adopt, they... frankly, most of them scared me a little. They were hungry, if that makes sense. Wanted a child so bad, any child, they didn't see anything in baby Jackson except a way to feed their baby dreams. It was... yeah.

“So... after a while, when he was maybe a couple months old... Mary said we should just admit that we'd never find anyone we really trusted. So, we adopted him.”

“And named him Jackson, because he'd been 'Baby Jackson' for so long.” Stiles finished for him.

Mr. Whittmore nods. “Yeah. It wasn't – it wasn't just being lazy. We were going to tell him about
his parents when he turned eighteen, wanted him to know we hadn't tried to erase them...

“I get it, Mr. Whittmore. I think Jackson will, too. But you need to be careful, don't call them just his parents. Because your his parents. They may have made him, but you raised him, you know?”

Mr. Whittmore parks in front of Stiles' house. “How the hell are you fourteen?”

“I need to explain temporal physics?” Stiles grins at him.

Mr. Whittmore grins back. “I meant, you sometimes sound like you're my age. And act like a strange sort of Yoda.”

Stiles giggles at that. “Yeah – your Yoda I will be, Mr. Whittmore. Teach you to show your son that love him you do.”

A strange look passes over Mr. Whittmore's face. “We might actually take you up on that. Or, at least, talk to your dad. We're kind of crap at this.”

Stiles snorts. “I don't think you'd be having problems, if the evil Ms. Dewitt hadn't...”

He frowns. “Yes. I wonder what, exactly, she thought she was doing.”

Stiles made what was, possibly, a strange connection. The last time he heard of a strange car accident like that, it was David Hale being murdered by Hunters. He shivered, wondering.

“She's cray-cray, Mr. Whittmore.”

He gives Stiles a look of sympathy. “That's more generous than I would be, had she treated me as she treated you.”

“Well, I’m not an evil lawyer, now am I?” Stiles said lightly, trying to make Mr. Whittmore laugh, move away from thinking about... that.

Thankfully, Mr. Whittmore followed the plan, because he smiled weakly at the old joke. Likely, he knew what Stiles was doing and played along, which was nice of him. “When you need an evil lawyer, I hope you remember to call us. I promise, my wife will not be defending that woman.”

“I – thanks, Mr. Whittmore.”

He nods. “Anytime, Stiles. Get inside before the rain starts up again.”

“Be safe driving home. Jackson'll kill me if anything happens to you.”

“Noted.” He winked at Stiles, and drove off, maintaining a safe speed, probably just to reassure Stiles.

Now to call Danny and let him know how it went. The do some research on Packs near Seattle.

March 8th, 2012

Derek sat with his brother and sisters on the porch, all but quivering in the chill air.

John was laughing at them quietly. “They always like this?” He asks Stiles.

Stiles gave his father a sly smile in return; it made Derek want to whine, that smile; as he usually did when things about Stiles confused him, he ignored it.
“You were warned about full moons, dad.”

“Yeah.” The man didn't seem at all put out by either the strangeness of the Hales or his son's acceptance of it – maybe because he was just as accepting. “But maybe I should wait until tomorrow to give you guys the news?”

Derek bared his teeth without thought, and Stiles' eyes widened. “Now you've got to tell us, dad! You can't go teasing them on full moons!”

“All right, all right.” John gave Derek a warning look. “Just don't turn those things on me. It's about Dewitt.”

Derek let out a whimper at Stiles' immediate stiffening; he hates it when Stiles smells like this, self-loathing and disgusted with himself.

John sighed. “I hear you, son. But it's good news – her second arraignment is on Monday.”

That was good news. Derek let out a relieved huff, then focused on pushing back his shift. “Does this mean she'll finally be transferred?”

“Yes, thank God.” John nodded fervently. He'd been avoiding the station as much as he could, because Kate's presence was like a constant itch against his psyche. At her first arraignment, where she heard the charges against her, she'd just laughed, then said both Derek and Stiles had 'asked for it'. The judge had ended up holding her in contempt when she couldn't be bothered to say anything else, and refused her bail. “But I wanted you to know, because neither of you are going. Talia and I will be there.”

“We'll both have to speak at her trial, though.” Stiles was quieter than normal, sounding thoughtful, but the scent of his fear made Derek whine, made him crawl up the steps and press against his legs. Stiles unconsciously rubbed the back of Derek’s neck. “You need to make sure it's not during a full moon – she's smart enough to try and aim for then.”

“I can focus.” Derek growls.

Stiles snickers at him. “That's why your eyes are glowing?”

“I've been meaning to ask...” Derek stiffens at John's tone. He knows the question that follows.

Or he thought he did, anyway. “You talked to anyone about it?”

“About what?” Stiles asks curiously.

John doesn't reply, just keeping his gaze steady on Derek’s own. After a frozen moment's beat, Derek shakes his head. “Not much to say.”

“That's not true.” John chides gently. “But I won't push. Just... I’m here, alright?”

“Derek?” He forces himself to turn and look at Stiles, note the confusion and worry on the boy's face. Forces more words out, past the fear and the wolf. “I can't. Ask mom. She can tell.”

“Or I can, if you want?” John offers. Derek tips his head, question and assent at once; he doesn't know how much John knows. John nods. “Your mom told me the story. It'll be something for Stiles and I to talk about, when you guys all take off.”

It wouldn't be long until they did; the moon was rising. All that was keeping them in place now
Laura's eyes flickered between bright gold and red; she was going to Alpha soon, and hive off to make a sub-Pack, and Derek didn't know if he should rejoice or cry – he'd miss her.

Talia howled, first warning. Derek pushed away from Stiles, pulling off his shirt and getting ready, happy. Until Laura pushed him down and sat on him.

He'd definitely rejoice; she was easier to miss when she was gone.

**March 12th, 2012**

“That vile bitch!” Stiles walked right into Derek’s back, not registering the words of anger until after the impact.

“What's going on?” He didn't bother raising his voice.

Peter whipped around the corner into the great room, all but frothing at the mouth. “I'll tell you! That, that – damn, I need a new word! – she pled not guilty, said it wasn't her chasing, but you.”

“Huh? But I recorded her; Cora got video!”

“She said it wasn't as it appeared.” Peter snarled, throwing his phone across the room.

Laura caught it and set it down.

“I thought your dad was going to jump her then and there, Red.” Laura told him. “Mom had to drag Peter out, because he really might have. Good thing Chris was there to help.”

“Well, doesn't she basically have to say she's not guilty?” Stiles hadn't been afraid of Peter in a long time, and wasn't happy being reminded of a future where Peter instilled nothing but fear.

All the rage drains out of Peter, though whether it's at Stiles' words or his fear, he isn't sure. He's just happy to see it gone. “She could just admit it.” Peter says spitefully.

Derek still hasn't moved. “Der?”

He shakes himself. “Sorry. I just... last time I saw you that mad, Unc’...”

A look of remorse flashes across Peter's face, to be replaced by his normal snark. “Please. I’m not mad. I’m just exercising my right to free speech. And my right to think up vile names.”

“When's her trial, then?” Derek sounded calm.

He wasn't fooling any of them. Peter and Laura could probably smell him, but Stiles just knew.

“It starts on the twenty eighth.” Laura seems like she's playing along with Derek, but the looks she keeps shooting at Stiles let him know that she'll take care of him.

“I guess we're going to have to start talking to lawyers, huh?” Stiles is scared. He doesn't do well with attention, at least not from strangers.

“Speaking of, Mrs. Whittmore has offered to help the D.A. Specifically, she's asked to be the lawyer that deals with you two.” Peter offers this like it's a conspiracy. “It's up to you and your parents, but I think it's a good idea.”
“What did you do, Stiles?” Derek rounds on him, amusement warring with worry. “I knew I shouldn't have taken you over to their house last month.”

“I just talked to them about Jackson, no big.” Stiles defends. Why doesn't anyone trust him? It's like they think he's going to blow things up or something.

To be fair, he has vague memories of doing just that, memories of a boat and a siren and... he thinks it's Cora, screaming at him about shifting winds and wolfsbane smoke. But that hasn't happened yet, may never happen at all, if their luck holds. Things are already very different, the Hales alive months after the fire originally killed them...

“I'll talk to mom and John.” Derek promises, causing Stiles to lose the thread of his thought. “The Whittmores are crazy-good lawyers.”

“But that reminds me...” Stiles thinks this is a good time to distract Peter, and he really does need the help. “Peter, Packs around Seattle.”

“What about them?” Peter looks startled, maybe a little intrigued.

“It's a private research project. But I’m having some trouble...”

**March 23, 2012**

“Derek Hale, please come to the Principle's office. Stiles Stilinski, Please come to the Principle's office.”

Startled, Derek falters at the white board and looks at his calculus teacher. She gives him a short nod, so Derek walks away from the proof his was writing, sweeps up his books and bag, and leaves the classroom.

Why would Victoria call him and Stiles to her office? Did Mrs. Whittmore need to talk to them again?

Or... had something happened to his mom? No, she'd call Cora and Issac, too, if it had. Maybe John? She's smart enough to call Derek to help take care of Stiles, if that's the case...

It was all he could do to keep his pace steady as he walked across the small campus. Stiles joined him about half-way there, looking as worried as Derek felt.

He was too worried to talk, even.

Derek frowned. A silent Stiles is just wrong.

He let out a silent sigh of relief when they entered the office to be met by both John and Talia.

It was short lived.

“Boys.” John was livid. The knuckles of his left hand were swollen, as if he'd hit something, and his heart was still pounding.

“Dad.” Stiles was so quiet, even Derek strained to hear him. “What happened.”

John seemed to be choking on his rage; he waves to Talia, who nods, always serene in the face of everything. Derek hopes to be like that someday.

“It's Dewitt.” She's calm, but underneath it is fear.
Derek feels his hackles rising – his Alpha shouldn't ever be afraid.

“What about her?” Stiles is whispering.

“She escaped.” John chokes it out, face turning slightly red.

“Dad. Breathe, dad.” Stiles eyes are locked on John's, worry darkening them. “You need to calm down, please dad, breathe...”

Talia frowns between them, then raises a brow. “Stiles is right, John. Your heart...”

John bats at her hand, reaching out to offer him support; Talia lets him, but doesn't relent, darting her other hand up to the back of his neck.

She goes rigid, black snaking up her arm. “Jesus, John!” She hisses it, sounding pissed. “Are you have a damned heart attack?”

“No!” John grits out. “I'm fine. I'm just angry!”

“Let's let Melissa judge that, dad.” Stiles is implacable right now, and he's being back up by Talia. Derek doesn't even question, just helps them herd John to Talia's car, follows Stiles into the backseat.

On the way to the hospital, Stiles calls the station, telling Linda the basics.

John bitches the whole way there, Stiles bitching right back. The interesting thing was Talia, though – she smelled terrified, even if she wasn't acting out of the ordinary.

Once John's in back and being looked at, Derek braces her.

“Mom?”

She almost collapses against Derek, shaking. “Don't tell... anyone, Derek, I mean it.” Her eyes flash at him, an Alpha-order that wasn't necessary.

“Tell them what? I don't understand.”

She shuts her eyes, composing herself, then looks Derek in the eye. “John in my mate.” She tells him quietly.

“What!” It came out much louder than he intended, and he winces. “I mean... you've known him for forever! You were friends with his wife!”

“And that's why I didn't realize he was my mate until... until Stiles called me.” Talia's voice was shaky, and Derek suffered the most painful epiphany of his life.

His mother, his Alpha, was only human. She had hopes and dreams, weaknesses and fears, just like all the rest of the world. She wasn't perfect.

“But... but dad!”

“I loved your father.” Talia says flatly, almost angrily. “Don't ever doubt it. Were he still alive, my wolf would never have noticed what John is. But he...” Talia averts her eyes and shakes her head.

Derek could feel his heart breaking, just a little. “I... I’m sorry, I didn't mean...”

“Oh, Der, I know. I know, it's just...” She purses her lips, eyes distant. “After what happened with
David... I don't know if... you understand.” It's not a question, but a statement.

“I guess. How did you know?” Derek can't help but be curious; he hadn't really believed in 'mates', not after Paige.

Talia's eyes snap to his. “You know.”

Derek knows his brows meet, confusion shooting through him. “I do?”

At this question, mirth makes Talia's eyes dance. “Well. You will.”

“Wait. You mean I’ve already met...” Eyes wide in horror, Derek chokes out his biggest fear. “Paige?”

Shock flashes across Talia's face, but then softens immediately. “If she had been your mate, Derek, I would never have allowed any of that to happen.” She says fiercely.

“Then I don’t...” Derek shakes his head. “The closest I’ve come to romantic feelings was with Kate, and she sure as hell isn't – “

“No!” Talia's denial is bracing. “Gods, no, baby. It doesn't matter. You wanted to know why I’m scared, now you do. John's my mate.”

“He is?” Stiles gasps in delight.

“How...” They both blink at the boy, confused as to how he managed to sneak up on them.

He smirks widely. “Alan and Chris have been working me hard.”

“I see.” Talia says drolly.

Stiles' smirk grows, then disappears. “I won't say anything, Alpha.” He's almost subvocalizing, he's so quiet. “But you need to tell him. Unless you're willing to wait until he asks you. That'll be... well.”

Derek finds himself nodding in agreement. “He won't ask you, mom. It's not that he doesn't like you, but that he...”

“He just doesn't think of things like that anymore? Yeah, sourwolf. Surprised you noticed, though.”

“I notice things, Red. It's just, unlike some people, I don't feel any need to tell anyone who'll sit still enough to listen.”

Stiles rolls his eyes at Derek, then smiles more naturally. “I came to tell you what's going on. It was mild angina, nothing big, some changes to his diet need to happen, but...” Stiles shrugs. “It wasn't a heart attack. Doctor thinks it was mostly rage, and too many doughnuts.”

Talia nods, relief causing her to sag against Derek. “Good. Good. I'll... I'll talk to him. Not a word, Little Red, until I do. Promise me!”

Stiles nods firmly, eyes shining. “I promise.”

May 24th; 2012

Last day of school.
That seems so weird, it always does. Weird to think that, for the next three months, there'll be no school at all. Normally, this would be sort of depressing – a whole summer, and no one to spend it with but Scott.

This year is different.

It's not just the Pack. Though the Pack was huge, it was the biggest thing, the best thing, the reason all the rest had changed. Cora and Derek are fixtures now, vital.

There was Lydia, now actually a friend. There was Allison, Scott's girlfriend, yeah, but definitely Stiles friend too, and the promise of hang-out time with her. There was Issac, his fellow noraml-human-in-the-know. There was Boyd, promising to continue to coach Scott and Stiles. There was Erica, now dating Boyd, but becoming friends with Stiles; she'd taken to calling him “Batman” after he recorded Ms. Dewitt, and not just because her uncle Rémy did, so of course he called her Catwoman. It's what you do, right? Hell, there was even Jackson, nicer now, wanting to train with Boyd and willing to put up with him to do it.

Most of all, there was Danny.

Not that he'd get as much Danny as he wanted; Danny would be leaving the first of July, and he wouldn't be back until the week before school. His family did it every year, went back to Hawai'i. And it was actually a good thing, really, it meant he wouldn't be here for the Hale family reunion, and Stiles wouldn't have to juggle both a boyfriend and much expanded Pack.

And Stiles refuses to think about the hugely depressing thing that wasn't happening for over a month, choosing to focus on the now, on Danny’s arm around his waist and chin on his shoulder, on his friends laughing and making plans for the first week of vacation.

He and Danny leave the group hand-in-hand, walking to Danny’s car. “My place or yours?”

Stiles waggles his eyebrows at him. “Dude. My dad won't be home until nine.”

Danny grins back. “Your place it is.”

May 26th; 2012

“Mom!” Derek was all but bouncing in place, agitated by the delay.

“What has gotten into you, Der?” Talia turns a wondering eye to her eldest son, amused.

“I just... did you see what he got me? I’ve only got a month, and I’m going insane. I can’t...”

“It's okay.” Derek huffs at her attempt to calm him.

“Yeah. I just... where else am I going to find something? And this is the only day we can go without him ending up tagging along. Or Laura. Or Cora. Or – “

“I got it, I got it.” Talia laughs. “This is the only day to hit the Ren Faire without any of the rest of the Pack coming with, and seeing you angst over what to get Stiles for his birthday.”

“I'm not angusting, mom.” He glares at her, unsure if he's more annoyed by the accusation of angst or by her amusement of it.

“Of course, how silly. Well, shall we?”

The trip, as most trips with his mother were, seemed shorter than it was. Sadly, that was the last
good thing, really. Derek hated crowds, but any Renaissance Festival was sure to be crowded. And staffed by people who just loved to grab you, hug you, even kiss you.

It was nightmarish.

Then there were the... other staff.

The Arch-Druid who was in charge of the whole disaster, with whom they had to have tea, just to be polite. The kitsune who sold jewelery and leered at his mom like she was available and... yeah. The nomad Pack that traveled the circuit of Faires all through the southwest U.S., who'd already stopped by Hale house to check in. The Fae Lord who sold various Ren-type clothing, who eyes Derek like he was a particularly tasty dessert.

For some reason, Star was with the Lord, and she grinned to see Derek and Talia. “What brings you out? I thought you guys were coming next week?”

“We are. But Derek wanted to shop for Stiles' birthday without the Pack chiming in.”

Star's eyes light up. “Can I help?”

Derek hesitated for less than five seconds. “Yeah.” At his mother's surprised look, Derek flushed just a little. “She won't make fun of me or anything. And she'll probably have some good ideas.”

“I've got tons.” The half-fae woman promised. “In fact... excuse us, Gwydion.” She winks at the Fae who was still leering at Derek. “I've got work to do. Talia, you coming?”

“I trust you both.” His mom assured them.

Derek rolls his eyes. Star was awesome, but she was his mom's friend. Why wouldn't she trust her?

“I'm actually younger than you, according to the Fae.” Star confides, as if reading his mind.

Derek jerks slightly in response. “Um. What?”

“I can't actually read minds, but the look on your face coupled with your mood...” She grins at him, clearly pleased to have discomfited him.

“But you're actually a teenager?”

She snorts. “I'm thirty eight years old, so no. I was raised human, Derek, and mostly think like one. I'm just... I don't know, more adaptable? Or something. The Fae are all a bunch of stuck up snobs.”

Derek snorted in agreement. “Sorry.”

“No worries. Let's look here; he's going to need something like an athame, whatever tradition he ends up working with.”

There were lots of nice daggers and knives and swords, but none of them screamed 'Stiles'. After maybe twenty minutes, Derek sighed. “Maybe if we don't find something better?”

“Hmm.” Star led him off.

Rings and necklaces, statuettes, wands and staffs... nothing was quite *it*. Derek was ready to tear his hair out, when they enter 'Ye Old-Tyme Apothecary'.

Derek saw it immediately. Rosewood. Star followed his gaze, then smiled.
“You'll have to fill it.”

“I can do that.” Derek says confidently. “There was a small dagger that would be perfect. And a wand. I’m sure we can find a chalice, and a stone.”

“Herbs we can get here. What isn't here, Dr. Deaton can get.”

“Not to mention Ash. And salt.”

“And stuff.”

Star and Derek trade a grin, and turn to the proprietor. “How much?”

“Who is it for?” The elderly woman asked suspiciously.

“My friend and... my friend, Stiles.” Derek bit his tongue, shocked that he almost said 'Pack-mate'.

The woman gives him a small, secretive smile. “Aye? A wolf-boy, like yourself?”

“Ah.” Derek gives her a polite nod – whatever she might be, she clearly knows what he is. “No, but he is Pack. And he's training... well, this will be perfect, for his training.”

The woman studies Derek for a moment, then looks to Star. “Princess? How say ye? Does the boy's friend truly have a need for such as this.”

Star inclines her head regally, though she doesn't acknowledge the woman's form of address. “Indeed, goodwoman, he will have need and use. I am one of those who will train him, when the time comes.”

“Hmm.” She hums, looking pleased. “Then you would know what will be needed, yes? Let us fill what we can, and decide on the final price then.” Star and the woman – Agatha, it turns out – spend a good half-hour going through herbs and regents, filling all the drawers with anything and everything Star could think of that Stiles might need in the next couple of years.

Either Star really was some sort of princess, or Agatha had taken a huge liking to both her and Derek; she brought out other trays, with wands and chalices, plates and daggers, stones and candles, allowing them to find the perfect tools to finish filling the chest.

And it was less than two hundred dollars. Derek gaped when she gave him the final tally – he'd expected the chest, alone, to be more than that!

“Nay, lad, some things go where they must; I am here only to send them along.”

Derek mulled that over, and decided that she wasn't selling him the actual equipment, just the herbs and such. “I don't know if I – “

Star smack the back of his head. “When a Norn tells you the price, you can haggle, but you can't tell her no!” She hisses.

Agatha grins slyly at Derek. “Listen to the Princess, lad.”

“Of course.” Derek manages. “Forgive my rudeness, I just... I don't want to take advantage.”

“Your Alpha has much to be proud of, lad. Worry not. Now, will ye haggle?”

“That would be Star's job.” He says, rather desperately. He really, really doesn't want to stick his
foot back in his mouth.

Star grins happily.

Derek just hands over the credit card

**June 15th, 2012**

“Stiles!”

“Wassat?” Stiles blinked at his dark bedroom. Were his walls talking?

“Stiles, wake up!”

“Uncle Creeper? Wow, way to live up to the name, what time is it?”

“It’s a little after two. I need you.”

“What’d ya mean, you need me? Is something wrong, is someone hurt?” Stiles feels the adrenaline flood through his system, and starts breathing faster. “Who’s hurt? Have you called Alan?”

“Sarah.”

Stiles’ face goes cold. “Oh, gods, Peter.”

“No, no, she’s just... it’s early. Not too early, but it's early.”

“Wait.” Stiles turns towards his bedroom door, sees his dad filling the doorway. “If she's gone into labor, why are you here?”

“Stiles!” Peter almost shouts his name.

John’s face softens. “Ah. You don't have a teddy bear. Get up kiddo. Go, Peter. I’ll get Stiles to the hospital as soon as he's dressed.”

Peter just stood there, wringing his hands. “Can I just... I’ll go with you. Talia's with Sarah.”

“Just let me put on shoes. I know the hospital's used to crazy people in PJ's when women go into labor.” Stiles shoves a pair of sneakers on, not bothering with socks.

“Really?” Peter doesn't look ready to faint, anymore, but he still isn't the calm, suave man Stiles is used to – his hair is sticking out in every direction, his clothes are as mis-matched as Stiles PJ's.

“Really. It's a good thing I saw you climbing into my son's window, Peter, and recognized you. I might have shot you, otherwise. That would have delayed your arrival.”

His dad was way too amused, Stiles thinks.

“Still, no use trying to make you sweat more than you are.” John seems cheerful, almost jovial. “We'll take the squad car; with the lights, we'll get there as fast as if you ran.”

They actually beat Talia and Sarah to the hospital – once he'd woken his Alpha, Peter had taken off for Stiles house, determined that the boy would be there.

Stiles didn't question. Anything. Like what Chris and Victoria were doing there.
Actually, there were so many people there, they filled the waiting room and then some – Chris and Victoria showed up about a half hour after they got there, all the rest of the Hales, and Jon and Terry and Mary, got there around six; Brian and Rose and their kids showed up around eight. Dr. Nagato came in a bit after nine with more coffee than Stiles would have thought to bring, which was a good thing, since Melissa had just come off shift, sitting next to Stiles, and Steph had come down from Redding, bringing her boyfriend and one of the Hale sub-Packs, led by Talia's cousin Gemma. It was like Christmas dinner, only it was June and they were in a hospital.

Star sauntered in a little after noon.

Peter pounced on her. “Where the hell have you been, ban-draoi?”

Stiles blinked; he'd heard that term before, somewhere...

Star takes Peter's hand and does something; whatever it was, it leaves Peter calmer. “You told me she was born just before thirteen hundred.”

“Of course I did. When did I do this?” Peter's still snarling, though it's mostly for show, now.

“At her saining, of course.” Star studies Peter, smiles slipping away. “Why are you...”

“Freaking out?” Peter raises an eyebrow. “My wife is screaming, Star. And we've been waiting for you for hours; my daughter can't be born without you here!”

Star looks rather taken aback. “Yes, she can.”

“No, no – you're her fairy godmother, you have to be here!”

Stiles takes a small step back; he'd learned that Star would ignore nephilim jokes, but call her a fairy and she'd cut you down.

For once, Star didn't exact retribution, though her eyes did flash bright silver, causing rainbows to dance around the room. “I'm sorry, Peter, I didn't understand what you wanted. I'm here. And there's still a good fifteen minutes.”


“Your her godfather, Stiles.” Peter tells him absently. “You have to be here.”

“I am here.” Stiles tries to stop – the last thing he wants is to see Sarah like that.

“No, you have to... Star, explain it to him!”

“It's custom, when new Pack is born – their parents, their Alpha, and their godparents are in the room. I thought that was only if the godparents were Pack, Peter. Stiles is Pack, but I’m – “

Peter crashes to a halt, staring at Star blankly. “You think you aren't Pack?”

“I... Peter, I don't live linearly.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Peter rolls his eyes and resumes dragging Star and Stiles down the hall. “Now, c'mon, she'll be here any minute and you have to name her!”

“We – what!” Stiles doesn't even care how high his voice is.
“Any preferences?” Star sounds almost as worried as Stiles.

“I can’t – Peter, I’m fourteen, I can’t name your baby!”

“Stiles. Just give her the name that means the most to you.” Peter’s patient tone is belied by the fervency with which he dragged both of them down the hall.

“It’s about time.” Talia huffs, as they spill into the room.

“I don’t know if so many – “

“Do your job, Nancy.” Talia snaps at the midwife – lent to the Pack by a witches’ coven in Oregon – and flashing red eyes at her. “You know our traditions.”

“Sorry, sorry. She's crowning.”

“Good. Peter, come take your wife's pain.”

That's what Peter and Talia had been trading off on; good to know. It also explains why they needed breaks like they did.

Easier to think about that, than...

“Gods, Tee, who the hell trusts a fourteen-year-old to name a baby!”

“We do, pup.” She bares her teeth, looking as mussed as everyone else.

“It's okay, Stiles.” Sarah pants from the bed.

“It's not!” Stiles protests.

He's cut off by a wail.

“Loud. Wolves are always so loud.” Nancy mutters, handing the baby to Talia once she'd cleaned her up some.

Talia ignores Nancy's words, looking at the baby with Alpha eyes. “Hello, little niece.” She almost purrs it, then leans over and nips the baby's neck.

Stiles gasps at the bead of blood.

It heals over instantly. Stiles hysterically wonders what they do when the baby isn't a wolf?

Talia hands the small bundle over to Star.

Star seems frozen and unsure. “I... I didn't realize that I gave it to her.” She whispers to no one. “I thought it was just serendipity. But... but. I name you, child, the strongest name I know. It has graced queens and peasants alike, but most importantly, it is the name of she who taught me, a literal hero who fights aside the gods. Elizabeth.”

Star kisses the baby's forehead, leaving behind silver lip-marks, and hands the baby to Stiles.

“Uh.” He stares at the little wriggling bundle, shocked and so, so confused. “I... it's something that means something to me, right? I don't know any queens, or any gods or heroes. But the name that means the most to me is my mom's name, and there isn't a better one. Claudia.”
Stiles presses his lips to the mark made by Star's; somehow, his kiss balances hers, and the mark fades.

“You owe me ten bucks.” Sarah tells her husband. “Johanna, my ass.”

“It was a valid guess.” Peter protests. “Stiles thinks his dad hung the moon.”

“But he thinks his mom causes the sun to rise.” Talia says, a bit smugly. “You owe me fifty.”

“You... you bet on what name I’d pick?” Stiles blinks at them. “Is this how you name your kids, you pick godparents who'll pick names you like?”

Peter waves the idea away, taking his daughter from Stiles. “That's a side-benefit, if one is so inclined. I personally wouldn't care if you named her, I don't know, Henrietta, so long as it was you who named her.”

“I...” Stiles sits down, not caring that he's on the floor. “I don't...”

Talia sits next to him, pulls him into her. “It's okay, pup. You didn't get any warning. Godparents don't; they'll over-think it, if they do.”

“Oh.” Stiles says blankly.

Derek leans on the glass wall, looking at his baby cousin wrapped up snug in the little plastic box.

“Why can't we just take her home?” He wonders out loud.

Talia smiles at him. “It looks better if we follow policy. She won't have many doctor's visits, almost no medical file at all. We try to leave as much of a trail as we can – that's why all of you were vaccinated.”

“We were?” Cora sounds dumbfounded.

“Not like it would hurt you.” Talia says philosophically.

“Elizabeth Claudia. Long name.” Laura ruffles James' hair.

“Doesn't matter. It's a good name.” Derek isn't sure why it's so important, but he knows everyone should be happy with the names. Especially the one Stiles chose.

“We'll just have to make sure to pick the right nickname.”

“She looks like a Beth.” James speaks up. “Don't you think?”

Derek cocks his head, studying his little cousin. “Yeah. Yeah, Beth seems right.”

Stiles stumbles up to them, looking wan and exhausted. “There she is.” He slurs, smiling at the baby through the glass. “What else I need t'do, today?”

Talia laughs at him silently. “I think, pup, you need to sleep.”

“Gods, sleep. I could sleep right here. But... don't I. I don't know. Kill a dragon and bring her it's heart or something?”
“Stiles.” Derek gently scolds the boy. “You've named her, that's all you have to do, today.”

“What’s bad?”

“Bad, bad, bad.” Stiles is chanting.

“Why don't you take him home, Der. John went in to work, since he left early last night.”

“Sure, mom.” Derek puts an arm around Stiles' shoulder, and leads him out of the hospital.

“That's what's bad.”

“Was s'pose to have lunch with Danny. Don't have my phone. What time is it?”

“It's almost four. I'll call him.”

Putting his words into action, Derek does.

“Derek?” Danny doesn't bother with hello; he sounds worried. “Have you seen Stiles?”

“He's right here. My aunt went into labor, and Peter dragged him to the hospital at like four am.”

“Try two.” Stiles grumbles, mostly incoherent.

“Peter decided that Stiles was going to be his daughter's godfather, and dragged him to this hospital in the middle of the night. We're just now leaving. Stiles forgot his phone, forgot everything, until just now. He was pretty much asleep.”

“Oh. Wow. He's a godfather, huh? Tell him to call me whenever he wakes up.” There's something off in Danny’s voice, but Derek can't place, and he's too tired to care. “And don't forget baby pics, okay?”

“I'll let him know. He was flailing, because he'd forgotten. It's not his fault, don't be mad at him.”

“I'm not mad, Derek.” Danny sighs. “A little annoyed, but not at Stiles. Not at anyone, really. Just...”

Derek doesn't try to untangle that; he's not as wiped as Stiles, but he's damned tired. “Good, it's really not his fault. I'll leave him a note to call you. You're coming to his party, right?”

“Party?” Stiles mumbles, still stumbling towards the car.

“Hush, we're throwing you a party for your birthday.” Derek refocuses on the phone. “You are coming, right? Stiles wants you there.”

“Of course I'm coming, Stiles is my boyfriend.” Derek has to work to not bristle at Danny’s possessive tone.

“Kay, good, you can meet my new baby cousin at the party. Elizabeth Claudia.”

“Oh, gods, we gave her a mouthful of a name.” Stiles whines.

“We're gonna call her Beth.” Derek reassures him. “It's okay, Stiles. It's a good name.”

“Stiles helped name... wow, your family is weird. Cool, but weird.”

Derek looks at his phone – how had he forgotten he was talking to Danny?
“We are what we are,” He shrugs. “Kay, I’m taking Stiles home, now.”

“You sound exhausted, Derek. Sleep on his couch or something.” Danny advises. Again, that odd note.

Derek gives another shrug. “Maybe. ‘pends.”

“Be careful. Let me talk to Stiles, make sure you two make it there. I can come get you?”

“I can drive, Māhealani.”

“Fine. Just... be careful. You've got Stiles with you.”

“I'm always careful of Stiles.” Derek protests.

“I know you are,” Danny says quietly.

It's jealousy. That's what that weird note in Danny’s tone is, it's jealousy.

Nope. Not dealing with that. “Here's your boyfriend; he misses you.”

“I do.” Stiles tells Danny solemnly. “You don't even... I’m sorry I forgot, but baby!”

“It's a good excuse.” Danny sounds amused. Derek tunes them out and concentrates on driving; otherwise, he'll think about why he's so pleased that Danny’s jealous, and that?

That's a bad thought.

### Interlude: Silver tarnished rust

*Seething, Gerard handed over his identification to the moronic guard on duty. It was fake, of course; his son would be looking for his name on the list of Kate’s visitors, and the last thing he wanted was to deal with Chris and his self-righteousness.*

*Especially after his last meeting with the Conclave.*

*Finally, after too many stupid questions, Gerard was allowed to see his daughter.*

“Orange really isn't your color.”

*Her eyes narrow, pinning him with a petulant glare. “I'm a winter, daddy, I can pull off anything.”*  

*He can't help the derisive snort. “Then why are you here?”*  

“That little slut played me!” She hisses back.

Gerard shifts in his seat, made uncomfortable by the malicious light in his daughter's eyes. He'd never been unnerved by her before, and damned if he let her see that he was now.

“I think 'slut' may not be the appropriate choice of descriptor, darling.” Gerard smirks at her, staring Kate down, reasserting control. “The sheriff’s son, really, Kate?”

“How the hell was I supposed to know that?” She's frustrated, Gerard realizes.

“You should have realized his age.” That's the part that made Gerard angry. Hale had been bad
enough, and he was both almost legal and a monster. But the fourteen-year-old son of the local sheriff?

Kate just rolls her eyes. “If they're old enough to get hard…”

“But he wasn't, was he?” Two could play at this game, glaring back and forth as they were.

“Little bitch is a fag.” Kate spits out, fury blooming across her cheeks and heightening her resemblance to her mother. “He played me, daddy – he's with them.”

Gerard tilts his head and studies her while he considers her words.

“It's possible.” He allows. “But we don't know. Until we do…” The look he pins her with causes his daughter to flinch. “We have other problems.”

“Sir?”

“That damn half-breed is here.”

Gerard shouldn't feel the pleasure he does, watching his daughter – his only true child – strangle herself at the thought of the half-breed. He can't seem to help himself; much as he hates the girl with every iota of his being, hates that she has finagled her way into the Conclave and spread her lies of tolerance and restraint, he hates weakness more. His daughter's fear of the girl was nothing but.

“She was in Ohio! With the human half of her family.”

He mentally applauds the sneer Kate summoned up. “And now she is here. Working with the Hales.”

“But why? It doesn't make any sense, daddy!”

Gerard sighs, because he hates doing this. But it's necessary. To teach, one must often demonstrate; it's a lesson Gerard had forgotten, and now they're paying for it.

“My oversight, I'm afraid. She also has family in Redding. Presumably, she met the Hale Pack through the Monroe Pack. And we both know she's a little busy-body. The presence of your brother and sister-in-law probably peaked her curiosity, and now she's hooked.”

“Fucking fae.” Kate mutters.

“But don't worry,” He slips into archaic Latin to finish, “You'll be gone before the fortnight's out.”

“Sir?” A guard yells. “I have to ask you to stick to English!”

“My apologies, officer.” He sends a charming smile across the room. “It's Latin, translates as “Even the moon must rest and renew.” Just a little word of... encouragement.”

Kate’s eyes light up with unholy joy; father and daughter smirk at each other.

She'll be out the night of the new moon.

This was the third time the Hales had escaped them; the first time, when Gerard sent Hunters after the Alpha's mate, his damned son and his wife interfered, did the clean-up Gerard had expected the wolves to do. The second time, neither he nor Kate was able to get close, though the Hale boy
should have been an easy target, with his girlfriend traumatized as she was by some other wolf. The boy should have been ripe for the plucking, hating his kind and loathing himself.

Kate had gotten close, this time. Maybe a little too close, if she was that thrown off her game by a fourteen-year-old brat.

Well, if he was working with the Hales, he would burn with the rest of the Pack.

If he wasn't, Gerard would repay his interference three-fold; no one hurt his daughter.

Not even children.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Pack Traditions are upheld.
Stiles has a birthday.
And the Packs gather...

Chapter Notes

Holy gods, people.
I truly expected this little fic to just sort of... float, for a few people to notice but mostly that it wouldn't catch anyone's eye [especially because it's unrated]

Just. Wow. I cannot thank you all enough for the support and comments and kudos. Seriously.

So have another chapter! We're now at the end of my pre-written stuff, so it might slow down a bit. But hopefully not a lot -- I've received actually threats, ya'll, that's motivation! [I was threatened with having cookies withheld. i'm just saying] Honestly, the response is enough to drive me back to my keyboard, typing away at the next chapter.
Thank you all, so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

June 20th, 2012

Stiles is almost vibrating, he's so nervous. “What if I – “

“You won't drop Beth, Stiles.” Sarah repeats patiently. He's asked at least a dozen times. “Now, we need to hurry, it's almost sunset.”

“What were you guys thinking, picking me?”

“Hush, Little Red.” Peter orders absently. “We picked the right people.”

Giving in, Stiles sighs and picks up the basket Talia had given him earlier. It was Stiles job to carry baby Beth to the nemeton for her saining.

He'd had to look that up – he hated looking like he didn't know basic things – and walked away thinking it was just another type of christening. A special naming ceremony, to introduce the new baby to the world.

Which would be fine, if he hadn't somehow ended up being responsible for this new life – who the
hell thought it was a good idea to have Stiles, of all people, carry a baby?

In the woods?

So he stumbled along, keeping the basket and Beth away from the ground, the trees, random plants... he kept tripping, but managed to not drop the baby.

He deserved a medal.

Then he was standing on the north side of the enormous tree-trunk that was the nemeton, facing Star standing to the south. She'd just appeared, out of nowhere, when the bottom of the sun hit the top of the Sierra Nevadas in the distance. Stiles was standing in for Earth and Star for Fire.

Peter and Sarah – standing at east and west, Air and Water, respectively – tipped back their heads and howled.

At that summons, the rest of the local Pack showed up: Derek, Laura, Cora, Issac and James in a group, Jon and Terry and Mary and her aunt Steph, Brian and Rose and their four kids, then Talia trailed by John, Victoria, Chris and Allison.

Behind them came half-dozen or so members of the two closest sub-Packs, led by Talia's sisters. Stiles didn't know them anywhere near as well as he should, being as they were mostly just Derek and Cora’s aunts, uncles and cousins. Amber, the elder of Talia's younger sisters, had a Beta who wasn't her wife or one of their children; Talia's other sister, Rowan, had her husband and twin boys.

Talia leapt atop the stump after taking the baby basket from Stiles, balancing it so smoothing, little Beth didn't seem to notice the acrobatics. Talia set her down gently, then straightened holding the most gorgeous antique sword.

“We are gather today, to introduce a new member to the Pack, to Mother Moon and Father Sky; Mother Earth and Father Sun. Let all in the Pack bear witness!”

The wolves howl again, raising every hair on Stiles' body.

“Who brings this child before our Grandparents?”

“We do.” Peter and Sarah say as one. “We have brought her forth.”

“And what have you brought her to?”

“I brought her to the guardian of Flame.” Sarah says, nodding to Star.

“I brought her to the guardian of Earth.” Peter says a beat later with a nod to Stiles.

“Guardian!” Talia leans over Star, sword aimed directly at her left eye. “What say you?”

Star lifts her chin. “I say she has been brought to me, and is mine by oath as she is Water's by blood. I swear that I shall guard her all of my days. I swear by my name.”

There's a gasp at that, from everyone who knows anything about Star, and every wolf flings their hands over their ears to block out the name Star whispers to Talia.

There's a strange shock that runs through the circle, and Talia sways slightly. Then she composes herself and whirls on Stiles, sword balanced and aimed for his eye this time.

“Guardian – what say you?”
“I s-say she has been brought to me.” Stiles takes a deep breath, trying to still the flock of eagles that replaced the butterflies that normally haunt his stomach “And she is mine by oath as she is Air's by blood. I swear that I shall guard her all of my days. I swear – “What can Stiles swear by? He isn't Fae, to be held by his name...

Something sparks in his mind, a connection he hadn't made before, and Stiles pulls his spine straight, meeting Talia's gaze with all his strength. “I swear by my will!”

That strange shock runs through the circle again, and Talia gives him a proud nod.

“Heard and witnessed!” She slams the sword down next to the baby basket; drives it halfway down it's length into the huge stump.

“Heard and witnessed!” Comes the answering roar from the assembled group.

“Now.” Talia picks up the basket, leaving the sword for now, and jumps down next to Sarah. “That part's done. Ready for the party?”

“More than.” Sarah accepts custody of her daughter back. “After you, Alpha mine.”

Derek finally finds Stiles alone in the kitchen, and doesn't hesitate. He's been trying to get the boy alone for hours, wanting to show him how proud he is.

“What made you think of that?”

“What?” Stiles jumps and flails. “Dude, I swear, I’m going to be the youngest heart attack victim in all history!”

“Your heart is fine. And what made you say 'will'? Mom said we couldn't tell you, but most of the time people swear on their lives.” Derek is glad Stiles hadn't sworn by his life, even if he'd never heard of anyone actually dying if their godchild came to harm. The legends all say it could happen...

Stiles shrugs, embarrassed, by the scent of him. “I don't know. You're right, no one gave me so much as a hint. I just... I needed to find something equal to Star's name, right?”

Derek smiles at him, a bit more fondly than he meant to, but he's so proud; he can't imagine how John feels. “It was a good guess. It worked, so it obviously was the correct thing.”

“I was scared.” Stiles admits, and Derek preens a little, internally, because Stiles would never admit that to anyone else, except maybe his dad. “That I was gonna fuck it up, and then what happens to Beth?”

“Nothing.” Derek is quick to reassure him. “And nothing would have happened to you – you'd still have been her godfather. It just... wouldn't have been as deep? I don't know how to explain.” Maybe he shouldn't; the tie between Stiles and Beth is deeper than most ties; the only tie Derek knows of that would be deeper, aside from the blood tie of family, would be the tie between mates...

Stiles nods, and Derek loses his train of thought. “No, I get it. Legally, or whatever, I’d have been her godfather, but not in the eyes of God. The gods?”

“Same thing.” Derek shrugs. “It's actually pretty rare, for both godparents to be accepted like that.”
“Must be weird for Star.” Stiles amused always smells like spun sugar, and Derek leans a little closer. “She hasn't done the first part yet.”

Derek feels a brow raise without his permission, curiosity overtaking him.

Stiles obliges his unspoken question. “In the delivery room, she told us that when she was at the saining, she didn't realize that she was the one who named her Elizabeth. Actually, before then, she told Peter that he told her that Beth was born right before one.”

“That's... have you ever considered how weird it is, to be her?”

“Dude. Remember who you're talking to?” Stiles laughs, and Derek lets a smile flit across his face. Stiles’ laughter is contagious when he's truly happy, and Derek doesn't see it enough. “I'm not her, no, but I still have random memories of times that haven't happened yet, and hopefully never will.”

That gives Derek a moments pause. “I guess... it doesn't seem to really affect you? So I don't have my face rubbed in it, like I do with Star.”

“Lucky you.” Stiles sighs, then smiles. “But I’m actually really, really glad I do remember – it helps me with things. Not everything, not the things I want, I didn't remember anything about Kate until after...” Stiles shakes that subject off. “Like, I finally figured out what it was with Jackson that's been bugging me.”

“Oh?” What wasn't there about Jackson that wouldn't bug Stiles, honestly, the guy was a jerk.

“His dad told me how his birth-parents were killed. It reminded me, a lot, of...” Stiles looks away before continuing cautiously. “Of how your dad was killed. Or the cover story, anyway, I don't know how he was killed. But the abandoned SUV crashed into his car, so. I was researching Packs, have been off and on for months, but the other night when we were telling scary stories, I remembered talking to you about a Pack that had disappeared when you were a baby. It was the bogey-man story for you.”

Derek scowls. “I've never told you about that.”

“Not yet. I was... I think I was seventeen in the memory? Anyway, it's what led me to finding Jackson's birth-parents' Pack. Well, the Pack I think was his, anyway. I need to find someone who knew them, check and make sure.”

“Jackson's a wolf?” Derek asks incredulously.

“No, but I'm pretty sure his dad was one. He could take the Bite, easy.”

“Hm.” Derek wasn't sure what to say to that. What to think about that.

“Yeah. Now that he's getting along with his parents... he's less of an ass.”

“And you think he should get the Bite for just being less of a jerk?”

Stiles flushes. “No. But, dude, he should have grown up like this. Should have the same option Shelby and the other human pups have. Will you help me talk to Talia?”

Derek frowns. “I... let me think about it. I’m not saying you're wrong, but... but this isn't the right time. Let me talk to Jackson some, over the summer. Make sure he isn't going to revert. And then, we talk to Peter first. Get the Second's perspective.”
Stiles eyes him, confused, but nods.

Derek knows he's being a bit silly, but he can't help but feel over-protective, especially when he remembers how Jackson hit Stiles.

He's tried to make up for it, but Derek isn't sure he's really changed.

Someone has to protect Stiles.

**June 27th; 2012**

He was fifteen.

Fifteen!

Last year, on this day, he and Scott had gone to the arcade with dad and Scott's mom, and it had been fun, sure. They'd played every game, even the lame ones, and pigged out on pizza but that was okay, because that was the point. He'd worked hard to not be depressed. Turning fourteen had been fun, but Stiles had known that this was his life, that every birthday was going to be some version of this.

Sometimes, Stiles was happy to be wrong.

There were more people at the Hale house for his birthday party than had been at the entire arcade. Even Jackson showed up, pretending to be dragged by Lydia, but he'd bought Stiles a new lacrosse stick and wrapped a red bow on it.

His dad and Peter manned the barbeque, lording it over high schoolers and Pack alike, serving up steak and chicken and hamburgers only after the requisite begging had been judged.

Except for Stiles. It was his birthday. Or Lydia, of course; she wouldn't beg to Zeus, she certainly wasn't going to stoop so far as to beg mere mortal adults.

After they ate, and ate some more, and then had cake and ice cream... well, then there'd been the game. The wolves had made sure to disperse themselves evenly between the teams, and for awhile it had been Laura against Derek, until a hissed order from Talia had them separated and sheepish.

“Sorry, little man.” Laura had called. “You know how sibling rivalry gets.”

Stiles had shrugged with good humor, because it had been hilarious, watching Jackson fume at how good Derek and Laura were. Guy thought he was God's gift, so it was nice seeing him taken down a peg or two, even if they were sorta-friends now.

His dad had shocked him silly; he came downstairs this morning to find his mom's jeep, refurnished and ready to drive. When he'd just stared at it, John laughed. And explained how Stiles was qualified to get his license early, between his dad's working all the time and Stiles' technically having a part-time job with Deaton. It was actually training, but Talia was paying him for all the training he did, so he probably counted. He couldn't drive yet, had to take tests, but...

Danny had given him his gift the night before, climbing in Stiles' window after his dad left for a night shift. Stiles had handed the watch over to Talia before the game – it was too expensive, not to mention awesome, to risk. He didn't have the faintest clue where Danny had found it, and suspected that Jackson and Lydia had helped him get it – custom Batman Rolex. Even if they broke up tomorrow after the worst break-up in history, Stiles was going to treasure that watch.
Not to mention the rest of last night. Stiles leaned against the tree, watching his friends run back across the field, remembering it. They hadn't gone as far as Stiles had been prepared to, but that was Danny’s choice.

“We’re not ready. And I do mean we, Stiles.” Danny had been much calmer than the moment called for, actually “I've never done this.”

“Really?” Stiles wasn't sure if he should believe him, but he didn't want to call Danny a liar.

Danny just laughed. “I’m barely two years older than you are, Stiles. Blowjobs are as far as I’ve gone. I’m good with blowjobs, actually. If you are?” He’d turned a bit shy, then, and Stiles hadn't even tried to hide his grin.

“I'm more than good.” And he was – he'd been nervous about what he thought they'd be doing; willing, but nervous as hell. This was... easier. Better.

"Are you sure? Because if you're still – "

"I'm sure.” Stiles didn't want to think about Kate, let alone talk about her any more. She'd already stomped his budding sex life, causing Danny to retreat back to first base for months; he wasn't about to let her interfere with this, all this time later. “I'm beyond sure.” He whispered into Danny’s neck, then slid further down, showing just how sure he was.

Seriously, this birthday couldn't get any better.

Derek slipped into his room, startling Stiles, who was taking a break from his party.

“Bell, dude, I’m not even joking!”

He rolls his eyes. “I'm not wearing a bell, Stiles. Give it up.”

“Then stop creeping around worse than Peter.”

“Whatever.” Derek mumbles, stepping around the boy and opening the bottom drawer of his desk.

He pauses, present still in the drawer, suddenly unsure. Stiles had found the perfect gift for him; what if this was stupid?

“Der? What's wrong, sourwolf?”

“Nothing.” He doesn't mean to snap, just... Stiles gets under his skin so easily. It doesn't really makes sense, he likes Stiles, why does he always end up being so short with him?

“Sure. Sorry.” Stiles mumbles it, smelling sad. Again. Why does Derek always make him sad? How does Derek... he shouldn't affect Stiles like this. He shouldn't care... damn. Just, damn.

“No. I’m sorry, I just...” Derek sighs, giving in. “I'm nervous.”

“Huh?” Stiles gapes at him. “I didn't even think that was possible. How are you, of all people, nervous?”

“I just. You got me, you thought about it so much.” Derek stops trying to find words, and pulls out the chest instead.
It's not that big, a foot long, maybe half that wide and deep; a deep reddish-brown in color, the top of the polished wooden chest has an intricate carved triskelion, an exact match for the Hale Pack crest. It contained a lot more room than seemed possible, some combination of the nestled shelves and some sort of magic – Derek was sure it was actually magic, some sort of spatial distortion – granting more physical space than possible given it's dimensions.

Stiles' jaw drops, his eyes so wide they must hurt. “What is that?” His voice is reverent, not quite a whisper, and a flush a pride travels up Derek’s face.

“Your birthday present.” Derek says simply.

“Dude.” Actually a whisper. “This is...” Stiles opens the top, and his eyes get impossibly bigger.

There are clamps in the lid, holding a small dagger, wand, chalice, stone ball, and mirror. They're a matched set; the wand, the hilt of the dagger, the chalice and the frame of the mirror are made of rosewood like the chest, polished and beautiful. All five tools bore the same triskelion as the chest itself; the dagger has it etched into the blade, the wand has it carved on it's base, the chalice has it carved on three sides of it's cup, the stone has it floating deep in it's center, and the mirror has it etched across it's entire face. The pommel of the dagger holds a small crystal, the same type of stone as the ball, if smaller; the tip of the wand holds another, the chalice has one set in the center of each triskelion and the mirror has several miniature crystals around it's frame. The tools are a wonder, and the set should cost several thousand dollars.

Derek chuckles at the look of shock on Stiles face. “I know, right? They came with the chest, free of charge. But there's more. Look.”

Derek pulls out the top shelf; it slides up easily, supported by clever arms, and sports several small drawers, neatly labeled. “Open them.”

Stiles does, one at a time, then pulls up the next shelf. There are five shelves, with anywhere from three to seven drawers, each full of some herb or regent. Under the shelves sits a bag holding over a dozen miniature pillar candles, of every color imaginable, and a book, hand-made paper and bound in more rosewood. “What's this?”

Derek can only shrug. “The woman who sold it to me said that most new practitioners needed a place to keep their most important notes and ideas. I asked if it had a name, and she laughed. Said 'the new witches, they that call themselves wiccan, call it a Book of Shadows. Silly name. It already has a name, lad. 'tis a book.’” Derek mimics her accent and intonation exactly. “So. It's your book.”

“It's my... Der.” Stiles looked up at him, tears making his eyes luminous.

Derek’s stomach flips at the sight.

“Happy birthday, Stiles.” Derek said softly.

“It's too much.” Stiles protests weakly.

Derek bites back a laugh. “You'd be surprised. She didn't charge me for anything but the herbs. Said that the rest were looking for who they belonged to. I'd been feeling guilty, thinking you'd have found them when we all went to the Faire, except her whole shop was just gone when we went.”

“She – gone?” Stiles looked back and forth between Derek and the chest several times, biting his lip and blinking quickly. “Really? Only the herbs, you promise?”
“I swear, Red.” Derek meets his eyes, trying to show the truth of his statement.

After another minute of uncertainly chewing his lip, almost driving Derek to fits with how he wants to stop the abuse, Stiles starts to smile. “It's awesome, Der. It's seriously, so incredibly…”

Suddenly, Stiles flings himself forward, draping over Derek’s lap to hug him tightly.

His stomach flips again, and he gently hugs the boy back.

“I'll be careful of everything, Der! I promise, I’ll be careful and do everything right and protect everyone and make you so proud of me!”

“I already am.” He says quietly. “I always will be.

Stiles was wrong.

Derek was the coolest, most awesome werewolf ever. Not that he'd tell Talia, he wouldn't want to hurt her feelings.

Then again, Talia has to know how awesome her son is, right?

Stiles hadn't even realized that he wanted a gift from Derek; all that time he'd spent, trying to find something perfect for his birthday, had just seemed to Stiles to be necessary. Bonding with the one member of his new Pack that didn't seem as enthusiastic about him.

But when Derek pulled out that chest... at that moment, Stiles realized why he'd been feeling a bit down, despite how wonderful everything was. He knew Derek couldn't have forgotten it was his birthday, he'd helped plan the party, for the gods' sake!

Stiles had thought the party was his present from all the Hales.

Until Derek gave him the chest.

But the present wasn't the chest (which, if Derek is to be believed, doesn't really come from him at all, but rather was just trying to get to Stiles, in that creepy way all mystical tools have) or even the collection of herbs and salts and everything inside.

No, the present was Derek’s quiet, but unequivocal, faith and support in Stiles chosen path.

And Stiles will do whatever it takes to live up to that.

July 3rd, 2012

Stiles can't hide his grin, doesn't bother, when every wolf in the clearing growls in unison at the fireworks. “It's too funny, Terry!” He's happy to have something to laugh at; Danny’s been gone for two days, but it feels like forever.

“They do this every year.” She giggles right back. “Can't go for a proper run, might get drunken patriots on their territory, and besides, there's the dreaded invasion of sparks!”

John joined them on the lawn, as amused by the werewolves as his son and Terry. “Where's Rose? Shouldn't she be here, watching her husband and the rest act like puppies in a thunderstorm?”
“She's doing something 'important' with Star.” Terry answered, shrugging. “They do it every year. Won't tell us what it is. Actually,” Terry looks at Stiles, “Be prepared to join them in a few years.”

“Huh?” So it wasn't eloquent, it was a perfectly good word that got Stiles' confusion across.

“Star seems to think you'll be more... active? That's probably the best way to describe it – She thinks you'll be more active than Alan ever bothered.”

“Alan's too wrapped up in his 'neutrality’.” Stiles snipes back. Alan Deaton's vaunted neutral status continually got on the boy's nerves, not least because Alan couldn't even freaking explain what the hell he meant by 'neutral'.

“True.” Terry just nods genially. “But you aren't neutral. Star thinks that you'll want to be active in taking care of the land.”

“What does that mean?” John merely sounded curious, but Stiles knew it was more than that; his dad was a giant worry-wart. Stiles came by it honestly, from both parents, after all.

“I...” Terry wrinkled her nose. “I don't actually know any specifics. Something about wards and shields and early warning systems... I don't do magic.” Then she grins, taking years off her age with the sheer mischief it entailed. “I'm just a giant leech on the Pack, you know?”

“Terry!” Stiles couldn't help but sound scandalized.

“What?” John sounded offended.

“Think about it – I’m not a wolf. I’m not magic.” She nods at Stiles. “I'm not even a sheriff who can help them hide supernatural stuff from the world. I'm just a plain-ole vanilla human with nothing cool.”

“Can it.” John sounds kind of mad, actually, warming up a colossal dad-speech, and Stiles grins. His dad had integrated into the Pack even more seamlessly than Stiles himself. “That's bull, and you know it. Humans help anchor the Pack, remind them why they need to come back their human sides. We bring stability and rationality. Besides,” John lets some of the hardness leech out of his voice, casting a conspiratorial grin to Terry. “You bake. No one else is brave enough to give me cupcakes.”

Stiles shoots upright in his lawn chair. “You're giving him cupcakes!”

“They're low-carb, low-fat cupcakes, Stiles.” Terry soothes him. “I know better.”

“Good. Because Tee'll kill you, if I don't.”

John “humphs” at that, sounding more annoyed than he is. Stiles knows he's not annoyed, and he doesn't have any reason to be – after all, Stiles and Talia finding out about his new heart problems led to John finding new heart issues altogether.

Now they just have to come clean to Stiles.

“Any word on...” Terry cuts her eyes to Stiles, who rolls his eyes.

“Yeah, dad – any word on Kate?” He'd stopped giving her the respect of her last name after she escaped from prison.

John frowns. “No. There's no trail, nothing. The jail's audit came clean – I know, I was part of it.
Power went out, there was a riot. Power came back, no Kate Dewitt. Argent. Whatever the hell her name is."

"Argent." Chris says mournfully, coming and sitting on the ground next to John. "Sure you don't want to hit me? The offer's still open."

"I'm sure." John says stiffly.

Stiles didn't hear about it for a long time, and when he had, he'd been horrified; the day after his dad arrested Kate, Chris had gone to their house, drunk off his ass and crying. He'd begged John to beat him, feeling like what happened to Stiles was his fault.

"Stop it, sensei." Stiles made his voice as hard as he could. "Unless you somehow made Kate do what she did, it isn't your fault."

"I know. I just..." Chris shakes his head. "Conclave wants to find her, too. Her and my fa – Gerard."

"They do?" That was new and fascinating. "Why?"

"There was a string of incidents that matched what she was planning here." Chris has that thousand-yard stare going again, the one that made Stiles want to kiss his dad's feet for being sane. "Chances are real damn good that she seduced other weres, of various type and age. And killed I don't even know how many innocents. Even those who think no werewolf can be innocent are disgusted; they've killed at least twenty humans. Most of them children."

Stiles heard a crunch, turned to see his dad crumpling his can of diet soda, spilling it on the grass. "Dad?"

"That's... I'm so sorry, Chris."

"I'm the one who needs to be saying that, John."

"Damn it, Chris." It was weary-sounding, but then his dad was tired. "Stop. Just stop."

"I'll stop when they do." Chris returned flatly.

"Any way to get anything official? Maybe we can get the FBI looking for them?"

Chris looked shocked, then thoughtful. "I'll ask. It never – we're not used to working with police."

John nods. "But this time, you are. No reason not to, when you can."

"True. I'll get Vic to talk to the Matrons. It's a good idea."

Stiles beams at his dad and his mentor. "They'll find her, Chris." He's confident; she was too proud, too reckless. She'd mess up soon.

"That they will." His dad agreed. "And Chris, as her brother, I want you to look at some of the security feeds when you get a chance."

"Why?" Chris doesn't seem unwilling, just wary.

"I think her last visitor was Gerard."

"He was blacklisted." Stiles protests.
John gives his son a rueful frown, then shrugs. “No one by that name visited. But going by the description you and Vic gave, Chris... I could be wrong, but he looks an awful lot like the picture you approved from the sketch artist.”

Chris just closes his eyes. “I wish we'd killed him when he didn't deny he instigated the attack on David.” He admits.

“But wouldn't it better to watch him rot in jail?” John tries to cheer Chris up.

Chris just shrugs. “I don't care if it's in jail or six feet under, so long as he rots.”

“Cheers to that.” Terry clinks her beer against Chris’.

“Amen.” John adds.

July 28th, 2012

Derek pauses at the top step, looking over the lawn, scrutinizing it.

He's not sure for what, exactly. It's not even his job, to check things, but he feels like he needs to. It's been five years since the last full reunion. Oh, they have the entire Pack here every year, but not the related Packs – the Monroe Pack, that Steph's joining soon, the Ross Pack, that she and Jon and dad had come from, the tiny Barnes Pack, made up of mom's aunt Violet and her family. And Deucalion was coming, like he did every few years. Last time there was a huge reunion had been perfect, but his dad had been here for that one

John was great, but he wasn't dad; he wasn't a wolf, wasn't prepared for this. Hell, Derek’s not even sure that mom and John are actually together, yet. She'd told him that they were mates, but...

Stiles seems sure that they are, just being... quiet.

Derek isn't as sure.

Yeah, they smell like each other. But no more than, say, mom and Peter. Which is an image he never wants in his mind, what the hell, brain?

Derek whines to himself and refocuses on the front yard. It's clean, none of the random toys and equipment that normally litter the yard. The picnic tables are set out, not in tidy rows because who wants to be regimented? But scattered in small groups, so that the sub-Packs and related Packs can sit together without closing themselves off from the larger group.

Steph was setting up the grill, more excited than anyone – she was finally, finally getting to officially announce her engagement, and the Monroe Pack was already in town in anticipation of the reunion that starts tomorrow.

Derek goes to see if she needs any help.

Steph gives a small start when she turns to him, sheepish look on her face. “Don't do that, little-D.”

“I'm not little anymore.” Derek points out with as much asperity as he can.

The grin melts away, replaced by something Derek can't name. “I know. I almost called you David.”

“I – what?”
“You look just like him, you know.” Steph looks away, out into the woods that border their property. “And I look up, and I forget, it keeps happening. You're so much like him, sometimes.”

Derek blinks away tears. “Thank you.”

“That wasn't a compliment.” She mock growls. “You're broodier than he ever was, though.”

“For the last time, I’m not broody.” Derek has no idea where anyone got the notion that he broods, let alone why everyone was agreeing with it now, but he was sick of it.

“Yes you are!” Came the sing-song voice of Stiles, and Derek rolls his eyes. He'd blame the boy for the broody tag, if it hadn't already been in use before he showed up.

Stiles flails his way out of a tree, almost falling twice. Derek finds himself standing below him, braced to catch him, before he even knows that he moved.

“What are you doing?” He demands, horrified.

“Pinata.” Stiles says serenely. “It'll be fun!”

“Not if you break your neck putting it up! Whose idea was it to let you hang a pinata?”

“I tried to do it, but he wouldn't hear of it.” Steph sounds annoyed, but smells amused. “Who am I to argue with Princess Red?”

“I'm a boy, Steph.”

“Yet somehow, still a Princess.”

Stiles just rolls his eyes, muttering something, then throws himself out of the tree at Derek.

“You're going to break something.” Derek grits through his teeth.

“Nah.” Stiles smiles, bright and huge and trusting. “You're here to catch me.”

“Save me from blind idiots.” Steph mutters, walking away.

Derek freezes.

“You can let me down.” Stiles sticks his tongue out at Steph, twisting in Derek’s arms.

Derek doesn't move.

“Derek?” Stiles pats his face. “Der? You in there, sourwolf?”

He blinks slowly. “I. Yeah.” Carefully, Derek sets Stiles down.

“You okay?”

“I don't – I just realized, I need to talk to my mom.”

Derek flees.

“What the hell?” Derek can't stop hearing Stiles. “Steph? What's wrong with Derek?”

“Huh?” She sounds as confused as Stiles. “I dunno, Red. Did you hurt yourself in that tree?”
The image of Stiles lying on the ground, broken and bleeding after falling from the tree, flashes across his mind as Derek paces outside Talia's office. She's in there with the Alpha of the Monroe Pack, their Emissary and Deucalion, and Derek knows better than to interrupt.

“No, didn't even get a scrape. But why would that freak Derek out?”

“You know we sometimes have problems with blood, if he smelled it and didn't expect it…”

“I'm not bleeding,” Stiles asserts firmly. “So why'd he run off?”

Steph sounds confused, and maybe a little worried. “I don't know. He said he remembered something he needed to talk to Tee about, so. There's three Packs here, and the Alpha-pack, plus all the rest of ours. It's probably something time sensitive.”


The door to his mom's office opens, finally, and Derek steps away from the grouped Alphas.

“Derek?” Talia gives him a questioning look. “Something wrong?”

“I…” Derek closes his eyes and mentally slaps himself. “I need to talk to you when you get a moment, Alpha.”

She raises a brow at that; it's rare for her children to call on her as Alpha. Trista, Alpha of the Monroe Pack, smiles and excuses herself, followed by her Emissary Karl.

Deucalion eyes Derek. “Is there anything I can help with? Or Jeff; he'd love to help.”

Oh, this was the last thing he needed – Duke trying to help him. “That's kind of you, sir, but it's a bit more personal than that.”

This seems to amuse the Eldest. “Remember us if you need us. We'll see you at dinner, Talia.”

“Of course. And please remember – “

“What you said about the new pups, yes, yes.” Too composed to roll his eyes, Deucalion just nods genially and saunters off.

“He scares me.” Derek says too softly for anyone to overhear.

Talia hums. “Come in. What's wrong?”

“I don't know if wrong is the way to… it's something Steph said and it just, out of the blue…”

“What are you going on about? You sound like Stiles.”

“Yes, exactly!” Derek stops and bites his tongue. “Sorry. I just. He was in the tree, mom, like any of us would be, and he can't – “

“Derek.” Talia moves closer to her son, reaches up to cup his face. “You've seen the boy in trees before. You've helped him climb a fair few.”

“Then he threw himself out, just jumped from fifteen feet!” Derek grinds his teeth, not able to explain his agitation. “When I tried to get him to be careful, he just blew me off, said that I'd be there.”
Talia snorts. “No, sorry. It's just. He trusts you, honey.”

“I'm not always going to be there when he jumps out of trees!” Why isn't she getting this?

“I doubt he'd have done it, if you weren't there.” Talia points out. “Why is this bothering you?”

“We can't always be around!” Derek throws his hands up. “He pulls stupid stunts all the time, he's going to get hurt, and we, we can't – “

“Derek.” Her Alpha tone makes him freeze. “He's a teenage boy. Of course he does dumb things! He plays lacrosse, for one. But he doesn't do things like that without Pack around. He doesn't take stupid chances, trust me.”

“Just. Please, mom. Talk to him? I don't mind catching him, I don't, but if I’m not around to do it...”


**July 29th, 2012**

Stiles stands on the side of the road, across from Alan, and just breathes.

“Good, Stiles. Feel the land, it's beat, it's pulse. Let it flow through you. Yes, like that. Now, let it slip inside, welcome Her in.”

Something bubbled up, warm and old, gods so old Stiles can't even understand it. But it doesn't push, just flows into those spaces it can fit, like it knows where it's safe. Where it won't hurt him.

“Yes.” Alan says, and it echoes; Stiles hears it with his ears, but also his bones. “The land is us and we are the land. Be ready.”

“I'm ready.” Stiles hears himself say.

They wait.

How long, he isn't sure, but he doesn't think it's long; the sun has barely moved. A large group of vehicles comes down the road, let by an SUV with... his brothers and sisters?

The train of trucks and cars stops, and the lead SUV is emptied; four Emissaries walk up to Stiles. Why him, and not Alan, he isn't sure, but he knows they must have reason.

The first, a woman who reminds him too much of Alan, gives Stiles a shallow bow. “I am Marin Morrel, Emissary to Deucalion. We come in friendship” She offers Stiles her left hand.


Marins gives him a small smile and steps back. Stiles pulls his athame out of the ground, dips it in the bowl of rubbing alcohol, and cleans it quickly. He'll have to take proper care of it after the protracted welcoming ceremony is over; in the meantime, he repeats his actions with the other three emissaries.

That taken care of, both Stiles and Alan relax, letting their awareness of the land retreat.

Marin motions to the SUV she'd been driving. “It's still another mile to the house, ride with us?”
“Gladly.” Alan smiles at her, and it clicks; they're siblings.

“So which one of you is older?” Stiles can't help asking as he climbs into the SUV.

“Alan, of course.” Marin laughs. “He's much too serious to be someone's baby brother.”

“True that.” Stiles nods.

“But we're not new and exciting, you are. Fifteen, and already able to call the land?” Marin seems fascinated by Stiles.

But it just seems like a new person trying to get to know a new co-worker, so Stiles spends the drive talking about anything that pops into his head.

When they finally park, Alan chuckles. “Stiles is always this boisterous, yes. His endless energy will serve him, and his Pack, quite well.”

Marin gives him a small smile. “Good. It's been too long since you've trained anyone, Alan. It's nice to see you so enthusiastic.”

Alan just shrugs. “Most of the time, I have little to do. The duties aren't onerous.”

“Lucky you.” Marin mutters.

July 30th, 2012

Derek left early for his run; the sheer number of people in the house was making his wolf very, very unhappy.

It wasn't that they were strangers; it was that so many of them weren't Pack. No matter how the human side saw things, the wolf knew better.

The Ross Pack wasn't too bad – most of them were actually relatives on dad's side. He could have dealt with them.

The Monroe Pack also wouldn't have been too bad, if it had been only them. He knew them all, and with Steph marrying their Alpha's brother, they were somewhat related. Sort of.

The Barnes Pack was small, and honestly seemed almost swallowed up by the others; if Derek hadn't known they were a separate Pack, he'd peg the family of five as one of their sub-Packs.

But add the Eldest's Pack on top of all of them, and it was...

Yeah.

Maybe it was just Deucalion's Pack, at that. The Eldest Wolf scared Derek, now that he actually knew who he was. Last time he’d met Duke, he hadn't know, just thought he was a friend of mom's. Then all that stuff with Paige – and Duke had been awesome, there's no other word to describe it. He hadn't looked down on Derek for wanting a girlfriend, hadn't told him he was being stupid or immature. Hadn't blamed Derek at all, for what happened.

Derek blamed himself. If he hadn't gone for Paige, Jared Ennis never would have touched her in some insane bid to earn Derek’s loyalty. She wouldn't have almost died, her parents wouldn't have actually died, they'd be safe and happy.
Derek frowns and stops, thinking. They wouldn't be happy, would they? Not with what her uncle had been doing. Derek shivers, and pushes that away. They'd be safe, anyway.

But Duke – and Jeff, can't forget him, the guy lost his brother in all that – just did what was right.

Not because it was right, Derek doesn't think Deucalion, Eldest Wolf, thinks in terms of right and wrong; no, he thinks in terms like “correct” and “unacceptable”. Ethics colder than morals, if just as finely acted upon.

Jeff acted because it was right; Duke acted because it was correct. Derek isn't sure how to explain this to anyone else.

Deucalion leaves Derek cold.

Jeff...

Jeff was right behind him.

Derek spins, braced for an attack.

“Hey, man, didn't think I'd ever catch up with you.” Jeff gives him an approving nod. “You're damn fast, big guy.”

Derek relaxes by inches, realizing that Jeff isn't attacking. “I – sorry, I'm used to running alone.”

“That's cool, I can...” Jeff jerks his head, but it doesn't hide the hurt in his eyes.

“No, no, that's not... I just. I wasn't expecting company.”

“So it's okay?” Jeff looks up at Derek – and isn't that strange, that Derek’s now taller than he is? – a shy smile on his face. “I don't want to impose.”

“You will never be an imposition.” Derek tells him seriously. “You saved Paige.”

“Pretty sure she saved herself.” Jeff looks down, flustered.

“The only reason she was able to do that was you coming and telling my mom.” Derek sighs. “It was a mess, I won't lie. And I'm not lying when I say, if it wasn't for you, she'd be dead.”

“Still. I'd understand if you didn't want to look at me. Unwelcome reminder and all.”

“I want to remember.” Derek is stunned by this new realization. “I want to always remember that doing the right thing may be hard, but that it's worth it. That there are people who will do the right thing.”

Silence falls over them both, as Jeff absorbes what Derek says.

“I don't think I did anything special.” He finally admits. “I just quit lying to myself, stopped trying to justify what my brother was doing.”

“You think that isn't special?” Derek can't believe what he's hearing. “You were raised to obey your Alpha above all. That's fucked up enough, what your dad and brother did. But when he started breaking not just human law, but our law... going against what you were told all your life...” Derek shakes his head. “I'm not sure I could have done it.”

“You're stronger than you credit yourself, young master Hale.”
Derek stiffens at Deucalion's voice, coming from seemingly everywhere.

Jeff rolls his eyes. “He does this. Training, he says. Even though this is a vacation.”

“Training never ends.”

Derek does a double-take as Duke steps out from behind a tree. “Did you just quote Batman?”

Duke laughs. “Wisdom can come from any source.”

“With great power comes great oration?” Derek quips, and mentally thanks Stiles for hours and weeks and months of unrelenting pop-culture education.

“Exactly. Your mother and I were discussing you just the other day.”

“Really?” Derek throws a look at Jeff, who seems just as confused as he is.

“Really. Laura is her Heir, but we both see Alpha potential in you. And you've had no training.”

“What?” Derek can't seem to catch his jaw. “Me? No, I’m just a Beta. I’m not – “

“Two of Talia's younger sisters became Alphas. That's why there are sub-Packs, boy.”

“Well, yeah. But... but I’m a Hale.” Derek points out a little desperately. “Our Alphas are always women, from the first Hale on these lands through Laura.”

Duke cocks his head, studying Derek. “It's true that the primary Alpha has always been a woman. Well, from what I understand, not always. But I supposed your Red changed that, didn't he?”

“What? Stiles?” Derek is completely lost.

Duke nods. “From what your mother has told me, he changed a great deal when he came back through time. Not least, he somehow allowed the current Treaty, which kept a certain fugitive Argent from burning your family alive. It seems that originally, she succeeded, and only you and Laura escaped the fire. Peter survived it, in a coma. Eventually, you were the only Hale left alive, an alpha without a Pack. The ones young Stiles remembers as Pack? They were your Pack, picked by you, after your entire Pack was dead.”

“I don't... I... she didn't, she – I didn't! I never – “

“In that time, Paige was dead. And Argent found you sooner, in the depths of your grief, with no friends and estranged from Peter. The fire should have happened a year ago.” Deucalion gives him a cheery smile. “Remarkable boy, Stiles. This land seems to breed remarkable people.”

“Stiles belongs here.” Derek doesn't attempt to hide his fear.

Deucalion could not have Stiles.

Stiles was hi - was theirs.

Period.

“So he does. I won't steal your Red, boy.” Deucalion meets Derek’s gaze. “But if he ever wants to come to me, I’ll take him. Same to you; when your Alpha powers come, if you want to, you can join us.”
“You have mostly Alphas, sir. I don’t know how that works.”

Duke bares his teeth. “It works because I am the Eldest. We are content.”

“We really are.” Jeff puts in quietly. “I feel safe, like I never did before.”

“My Betas will tell you the same. Talk to them, Derek. Talk to Marin.”

“Sir.” Derek thinks quickly. “I’m only seventeen, and Stiles is only fifteen. We both have high school, and college.”

“Of course you do. But I’m a wolf, Derek. The Eldest Wolf. Patience is my only virtue.”

Deucalion disappears, leaving behind a shivering Derek and a contemplative Jeff.

“Where’s Derek?” Stiles finally demands, after breakfast.

Normally, the sourwolf beat him to the table, but Stiles hadn't seen him all morning.

“He went for a run.” Talia frowns, looking around. “But that was a couple of hours ago.”

“I’ll just go find him?” Stiles offers, seeing Deucalion come in the back door.

“No need, pup.” Duke calls cheerfully. “I just finished speaking with young master Hale, and came to talk with you.”

“Me, sir?”

“Of course! I have to greet all the new members, don’t I?”

“Have you spoken with Issac?” Stiles wants to kick himself as soon as the question is out – he remember Duke torturing Erica, Boyd and Cora, and now he's offering up Issac?

“I spoke to him last night. Will you and Talia join me for coffee?”

Stiles relaxes minutely. If Talia's there, it won't be so bad.

They retire to her office, sitting on the couches in front of the desk. “Tell me about yourself.”

“I... I don't know what to tell? I’m fifteen. I, um, I have a 'spark'. I skipped a grade, have the second highest GPA at school and play a lot of video games.”

“Good for hand-eye coordination and reaction time.” Deucalion nods approvingly. “I hear that you are taking lessons from the Argents, as well as Deaton. How do you find them?”

“Good. I... I already knew a lot of the basics. My dad's the Sheriff, you know?” Stiles feels like he needs to hammer home that he's not easy prey. He doesn't trust Deucalion as far as he could throw him.

He couldn't throw him at all.

“But they’re... well, Chris and Vic are tough teachers, but they aren't mean. They've got a system, I don't understand it, but it seems to be working. So I’m learning Eskrima for blade work, Krav Maga for hand-to-hand, and way too much archery. I’m much better with a gun than a bow,
though, because I’ve been shooting with dad since I was eight.”

“I remember the first time he took you to the range.” Talia muses reminiscently. “Your mother was half-convinced that you’d shoot yourself, and half-convinced you’d be a prodigy.”

Stiles can't stifle the chuckle, despite the flare of tears that prickle his eyes. “The truth was pretty much in the middle; I wasn't so bad I hurt anyone, but I didn't hit the target until my second clip.”

“And your other training? With Alan Deaton.”

Stiles returns his gaze to Deucalion. “That's... I think I’m moving faster than he wants me to, actually. He doesn't... he doesn't mind training me, exactly. I think he just. I don't know, doesn't want to have to do any of it? Wants to be just a vet. And he doesn't seem to get that I do, I want this.”

Deucalion frowns, nodding slowly. “Deaton was never as comfortable with his power as you are. And then, he blames his mother's death on her power.”

“Marin doesn't.” Stiles doesn't know why he knows, but he knows.

“No, she doesn't. And neither of them should; what happened with Marissa Deaton was tragic, but it would have happened even if she'd been as mundane as the local librarian. Wait, I should be clear that I’m speaking of the elderly lady who still treats me as if I might desecrate the books by breathing too loud; the younger librarian is a witch.”

“She is?” Stiles sits upright at that little tidbit. “How do you know? Can you smell something different, or is it something you can see?”

Duke outright laughs. “Star told me. You can't tell witches from normal humans, unless they're actively working something – when they do, you can smell something like ozone. Even you could smell it.”

Stiles wrinkles his forehead in thought. “I've never smelled ozone when I'm working.”

“You wouldn't.”

“But I also don't smell plants, like when Alan works.” Stiles frowns. “Which is odd, now that I think of it. Shouldn't I?”

“You aren't a druid, young Stiles.” Duke smirks; Talia looks surprised by his honesty.

“Then what? I'm not a witch, obviously.”

“You're ban-draoi.”

Stiles gapes at the man. “I've heard that before, where did I – Peter! He called Star that.”

“I'm sure he did; it's only because of her that we know.” Duke composes his face into it's natural grave lines. “It's a more difficult road than that of a druid, though it has the same roots.”

“What is it?” Stiles demands, forgetting his fear.

“Alpha Hale?” He defers to Talia.

She sighs. “Fine, leave me the difficult parts. It's sort of the inverse of a druid.”
Stiles gulps. “Like a darach? Star isn't evil, and I don't want to be!”

“No, an evil ban-draoi would be a ban-dur'ak. You aren't evil, Stiles, I promise.”

“Okay, yes. Good.” Stiles flails a bit, then nods firmly, emphasizing that he is not, so very not, not evil. “So I know it's not evil. It's the inverse of a druid. That would be, what? I work with cities?”

“Close.” Talia graces his with that proud smile. “Druids serve the land, right?” Stiles nods. “Ban-draoi, they serve the people.”

“Oh!” Stiles feels his mouth drop open. “Oh! So I don't get power from the land, but from you guys! But wait, the land gave me power yesterday.”

“This land is ours; land like this, dedicated to a family or a Pack or Pride or Coven... well, land like this is usable by druid and ban-draoi equally, so long as they are part of the group that is the land.”

“Alan can only take you so far.” Deucalion interjects smoothly. “I spoke with Star last night, she hopes to begin further training with you soon. Because Alan wishes to retire.”

“What? Can he do that?” Stiles turns to Talia, panicking.

She chuckles. “Of course he can. But don't worry, pup; it won't be tomorrow. Or even next year. He won't retire until you're ready.”

“But I think it won't be much longer than that.” Deucalion looks like a cat with cream, his satisfaction evident. “You're a bright lad, and your promise looks to live up to itself. I don't doubt you'll be pledging to the land before you expect it.”

“He won't until he's at least eighteen.” Talia says sharply. “And I prefer it, Stiles, if you wait until after college. It will make going away harder.”

“Wait, what? Pledging to the land?”

“It's a misnomer, in your case, but it isn't often that ban-draoi become Emissaries.” Deucalion explains. “It's the ceremony that makes you the official Emissary.”

“I become tied to the land?”

“No, the Pack. You are, as we keep saying, ban-draoi. But since the Pack is tied to the land, the effect is essentially the same.”

“I don't know if that's more cool or more terrifying.” Stiles admits.

“Why can't it be both?” Stiles shudders when Deucalion flashes his teeth in what he probably thinks is a smile; it's not.

After the Eldest left them, Derek found himself sitting on the ground, leaning against a trunk.

“Are you okay?”

Jeff seems honestly worried, so Derek doesn't snarl at him. “I don't know.” He admits.

“Duke can be a little... much.” Jeff agrees. “He doesn't mean to, he's just. He's old.”
“He doesn't look much older than Peter.” Derek points out; Peter was mom's youngest siblings, an full decade younger than her forty-five years. “I think that's what's so freaky.”

“Not just that.” Jeff laughs, then offers him a hand. “I keep telling him he freaks us young people out, but he just says that we have to learn to deal with him.”

“He didn't use to.” Derek confides a little sheepishly. “Before I knew.”

“Before you knew, he was hiding it.” Jeff grins. “That's probably part of the problem, the whip-lash.”

“You might be right. That, and he's the Alpha of a group that has four other Alphas in it.”

“Yeah. And Kali is... strange.”

“I remember.” Derek says quietly. “She came last time.”

“I know.” Jeff nods. “She still won't talk.”

“Really?” Derek can't wrap his mind around that. “I remember her from before; her sister married into the Roth Pack, I met her at the wedding. She was... she was bright. Happy. Her and her fiancee, I can't remember her name...”

“She had a fiancee?” Jeff seems surprised. “I wonder what happened to her?”

“You didn't know? Does Duke?”

Jeff frowns in the direction the Eldest had gone. “I don't know. I'll mention it.”

“He really needs to find out what happened.” Derek says intently. “I just, I have a bad feeling.”

“Really? Why?”

Derek gives an uncomfortable shrug; explaining Stiles was never easy. “Stiles' reaction, mostly. He looks at her and flinches, then looks over her shoulder like he's expecting there to be someone else.”

Jeff blinks at that, thinking. “He's the one with funky not-precognition?”

“Yes.” Derek says through his teeth, trying to not get mad; Jeff isn't trying to be rude. Doesn't realize that he's managing it anyway, probably.

“He seems like a fun kid, if a bit freaky. Not like Kali is, but that fore-sight thing.” Jeff shakes off his thoughts and refocuses on Derek. “Must be hard to get him gifts, huh?”

“Yeah, but not because...” Derek sighs. “It really isn't precognition, he doesn't see the future. He sees flashes of a different future, and in that one, nothing is like this.”

“I heard what Duke said. That's fucking up. But awesome, that he stopped it.”

“I'm afraid he only delayed it.” Derek doesn't realize he's spoken aloud until Jeff rears back. “Do you think I'm being paranoid?”

“Honestly?” Jeff gives him a solemn look. “I think you aren't being paranoid enough. The Conclave contacted Duke about the fugitive Argents – remind me to thank the Argents in your Pack for that – and asked him to warn every Pack he maintains contact with about them. If the
“Conclave is this worried...”

“Shit.” Derek mutters. “I need to...”

“No worries, man. I get it. But before you go, I need to confess something.”

Derek freezes. “What?” It's almost a growl.

“I... Duke wants you to get Alpha training training. I volunteered to give you the basics. If it's okay with you, he's going to ask your Alpha to let me stay.”

Derek looks at the older man in something close to shock. “That's... fuck, Jeff, I'm just a Beta.”

“Duke isn't wrong about your potential, Derek.” Jeff says earnestly. “And an Alpha without training is a time-bomb. I should know.” He chuckles bitterly.

Derek winces. “That wasn't your fault – that was your dad and your brother. Not you!” Derek isn't sure where this need to defend Jeff comes from, why he so badly wants to like the man.

It might be because Stiles had mentioned, casually, that Jeff should have died before Jared ever bit Paige. Somehow, he didn't, and because of that Paige had lived. Derek has learned to not question Stiles, not question the miracles that surround him.

Jeff puts his hands up in surrender. “Just, trust me here. You need the training. If you don't want me – “

“No! I mean, of course. I like you, Jeff.” Derek breathes, forces actual coherency. “Like I said before, you're a good guy. You do what's right. I'd rather you, than Duke, that's for sure.”

Jeff relaxes. “Okay, good. So I’ll let him know, and hopefully your mom'll agree.”

“I’ll talk to her.” Derek promises. “But I need to talk to uncle Peter. So....”

“Go.” Jeff smiles and waves him off.

Stiles... Stiles needs advice. It's obvious Talia trusts Deucalion, so Stiles isn't sure if she's the best person to ask. Also, she doesn't know about his research project.

Only Derek and Peter know.

Derek seems almost of wary of Deucalion as Stiles himself. And he doesn't really approve of the project, or at least doesn't approve of Jackson. Neither attitude is neutral.

Uncle Creeper it is.

He shoots off a text; *Hey, you got a few?*

*Always, for you*

*Great. Roof?*

Peter lopes down the back steps and scoops Stiles up. Stiles huffs, but wriggles around until he's wrapped around the man's back. “Gee-up!”
“I'll drop you.”

“You'd catch me before I hit the ground.” Stiles giggles.

“Still.” Peter swings off the branch onto the roof and kneels so Stiles can climb down. “What can I help you with.”

“It's about my project. Sort of.”

“Oh?” Peter raises a brow and Stiles flushes. He isn't sure what Peter thinks about the project; he'd never given any indication either way. But it embarrasses Stiles, sometimes, that he's putting this much effort into helping a guy that he used to loathe. Yeah, since everything, he and Jackson have gotten on....

But that was only recently. Stiles isn't sure if it's the sheer puzzle, or if he's holding out hope that finding out more would turn Jackson into a real boy, the boy Stiles can sometimes see under the giant asshole mask Jackson wears like a second skin.

Or maybe it's because there's that tug, sometimes, that says Jackson is Pack.

“There was that Pack that was wiped out, a couple years before Tee became Alpha. You said that we don't have treaties with anyone who had Treaties with them, but wouldn't...” Stiles jerks his head downward – he doesn't want to say Deucalion's name and draw his attention.

Peter's stare turns contemplative. “That's a good point, a very good point. He probably even met the couple in question, or at least the male half. If he – “

Whatever Peter was going to say is lost by Derek’s abrupt arrival.

They both turn curious gazes towards him, and Derek freezes on the edge of the roof. “I'm sorry, I didn't realize that you – “

“Nonsense, nephew. Stiles and I were just discussing his special project. You know about it.”

Stiles frowns, worried at the spooked look in Derek’s eyes. “What's wrong.”

“It's...” Derek turns his face away, shuddering. “I guess the Conclave contacted, um, people. About Kate. She... let's just say I'm not the first guy she used to get to his family.”

“Derek.” Stiles says gently as possible. “We already knew, Dr. Nagato told us – “

“No.” Derek says flatly, hand slashing through the air. “I mean, the exact plan she had here. I guess... I guess she wanted to try, soon after Paige; she thought...” Derek swallows, obviously backs up mentally, and rewords.

“I guess she thought Paige would die, that I'd be grief stricken and easy prey. But then Chris and Victoria were always there, so she backed off and came up with a different intro tactic. But...”

“But how would she know about Paige?” Peter finishes for him.

Stiles' face goes cold. “You think she's got wolves working for her?”

“You met her, Red.” Derek sounds ready to be sick. “She's very... persuasive. Hell, they probably don't know what she's doing, what she is, or how she's using... they're lucky they're still alive, if they even are, because she seems to kill entire families – “ He breaks off in a sob.
“It's okay, Der, we're all still here.” Stiles feels pulled to Derek, drawn into the gravity well of his self-loathing. “You just said it – she's persuasive, you didn't know, why would? How?”

“My wolf didn't like her.” Derek sobs.

“Your wolf doesn't like most people.” Peter points out.

“No, that's just sourwolf in toto.” Stiles teases, trying to break Derek’s mood any way he can.

“That's not the point!” Derek hits the roof hard enough to crack the tile. “She's, she's going around preying on us, finding weak points, then killing entire families! And Peter.”

Derek looks ready to scream; Stiles thinks the only reason he isn't having a panic attack is that it's physically impossible.

“Peter.” His voice has dropped to a harsh, impassioned whisper. “Think about it. She's preying, it's been working for most of a decade. No one she's gone after has escaped before.”

Peter nods slowly, showing Derek that he's following. Good thing, because Stiles is lost.

“Why did we escape.”

Peter's eyes widen and his mouth drops open. “Fuck!”

Stiles jerks backwards in shock at Peter's vehement exclamation.

Derek grabs him around the waist and buries his nose in Stiles' neck. “You aren't safe.” He mumbles into Stiles' hairline.

“I'm not part of your family, Der, why would – “

“Listen!” Derek roars, and damn that's loud when it's right in his ear. “You're the reason she got caught. No, not just caught. Her picture's gone up in every police and sheriff station in California. The Conclave isn't just looking for her, it's passing warnings off to us.”

“He's right.” Peter looks like he's seeing a ghost. “She... she's vain. And you've humiliated her. Wait here.”

“What?”

“Don't argue, Stiles. Just. Wait. Here.” With a last warning growl, Peter steps off the roof.

Derek sobs again, all but strangling Stiles.

“Derek, I don't understand.”

“She'll kill us Stiles, but...”

“No, she won't.” Stiles yells back. “I won't let her!”

“That's the problem.” Derek doesn't seem to notice the tears streaming down his face. “You got in the way, made her look bad. She'll kill us. But you? She'll break you.

**Interlude; Silver Tears**

“Poor Kali.” She mocks, voice sweet as ever. “Never could get the courage, could you?”
“It wasn’t something she needed to know.” Kali says numbly, staring down at Julia and wondering what the hell had happened.

“She thought it was.” She comes closer, floating across the floor as gracefully as any wolf. “She might have taken it better, had you told her yourself.”

“That you raped me?” Kali sneers at Kate. “She’d have tried to kill you herself.”

“Oh, sweetie, is that what you tell yourself?”

“What else do you call it, when you drug a person?”

“Drug? I roofied you? You’re a werewolf, sweetie, drugs don’t work on you.”

“Wolfsbane does. You dosed me good. I don’t even remember that night.” Kali chokes back a sob and pivots, keeping herself between Kate and her mate.

“She wouldn’t have believed that though, would she? That’s why you came, when I told you about the pictures. Let me chain you up, run current through you, cut you open...”

She spoke as if she were describing a porn scene, and it was sickening.

“I came because you said you’d go after her next.”

Kate blinks at her and seems honestly surprised. “That’s what you thought I meant? I’ve misjudged you. That’s vexing.”

“Vexing? Are you for real?”

Kate just shrugs. “If you weren’t worried that she’d leave you, why is she knocked out?”

“I don’t know what she did.” Kali stops herself, tries to hide the frantic beat of her heart. “She was angry, yes, because she knew it wasn’t the whole truth. She cast something.”

“Did she?” Kate seems to have decided ‘amused' was the correct tone for this strange meeting.

And it was strange. Kali hadn’t known Kate was here, in her home, after Julia texted her. She’d walked in on her mate almost hysterical, crying and sobbing and begging her to tell the truth.

Kali would have, was going to, but Julia went rigid, said “She's still here.” And passed out.

A howl sounds, a hunting howl, and Kate grins.

“Oh, Kali. For me?” Kate sounds disgustingly gleeful.

“What?” She doesn’t understand how, why, this woman – this plain human woman, Hunter or no – scares her as she does, but not even a feral Alpha makes Kali quake as Kate does.

“You called a Hunt on me.” Kate smirks. “It'll be loads of fun, I’m flattered.”

“I didn't call anything!” Kali protests. “I didn't know you were here.”

“Ah, Julia then. No matter. By Hunting me, your Pack has signed their death warrant.”

“You can’t do that.” Kali splutters. “She called for help because a crazy bitch broke into our home and threatened her; that's not calling a Hunt, and you know it.”
Kate snorts. “It’s all in how I spin it, baby. I raped you, you claim, and she wants me dead for doing so. So, as the Emissary of your Pack, she called a Hunt on me.” An evil smile spreads across that too-angelic face. “The Conclave will buy it. In fact... yeah.”

Kate stalks to the front door, rarely used by either Kali or Julia, and throws it open, signing something with her hands. “This is too perfect. In a fit of remorse – because of course I didn’t realize you’d been affected by wolfsbane, didn’t realize you couldn’t consent – I’ll let you and the Mrs. go. We’re only going to kill those who try and kill us, after all.”

Kali pulls out her phone, frantically trying to call off whatever Julia started.

The front door slams.

“Baby, you gotta wake up and stop this.” She whimpers over Julia. “Please, baby...”

She can’t leave her mate like this, not when Kate could come back at any moment.

A gunshot.

Julia jerks

Kali flinches at she feels a Pack-mate die.

Another.

“Please, baby...”

Julia whines.

“No, no, no...” Her heartbeat is slowing. “You can't, baby, no!”

Kali calls 911. It's all she can do.

She tips back her head, howls as the Alpha power slams into her.

The ambulances comes, Julia has slipped into a coma.

Gone.

Her Pack, all of them. Julia might as well be...

Gone.

Chapter End Notes

Ban-draoi [Gaelic, it's pronounced "ban dree"] literally translates as "female druid", but as we all know, something is always lost in translation. in this case, the way I define it in-story is correct -- 3,000 years ago, it was thought that tending the land was a "masculine" vocation, while tending to people was "feminine" [hell, in a sense, this is still a societal norm -- men bring home the bread, women tend the men and children. I'm not ranting on that. really. well, if you ask nicely, I've several long rants, but I won't force them on anyone...] Now, how much of this actually translated into any sort of religious or sacred practice
is ANYONE'S guess. we know very, very little about the druids, or the ancient Celts in general, and what we DO know has been passed down refracted through the bigoted lens of first the Romans [the first mention of Druids known to history, at least written history, was by Caesar; he accused them of dozens of evil practices, including human sacrifice, with little to no proof] and then later the early Christian missionaries, who had good reason to paint druidic practices in a bad light -- they were there, after all, to convert the heathens*. the flip side to that is that there is reason to believe that many druids found shelter in the monasteries and abbeys of the British Isles, but they would have been just as invested [if for completely different reasons!] in hiding the truth of their practices from the Church.

so we have little FACTUAL information.

here's what *I* know.

couple centuries ago, my great-great-I don't know how many greats off the top of my head-grandmother moved to the U.S. from Ireland, and eventually married a Cherokee man. She claimed to follow the "old religion" and called herself ban-draoi, and left several diaries to her children. these diaries are mostly JUST diaries, detailing a mostly-ordinary life [if one considers an Irish immigrant in the 1790s who marries a Cherokee man openly to be "normal"]; woven into the diaries, however, were the practices she followed.

a portion of my family continues to follow these practices today, including me. not a large portion -- it's only the Cherokee half, anyway, and of that half, i'd say it's about a 5th of us.

I have no clue how accurate these practices are. hell, I've got no clue if she just made the whole bloody thing up, because she could! but it's a practice that suits me, and i'm happy with it. it resembles, in many ways, the later Wiccan faith, and the differences are sometimes startling. but it works for me and my cousins, so we'll keep it. after all, one of the main tenets of our faith is the adage; "God is everywhere and everything, religion is merely the lens one uses to see Her."

so, in following my understanding of Teen Wolf twisting of Real World things, druids, witches and ban-draoi aren't followers of a RELIGION; no, they're humans who are born with a "spark", and said "spark" follows a specific path -- a person born with a witch spark could learn from a druid, and do many of the basic things a druid could do, but the more advanced stuff is witch-specific, can't be taught or accessed by anyone but a witch.

witches give off an ozone smell. druids give off a plant smell.
what to ban-draoi smell of? "people". specifically, it's the smell of blood, but that wouldn't be noticeable unless it was a HUGE working.

in Real Life, I've never noticed any particular smell, aside from those give by components used in ritual. but maybe i'm wrong, and there *IS* a smell, i'm just not cool enough? :D

so.

I hope this all makes sense? *cowers* please don't throw books at me about historical inaccuracy! i'm working off family legend and twisting I Approved Teen Wolf fashion! I mean, "Darach" doesn't actually mean "Dark Oak", na da? a Kanima isn't a weird LIZARD thing, it's a jaguar thing! silly TW writers... *G*
please still love me! or, at least, don't hate me!

*interesting note; the word "pagan" is older than Christianity by a lot, and it ACTUALLY was the word used for any non-Roman religion, or rather any religion that didn't adopt itself to Roman practices. Christianity, as was it's wont, stole the word and warped it's meaning, so people think "pagan" means "Non-Christian" but this IS NOT TRUE -- when Christianity was born, it was as pagan druidism or Hinduism or anything else that didn't include Roman practices. and now you know -- GO JOE! :D
gods I'm such a dork and have now totally dated myself lol.
July 30th, 2012

Derek can barely think; all he can see is that image of Stiles from earlier that day, broken and bleeding on the ground because Derek wasn't there to catch him.

“Der. I’m right here, I’m not hurt. Please, you're scaring me.”

Derek can't respond, just tightens his grip and holds on.

Peter returns quickly with Chris.

“What the... what's going on, lover?”

Stiles gives a small jerk in Derek’s arms, causing him to choke out a small laugh; everyone knew – Wait. How would Stiles know? He can't smell it.

“I think Stiles' shock has broken Derek’s. So thank you for that.”

“Wait. I mean. Sarah. Vic.” Stiles voice is utterly empty, and he smells as neutral as he sounds.

Peter and Chris exchange a look, then Peter smirks. “You're the one who dropped it. You explain.”

Chris sighs. “Why am I explaining my love life to a fifteen year old?”

“Because he's Pack?” Peter says smugly.

“When did I become Pack?” It's a pro forma grumble, but Derek answers.
“Pretty sure it started the night you and Vic brought us my dad's murderers.”

“Right. Well.” Derek snorts at the blush on Chris’s face. “My wife is a wonderful woman, and I will kill anyone who says otherwise.” Stiles nods frantically. “I love Vic. She loves me. But...”

Chris squirms a bit, which Derek finds fascinating. And it was petty of him to find pleasure in this, but this utter schadenfreude was so much better than –

Derek cuts his thoughts off at Stiles pained whine, when he tightens his grip again.

“Sorry.” He whispers.

Stiles pats his head, then nods at Chris.

“Vic is asexual.” Chris blurts.

“Um. What? You have a daughter.”

Chris turns more red. “She tried to not be. But... but she met Talia.”

Stiles screws his face up in confusion. “How did meeting Tee turn Vic asexual?”

“Red.” Peter rolls his eyes. “No. Chris doesn't tell this well. May I try?” He asks Chris.

Chris gives him a grateful nod. “Please, god yes.”

“Like Chris, Victoria was raised in a Hunting family. Raised with certain beliefs – like the belief that all werewolves are, at heart, animals who prey on humanity.

“Then she saw my sister with your mother. At first, Victoria was concerned; was Claudia Stilinski a witch or shifter or... something, that had slipped through the cracks?”

Stiles jerks again, this time in mild anger. “My mom was human.”

“As human as you, Little Red.” Peter smirks at Stiles. “Which became apparent very quickly; when Victoria spoke to her, it was obvious that Claudia had exactly zero knowledge of our world.

“So then why, she wondered, was the Alpha of the Hale Pack wasting her time with this mere human?”

“Wasting!” Stiles demands, voice shrill enough to bother Derek and make Peter flinch. Derek sighs, and pulls Stiles back against him, trying to calm him down before he does something he'll regret.

“Remember how Victoria was trained to view us; at the time, she believed we truly didn't see humans as anything worthwhile. She started spending time with Claudia. Not a lot of time, but enough that Talia noticed.”

Chris snorts. “I remember the day Talia made her attention known. She cornered us at the grocery story. She said 'I know that it's your job to watch for rogues, but don't you think stalking an innocent woman who's absolutely clueless is a little much?' To be frank, we were floored. After a minute, Vic asked, 'If she's so innocent and clueless, why are you around her?' And Talia, well. She was livid, I remember thinking, this is it, we're going to die in the produce section, won't my father laugh at this. But Talia just narrowed her eyes at Vic, and said 'She's my friend. She's funny, she can draw anything, and every kid in this city loves her. She finds the most amazing books for Derek, and finally convinced James that reading won't make him go blind. Why wouldn't I want to
be around her? She lights everything up!” Chris smiles sadly at the fond memory.

Derek blinks back some tears. “She did.” He tells Stiles. “She found the most amazing things in the stacks, things I’d never have thought to look for.”

“Well, yeah.” Stiles sniffs. “She was a librarian. She was awesome.”

Chris nods fervently. “We know, Stiles. We didn't become close with her like Talia did, but we did get to know her a bit. And Vic... one day, when you and Ally were ten or so, she look at me and said, “It's all a lie, isn't it? They aren't just animals, or no more than any human is. They're people.' It was rather shocking, actually. Before that... encounter with Talia, Vic had been adamant in her belief that werewolves were, well, wolves. She never listened when anyone asked for leniency, no matter the reason.”

Chris turns away then, a haunted look in his eyes, and Peter clears his throat. “Apparently, being forced to reexamine her beliefs about us caused Victoria to reexamined everything. Her entire life had been shaped by the Hunt and it's obligations – Training, tactics, weapons. Lead the team, that's what Matriarchs do, and they blend in, get married, have the next generation of Hunters.”

“She was pissed.” Chris says slowly. “She'd always chaffed at not being able to fight, thought it was bullshit, and her mother and the Matrons' council were always on her ass about it – ‘Matriarchs do not fight with swords and guns, their weapons are words and men.'” Chris spits the quote with hatred. “But that's how she was raised, and she thought she was doing good. Then she met Talia, and realized...”

Stiles sucks in a breath, and Derek relaxes. “She realized that she'd been living someone else's ideal life, but it wasn't hers.” Peter gives Chris a sad smile. “That if she'd been left to live her life her way, she wouldn't have married, or had a child. But she already had, and she wasn't about to leave either one – despite whatever conclusion you might have jumped to, Chris and Victoria love each other. They just aren't compatible sexually, and Victoria was no longer willing to lie to herself, let alone her best friend.”

Chris nods. “I... honestly, I wasn't surprised. We'd never been very... active.” His cheeks flame again, and Derek gives Peter a puzzled look, because that's shame.

“And Chris had a similar problem.” Peter answers Derek’s unspoken question.

“Oh.” Stiles says quietly. “Yeah, I guess, from Kate’s reaction, that your father is a lot like Issac’s, huh? Can't be bothered to look at the damned year.”

Chris gives a small nod, studying the roof intently. “It's not – I didn't embrace his belief, that it's something wrong or immoral. I was just... I kept thinking, if I were just a better Hunter, a better son, that he'd listen to me. See that he was pushing too hard, hurting innocents for no reason.”

Peter closes his eyes against Chris’s pain, and Derek hears a whine escape his own throat, sympathy for his uncle and uncle's... other mate?

“Sarah.” Peter clears his throat. “You know Sarah. If I wasn't married to the woman, I’d swear she was related to the famous Puck. As you know, Stiles, it's as rare for wolves to be straight as it is for humans to be bisexual.”

“It is?” Stiles sounds shocked.

Derek rolls his eyes. “How would he know that, Peter? Has anyone said anything?”
Peter pauses, taken aback. “But... huh. No, I suppose not. My apologies, Stiles. But it's true; most of us would be considered bisexual by normal humans. And as I said, Sarah's a mischievous bitch. She smelled the attraction on both of us, instantly. And spent the next several months pairing us up.”

“So... how does that work? Is it all three of you, or...” Stiles seemed a little too interested in the subject, and Derek frowns.

Peter laughs while Chris turns even redder. “Chris really isn't interested in any woman, aside from Victoria. Gods know, Sarah tried.”

“Shut up, Peter.” Chris mumbles, face in his hands.

“Perhaps it's best to think of it as shared custody.” Peter's grin morphs into a fond smile when Chris smacks him. “And I should file charges. You'll both stand witness?”

Stiles laughs. “You deserve every bruise you won't have, Uncle Creeper.”

Stiles really needs to move. He doesn't want to, but now that he knows... knows that, he really, really should.

Or should he?

Derek is Pack, that isn't going to change. Maybe he's over thinking it; after, Peter hadn't said Derek was bi, just that most wolves are. And even if he was, it's not like Derek thought of him like that.

Stiles tried really, really hard to not think of Derek like that.

It was easier, normally. Normally, Danny was there. But Danny was in Hawaii, and Derek was a warm, solid wall to lean against.

Derek was Derek, damn it; he was sourwolf, he was Stiles other best friend.

Stiles was not going to think about this any more. At all.

“So, you didn't run off and get Chris just to come out to me.” Stiles points out, desperate to silence the conversation in his head.

Peter sobers instantly. “No, I didn't. Repeat what you told me, Derek. Calmly, if you will – unlike me, Stiles will have bruises.”

Derek stiffens against Stiles' back, then lets him go. “Sorry. Okay...”

As calmly as possible, Derek repeats the salient points.

Chris closes his eyes halfway though the recitation, pain blatant in every line of his face.

“Oh, Jesus fucking Christ.” He stares helplessly at Stiles, immobile and almost broken. “I hadn't put it together that way. Jesus!”

“Wait. You're supposed to reassure Derek that he's over-reacting.”
“No.” Peter's voice is harsh. “He's supposed to convince you that, if anything, Derek is the epitome of sane, here. Pay attention, Little Red, or the Big Bad Bitch is going to have you for a snack!”

Stiles turns into Derek, burying his face in his chest, not sure he's breathing.

“What's – Peter, what is this?” Derek sounds panicked.

That made two of them.

Gods, his chest hurts, he can't get any air.

“He's having a panic attack.” Chris says from somewhere miles away. “You have to get him to breathe.”

“I don't – how, Chris?”

Stiles dug his hands into Derek’s shirt, shaking.

“Okay, I can – Stiles, listen. Breathe with me, okay?”

Black flowers are blooming in Stiles’ sight, but he can't follow them, he can't. Derek is scared, Derek needs him to stay here, not follow the flower path.

“In, Stiles, take a breath in.”

Stiles tries, he really does.

“Out, let it out, breath out the panic.” Derek rubs soothing circles on his back. “That's it. Take another breath with me.”

This times, Stiles actually gets some air.

“Good. Now out. And in.”

Derek talks him through it, until Stiles slumps against him, tears on his cheeks.

“I'm sorry.” He says, voice hoarse from the struggling. “That was childish.”

“Bullshit.” Chris is blunt as ever. “You've every reason to panic.”

“No. Helping.” Peter growls.

“Sorry. But look, Stiles, now that we know, we can watch for it.”

“He's right. We won't let her touch you.”

“Ever.” Derek adds his vow to his uncle's.

Chris reaches over and touches Stiles shoulder. “I don't think she could actually take you. Not that you could beat her straight up – she's got over a decade on you. But she won't be prepared for you. Won't expect you to have any training, let alone the level you have.”

“And that's just the physical.” Peter says, faking cheerful. “There's also what you've been learning on the flip side, so to speak.”

“Are you actually telling him to use magic on a Hunter?”
“In self defense?” Chris holds Derek’s gaze in challenge, and it’s Derek who looks away. “The Conclave has declared both Gerard and Kate outlaw; he could turn them both into newts and they won't raise a hand against him.”

“I can't actually turn anyone into a newt.” Stiles points out, giggling just a bit hysterically.

“Pity.” Peter muses.

“I can help.”

All four of them jump when Star says that.

She smiles, just a tad smug at startling two wolves.

“H-how?” Stiles winces at his stammer.

“If I take you as my apprentice, we'll have an empathic bond; if someone hurts you, or you get knocked out, drugged... if anything unnatural happens, I’ll know. Exactly when and where it happens.”

Stiles is pleased that he isn't the only one gaping at her, shocked.

Not by what she can do; they're all quite aware that Star can do hell of a lot; her randomly appearing places is only the least of it.

Not, it's the offer – she isn't 'neutral' like Alan is, but there are definite limits to how much she's able to help; angels – and the true fae are what all the stories of angels are based on, after all – have a strict non-interference policy. Written not on paper, or even stone, but in their very DNA.

“How?” Stiles repeats.

The smiles she gives him is sly. “You're my apprentice. Well, will be. So you are; there's a reason I was able to follow you fourteen years back. Well, eight from here. At the time, you'd been my apprentice for four years.” She shrugs. “But you've changed so much; I mean, on that line, we didn't meet, couldn't meet, until you were seventeen. I meet you sooner, here.”

“How do you not have a constant headache?” Stiles marvels.

“I don't know. I should, I keep flipping between four or five different timelines.”

“You – wait, it's still there?” Stiles covers his mouth.

“What's still there?”

“The other – the one where Kate got to you less than a year after Paige died, and everyone – “ Stiles chokes on his own words.

“I'm afraid so.” Star understands his horror. “But this one was created. Leave it alone, Genim.”

Stiles jerks backwards yet again, this time hard enough to leave a bruise on his skull from Derek’s chin.

“Ow.” Derek says mildly. “What was that about.”

“Don't ever say that again.” He hisses at Star.
“I'll have to, one time, when you become my apprentice. But I’ll do my best to avoid it otherwise.”

“Can you do it now?” Peter cuts in, apparently fed up with their bickering.

Stiles frowns, shaking his head. “I have to talk to dad, first. And Tee. I mean, I want to, of course I do. Tee already said how you wanted to train me, and that's all the flavors of awesome. But I have to talk to dad, make sure he's on board, you know?”

“Of course.” Star says calmly. “Your conditional agreement is enough to activate the bond from later, so you should be safe enough for now. But don't take too long.”

“Just. I’m gonna wait until after everyone leaves. I don't want the whole world to know. I don't want anyone else to know at all.” He adds fiercely, glaring at Peter. “I know you'll have to tell Sarah and Vic, but please...”

“Of course, Stiles. Arrangements of this nature are private.” Chris ruffles his hair. “Of all people, we understand that.”

Stiles blinks, then grins. “That's sensei-speak for 'don't give me shit about my illicit love affair in public, isn't it?”

Peter snorts. “You don't give us shit at all, Little Red. It's not illicit if all parties agree to it.”

“Whatever you say, Uncle Creeper. Hey, does this mean you're my Uncle too, Chris?”

“God save me, I’m going to end up with a ridiculous nickname, aren't I?”

“He calls you sensei.” Peter points out.

“Nah.” Stiles widens his grin, working desperately to appear back to normal. “I think he's now officially 'Uncle Anakin', because his love is considered a sin by the Hunter council. Like Anakin's love was consider wrong by the Jedi council.”

“No.” Chris snaps half-heartedly. “Just. I won't ever become Vader.”

“Oh, good point. I’ll think on it.”

“Let it go.” Peter rolls his eyes. “Star, when do you – where did she go this time?”

Derek snorts and runs his nose over Stiles' pulse.

Stiles gives Peter jazz-hands. “Yeah, exactly. Where in time is Carmen Sandiego?”

Derek follows his mother, Peter and Stiles into her office. Stiles had begged him to come, and Derek can't find it in him to say no. Not today.

Deucalion smiles at both of them. “So soon? I’m gratified.”

Stiles cocks his head, confused, then shakes it off. “I'd like to ask a small favor, if I may?”

“You may ask.” Duke allows graciously. It makes Derek’s hackles rise.

Talia runs her knuckles down his neck soothingly, and Derek relaxes. Deucalion isn't going to hurt
Stiles, and he isn't going to be able to poach him if he keeps acting like this.

“Thank you. It's about a Pack that used to exist, near Seattle.”

“Used to? You must mean the Franklin Pack.”

Stiles nods gravely. “Yes. Here's what I know; a friend of mine, Jackson, his birth parents died in a... suspicious car accident.”

“Suspicious how?” Duke interrupts to ask.

“When I was told the story, my first thought was...” Stiles cuts his eyes to Derek, then his mom.

“I see. Continue.”

“Yes, sir. Their car had been t-boned by an SUV; Mr. and Mrs. Whittmore were the first to see the accident. They found the SUV empty, Mr. Jackson was already dead, Mrs. Jackson almost there. Everything about the situation screamed wrong, when I heard it. Mr. Jackson bled out from cuts on his neck and thighs, but his tox-screen came back with several anomalies. Mrs. Jackson was almost worse; she was bleeding pretty badly, yeah, but what actually killed her was mistletoe poisoning.”

Deucalion lets out a shocked breath, leaning back in his seat. “You're right, that's highly suspect.”

“I know.” Stiles nods calmly, and Derek kind of wants to wrap him in bubble-wrap and put him in a box – his brilliance shouldn't be shared with anyone who doesn't absolutely treasure it, like they do.

Derek sighs to himself; Stiles would gut him if he knew what Derek was thinking right now.

“Mrs Whittmore refused to leave Mrs. Jackson’s side, she even rode in the ambulance. Somehow, Mrs. Jackson held on until after she signed custody over her baby to the Whittmores. Which, when you think about it, is strange as hell – who gives their baby, not even born, to a complete stranger?”

Stiles shakes his head. “They had a small parade of people wanting to adopt baby Jackson; Mr. Whittmore told me about them. There were a few that stood out in his mind, pinged his creep-meter pretty hard. He's a lawyer, so if he thinks someone's a creep... well.”

Derek pauses to let his little joke sink in, Derek knows it's to leaven the somber mood, and he looks gratified at Deucalion's quick smirk. Derek fists his hands, doing his damnedest to not growl at the Eldest, what is his wolf even thinking?

“The one that really sticks out in my mind is the older couple. Around fifty, Mr. Whittmore said, and seemingly desperate for a son; they had a daughter, brilliant and beautiful, the Whittmores met her. They couldn't remember the parents' names, but they remembered the girl, she was thirteen. And Mr. Whittmore said Kate scared the hell out of him.”

“Kate?” Deucalion sits straight upright. “You think Gerard was trying to gain custody of this young friend of yours?”

“I do. It wasn't long after Chris married Vic and started defying him. And the M.O. of the accident seems consistent with how he worked before Kate was legal to do it her way.” Even Duke flinches at the disgust in Stiles' tone. Derek bumps his shoulder into Stiles, wordless comfort.

Stiles gives him a small, grateful smile, then refocuses on Deucalion. “I have their files from the adoption agency, but it's mostly forged info. The only thing of any value were the pictures, and
Chris confirms that the girl is Kate and the father is Gerard, but neither he nor Vic can identify the woman.”

“This is all fascinating. And disturbing. But I am unsure as to what you want from me?” Duke leans back again seemingly content to let Stiles get there on his own.

“I'm hoping to confirm, first, that Mr. Jackson really was a member of the Franklin Pack.”

“And then?” Deucalion asks with seemingly endless patience, but there's something off; he smells of old, almost buried, grief.

Stiles spreads his hands. “I'm not really sure, to be honest. I know that I, sometimes, feel like Jackson’s Pack. But I don't know if he is, or if it's just... just feeling another person who's like me, part of the world but not a wolf. Or something.” Stiles bites his lip to stop himself from saying more, frustration an acrid burn in Derek’s nose.”

“I hope you have pictures?” The prodding is gentler than Derek would have believed, given what he knows about Deucalion.

Stiles flushes and gives a jerky nod, handing his tablet to the Eldest. “First is a picture of Bryant and Janice, their wedding picture. Then a pic of just Bryant.”

Deucalion takes one look and almost drops the tablet. “I officiated this wedding.” His eyes are clouded, and Derek’s stomach drops. “How did you...”

“Sir?” Peter prompts when Duke has been silent for over a full minute.

He jerks, then wipes a hand across his eyes. “I must thank you, young ban-draoi.”

“Thank me? But I’m the one who asked you for a favor...” Stiles chews his lip again.

Duke huffs out a despairing chuckle. “Please forgive me. I know I am making little sense. I...” He stands and walks to the window, looking pensive.

Derek exchanges a look with his mom, then Peter, all of them confused. Stiles is focused on the Elder, eyes melancholy and much too old.

After several more minutes of silence, extra excruciating because it's Stiles at the heart of the silences, Deucalion turns to face them again, once more composed.

He clears his throat. “One things about living this long, you continue to outlive those you love. I never took another to mate, after my Christa passed in eighteen eighty three. We had four children, and lost two in the war.” Derek slaps his hand over Stiles' mouth before he can even begin to articulate whatever question was on his lips. “Zeke had two sons before he died at Fort Henry. Mark had no children, was barely more than a child himself. My other two, Noah drawn only to men, but Marian had three children. One of them is your wife's ancestor.” He tosses off as an aside Peter.

Derek blinks in shock at this revelation, dropped out of nothing. “But I could spend the next hour, telling you stories of my children and their children, down the line, and it would be pointless. My bloodline narrowed, I thought, down only to Sarah and now little Beth. Bryant...”

Deucalion closed his eyes, and Talia stood, offering him a hand in comfort. He opened wolf-red eyes and nodded thanks. “I try to not hate this country, for continually taking my children. Wars are constant, any student of history knows this is. Some days it is harder than others. Bryant was
the only other one of my children left alive, and he disappeared.”

Duke swallows roughly. “We spent well over a month, searching for any sign of Bryant, his mate, and their Pack. We found nothing, not even their Emissary. Bryant's last name wasn't Jackson, it was Osto. Janice's last name was Hertogin. I presume that identification was found that listed them as Jackson, and that's why we missed them – we were looking for them by either their correct names, or as Doe's.” Deucalion closes his eyes as they flare red for a moment, composing himself, then looks at Stiles with something approaching wonder. “How did you get all this, Stiles?”

Derek wraps his arm around the boy in support as he wipes his eyes. “Seattle PD's been converting their records to digital. And has sucky security. But, look, Deucalion, sir, you gotta listen to me. Jackson was raised completely human; he doesn't know anything about any of this. Doesn't even know about werewolves. He loves his parents, and they're finally doing well, you can't – “

“What do you mean?” Deucalion demands, “Finally doing well?”

“They. There were misunderstandings, caused by Kate actually. His parents didn't tell him he was adopted, she did, to cause trouble. It's been sorted, they're doing wonderfully...”

“They really are.” Talia murmurs. “They came to me and John and asked for help.”

Deucalion slumps against the wall as if his strings had been cut. “Good. He is well cared for, that is good. Worry not, I have no plans to go storming into his life and taking over. I don't even wish to meet him right now, though I’d like to see him...” Duke stares off into the distance, seeing something Derek couldn't imagine. “But that isn't for today. Today, I discovered he exists, when I’d thought for most of two decades he died before he was even born. Today, I discovered that his parents, my grandson, were killed by these rogue hunters, who also tried to steal him away.”

Deucalion straightens, shedding the image of grieving parent and returning to his normal mode of terrifying bastard. “Now I know. These same rogues, they Hunt you as well.” Duke meets Stiles eyes; Stiles shrinks against Derek’s side, shaking slightly as he nods. “They shall not survive it. By my best count, they are responsible for the death of over a hundred of my people, innocent all, not including the humans of those Packs. Every wolf shall be warned against them, set to to hunt them.

“Their days are numbered.”

Derek was glad Duke was on their side; the only way he'd be more terrifying right now was if that look was aimed at them.

July 31st, 2012

Stiles closed the front door behind the last guest – Steph and her fiancee, as it happens – and slumps against it, exhausted.

“I don't want to be an Emissary anymore.” He grumbles to himself.

“Now, Red, it's rude to lie to others, and just wrong to lie to yourself.”

“Not lying, Uncle Creeper. Just tired.”

Peter chuckles. “I know, you've worked hard this week. I made you hot chocolate.”

Stiles straightens and turns around, already smiling. “Really?”
“With ginger, just like you showed me.”

Humming in contentment, Stiles follows the Beta into the dining room. Peter was the only person, aside from his dad, who could make hot chocolate like his mom had.

Speaking of, dad was already there with Talia, sitting next to each other but focused on Stiles. He doesn't bother to smother his grin. “Are you finally gonna ‘fess up?”

“So.” John's voice is pained. Talia laughs.

“Yes.” She says simply.

Peter pushes Stiles into a chair, placing a cup overflowing with whipped cream in front of him. “Not that they’ve done anything worthy of confession.” He snarks.

“Hush, Peter.” Talia doesn't look at her brother, but watches Stiles.

“Why not? I mean...” Stiles, for once, can't find the right words.

“I... you know I love your mom, kiddo.”

He melts at his dad's statement. “I know. I love her too. But... but she'd want us to live, right?”

John smiles uncertainly. “You think so? And you, you'd be okay?”

“Well, yeah!” Stiles scoffs. “And. Okay? Dad, I’d be ecstatic. The only way this would be better is if it were Melissa, cuz then Scott and I would be brothers for real.”

Something about this makes all three adults wince. “I think you're a little old to accepts my kids as your real siblings, Stiles.” Talia says with more urgency than Stiles thinks it warrants.

“Well, they're Pack. Isn't that kind of what they already are?”

Peter clears his throat. “Yes and no. One is able to be Pack with many they aren't related to by blood. Or even friends with.”

“Still. They're Pack. That's the important thing, right?”

Talia laughs. “I think you understand Pack better than most of the wolves I know. That's the other thing.”

“What is?”

“You can say no, son.” John assures him.

“No to what?” It's not fair when adults do this.

“Deucalion wants to offer you specialized training.” Talia says slowly.


“I know you were scared of him,” Talia begins.

“Still am. Maybe more scared, now that I know how old he is!” Stiles says quickly. “And Kali! She's... there's something wrong with her.”

“We know.” Talia nods. “So does Duke. He isn't sure what happened to her Pack, no one is. She
just showed up at his Arizona compound asking for sanctuary. He's the Eldest, it's his duty.”

“He's the what?” Stiles is fascinated; this is something he'd never run across before, in either timeline. Or, if he had, it wasn't something he remembered.

“The Eldest wolf. At least, in North America. He's almost two centuries old.” Peter slips into teacher-mode. “It is the duty of the Eldest to monitor the Packs, ensuring they're stability. That is why he travels so much; he's checking on the Packs.”

“Does Derek know this?” Why hadn't he told them, when they faced the Alpha Pack?

“He does now, because of what happened with Paige.” Talia stares off, looking sad. “Otherwise, he'd never have been told until he became a Second. It's kept a secret, from everyone else.”

“Why?” Stiles demands. “And if it's a secret, why are you telling me?”

“Emissaries also know. Alan should have told you already.” Peter frowns at that, then moves on. “Also, from some of what you've said... something happened, that caused him to lose the thread. It still might. We've warned him, as best we could. That's part of why he wishes you to study with him, and his Emissary.”

“Did you tell him he was blind?” Stiles spits spitefully. “But only when he isn't wolfed-out?”

“Yes.” How Talia remains calm, Stiles doesn't know.

He tilts his head in apology, knowing he's close to the line. “I just... he killed Erica! And Kali killed Boyd, using Derek as the weapon, they held him down and shoved Boyd onto his claws, and he never recovered from it, ever. Because Deucalion ordered it!”

Talia presses her lips together, skin almost gray. “He knows. He was sickened by that, though now he thinks he has some idea what happened with Kali. He gave me something for you.”

She sets a small, polished silver box on the table.

Hesitantly, Stiles picks it up and opens it.

“What is this?” He can't look away from it.

It's a red crystal, as large as his palm, and it pulses rhythmically.

“It's how you kill him, if he goes bad.” John states flatly. “I tried to tell him that it was too much pressure to put on a fifteen-year-old boy, on my son, but he wouldn't listen. Said that only you could be sure, with your... whatever.”

Stiles squeaks, sets the box down quickly. “He gave me his heart!”

“Metaphorically.” Peter smiles in pride. “It is not truly his heart, you understand. And you can't just decide that you don't want to have to worry about Duke. You have to truly believe, with all of yourself, that he has become evil.”

“Holy Mary Mother of God and all the Saints above.” Stiles breathes. “He – he's insane, Tee! I can't – I’m just a kid!”

All three adults snort. “We know better.” Talia reaches across the table. “And so does Duke.”

“Well. If he can trust me with his heart.” Stiles says faintly. “But can we do it here?”
"He said he'd come back, yes. Once a month, new moons." Peter smiles gleefully. "And he promised I could watch, or your father, if you want."

"That's..." Stiles snorts. "Wow. Yeah, I'm just gonna go with yeah."

"I don't think you understand what you gave the man today, Stiles." His dad says gently. "I wasn't in the room, which I'm still annoyed about." He pauses to give Talia a look. She looks apologetic, but not repentant. "But I heard it all. You gave him answers he'd been looking for, for seventeen years, and you returned half his family. He owes you, kiddo."

"In a very real sense, Stiles, Jackson is the only true Pack Duke has." Talia informs him earnestly. "He mostly keeps a Pack of those who need him, or who he needs to keep the wild Packs in line. It works, but it isn't exactly the most stable. That's why he maintained close ties to his descendents."

"We remember when Bryant disappeared." Peter looks grave. "We thought, for a couple of years, that we were going to lose Duke, that his Second was going to have to kill him. I was your age, didn't know who Duke was, but I remember being scared of him, because our mother kept saying he was going feral."

Stiles swallows. Feral wolves are those who give in to their wolf completely, live only as the animal.

"You've returned something precious, and he will never forget that." Talia holds Stiles' gaze. "But more, he sees potential here. Not just you, no need to feel overwhelmed. He's asked, and I've granted permission, for Jeff to stay and train Derek, and for Marin to stay and train with you."

Stiles almost chokes on his hot chocolate. "I'm supposed to be asking you guys if I can train with Star, Tee. Not Marin."

"No reason you can't do both." His dad points out. "The more viewpoints, the better, right?"

"Does that mean I can? With Star?"

"Of course." John nods. "We're won't even have to adjust your school schedule; Marin is the new French and Latin teacher."

"Oh, goody." Stiles replies faintly. "I can get AP credit for Emissary training."

"If you aren't cheating," Peter points out. "You aren't trying."

**August 14th, 2012**

Derek ducked under Jeff’s claws, tucking himself into a somersault and rolling away from the Alpha.

“Good! You're more agile than I am, use it against me.” Jeff continued to coach him through the bout, and Derek lasted another forty minutes before Jeff was finally able to pin him.

Laura cheered Derek on when he was winning, and tried to distract Jeff when he wasn't – family first, she said, when Derek asked.

Derek worried that Laura held Jared’s actions against Jeff. She said she didn't, and she wasn't lying, but what if she didn't realize she did? Mom was taking Jeff seriously, taking advantage of his offer to train Derek to also get some much-needed training for Laura; not that Laura was untrained, but
that she'd only been trained by Talia.

Talia, like John, felt that more perspectives were better.

Today, Derek didn't leave when his training was over, like he'd done for the past two weeks.

“Not complaining, but don't you normally spend afternoons with Stiles?” Jeff downed a bottle of some sports drink, cooling off before his session with Laura.

Laura explains before Derek even opens his mouth. “Danny came home yesterday.”

“Who's Danny, and what does he have to do with – “

“Stiles' boyfriend.” Derek cuts him off.

Jeff pauses, then shares a look Derek can't decipher with Laura. “Ah. Well, you're always welcome to stay, you know that. You learn as much from watching as doing.”

“Thank you.” Derek ignores the pity in the older man's gaze and slumps against the wall, still breathing hard.

“Sure. Ready, Lo?”

Stiles twines himself around Danny more tightly, content to just hold him.

“Longest two months of my life.” He murmurs.

“I'm surprised you had time to notice.” Danny teases, but there's something... off.

“What? I missed you every day!” Stiles pulls back to meet Danny’s eyes. “I noticed. Why wouldn't I?”

“Well, there's your new goddaughter, and bro-time with Scott. And Derek.”

Stiles blinks at the twist of Danny’s lips when he says Derek’s name.

“What about Derek?”

Danny studies Stiles' face, then looks away. “Nothing.”

“No, not nothing.” Stiles sits all the way up, confused and worried. “That wasn't nothing. Last I looked, you were friends with Derek, too. But you sounded like...”

Danny swallows. “I just. I was gone for a long time. Let my imagination get the better of me, I guess.”

Mouth open, Stiles just gapes at Danny. Finally, words come. “Wait. You thought I’d... never mind who with, but that I would at all.”

Miserably, Danny tries to pull Stiles back down. “No, no I didn't think you'd cheat. I promise. I just...”

“What, then?” Stiles slaps his hands away, getting angry.
“I just kept expecting a text.” Danny says with a small voice.

“Why?” Stiles demands.

“Because I’m an idiot.” A tear slips down Danny’s cheek, and Stiles softens.

“Yes, yes you are. Why would I break up with you?”

“I... I see you and Derek together, and it looks...”

“What!” Stiles winces at his own high-pitched voice. Clearing his throat, he tries again. “It looks?”

“It looks good.” Danny whispers. “He opens up around you, and you calm down with him.”

Stiles just stares at him boyfriend, unsure what to say or do to reassure him. What he's noticing is just Pack, just the way Pack interacts with each other. But Danny doesn't know that, can't know that.

Still, he has to try to explain without telling secrets. “That's just... Derek is my other best friend, you know? It's not anything like... He doesn't really have any friends, except his sisters and me. It's not...” Danny isn't looking reassured. “Besides, I don't think he's into guys, you know? The only person I know of that he's dated was Paige. And he was into Kate, before she showed herself as a psychopathic harpy from hell.”

Danny does relax at that, slightly. “He's just... he looks like a model, or an action star. I feel a little, I don't know, inadequate, I guess? When I compare – “

“Don't do that!” Stiles says fiercely.

“Do what?” Danny rears back at Stiles vehemence.

“Don't compare. Don't ever! You're gorgeous, I never would have believed you were really interested in me at all, I mean, loot at me!” Stiles flails his arms for emphasis. “If anything, you should thank Derek – not only did he give me training in talking to gorgeous people like you, like you were just normal, but he's the one who convinced me you really did like me!”

“He did?” Danny looks shocked, but pleased, at this revelation.

Stiles nods, “Him and Cora.” He ignores how it was mostly Cora who did so positively; Derek’s contribution was worrying about Stiles being hurt by Danny.

That's what had actually convinced Stiles that Danny was interested; Derek wouldn't worry over nothing.

“But why would you need convincing? I keep telling you how amazing you are.” Danny sighs. “I see you've backslid, in my absence.”

Stiles sighs. “I think you're blind. But I'm not complaining. And like you've got any room to talk? Thinking I was gonna be so idiotic as to leave you for Mr. Grumpy McBroody?”

“His glower is so sexy.” Danny deadpans.

“Careful, if you don't pay me attention right now, Surfer Danny, I might run after the stubble!”

“Surfer – I keep telling you, I can't surf.” Danny laughs. “But I can do other things.”
“Yeah, well, if you can't surf it better be something good. Show me what ya got.”

**August 19th, 2012**

“Wait up, sourwolf!”

Derek slows down, waiting for Stiles to catch up with him, curious as to why the kid was up this early on a Sunday.

“Damn, you don't mess around when you run, do you?” Stiles was breathing a little hard, but not too bad; his training over the summer was already showing.

“I run to run, Stiles, not play.”

“Always so serious. All work and no play…”

“Yeah, yeah. What are you doing up, anyway?”

“Couldn't sleep.” Stiles shrugs. “The ceremony's today.”

Derek nods, pensive. He knew it was the right thing, for Stiles to officially become Star's apprentice, but he didn't really like it. The more training they both started, the less they saw each other.

But. “School starts day after tomorrow.”

Stiles brightens. “Yep. We'll be able to hang out at lunch, and during P.E. again. Feel like I haven't seen you all week.”

“You almost haven't, except at dinner.” Derek grumbles. “One of us is always training, or you're with Scott. And now Danny, again.”

Stiles frowns slightly. “You and Danny are friends.”

“I guess.” Derek shrugs. “Since you're with him, we kind of have to be.”

“Wait, you wouldn't be friends with him otherwise? I thought you liked Danny?”

“I do. I just, I’m not good with people, you know that.” Derek shifts on his feet, feeling a little lost. “I don't think I exchanged a dozen sentences with Danny before you started dating him.”


“What?”

“I mean it. It's your last year of high school. You're going to enjoy it if it kills you. I’m going to make sure you enjoy it. Starting with friends! Not just me, Derek. You need friends.”

“Stiles.” Derek sighs. “I did fine before.”

“You were miserable before.” Stiles informs him bluntly.

He's not wrong. But Derek isn't sure that making more friends is the answer. “I don't like lying to people, Stiles.”

“Who said anything about lying?”
“Everything we do is a lie.” Derek growls.

Stiles stares at him, astonished. “Wait. You think you can't have friends, because you can't tell them you're a werewolf?”

“You don't lie to friends, Stiles.” Derek points out.

“There's a difference between lying and withholding information!”

“Would John agree with that?”

“About this subject, yes.” Stiles nods firmly. “Not about most things, you're right. But when it comes to you guys being werewolves? Something that it's dangerous to know? Dad agrees that the Masquerade is necessary.”

Derek looks away. “It is. But it's... it's not comfortable. I was really happy about you, even when I was confused, because you were someone not related to me that was near my age, that knew. I don't think I can be close with people who don't know.”

Stiles deflates. “That's... Derek, you can't live your life with just the Pack! Everyone else has friends who don't know, why can't you?”

“I'm not everyone else.” Derek snarls, then turns back to Stiles. “Look, I appreciate what you're saying, I just don't think it'll work.”

“Oh, it'll work.” Stiles narrows his eyes. “So long as you don't actively sabotage it, by being a dick. Just... hang out with us, like you have been, but interact more, okay? You've gotten me and Issac out of the deal, lets see what other friends you can get, yeah?”

“Whatever.” He huffs. Stiles will see for himself that it won't work.

“Good.”

Talia helps Stiles climb up on the nemeton, then helps John, before jumping up to join them.

“Why are we doing it here?” John asks nervously.

“Because this is where the Pack does these things.” Talia reminds him. “I was married here. So was Peter, and John and Terry, Brian and Rose... all the kids were sained here. Treaties are signed here.”

“What's the problem, dad?” Stiles works hard to keep the amusement out of his voice, watching his dad's nervousness at being on the nemeton.

“It feels like standing in a church.” He finally grumbles.

“You pretty much are.” Star say; one minute, it was only the three of them, next second, bam! Star was making the top of the nemeton rather crowded.

“Not helping.” John frowns. Talia rolls her eyes at Stiles, sharing his amusement at his dad's distaste for anything that resembles religion.
“It’s a short ceremony, John.” Star tries to reassure him.

“And soonest begun...” Talia prompts.

“Right, right. I, John Stilinski, natural father of Genim Mateusz Stilinski, bring him forth on this day that he may find a guide upon his path.”

“I, Talia Hale, Alpha of Genim Mateusz Stilinski, bring him forth on this day that he may find a guide upon his path.”

“What say you, Genim Mateusz Stilinski? Do you seek one to guide you to your path?”

Stiles feels his face flame at the constant repetition of his birth name. “I did seek a guide, and a guide I have found.” Stiles bows to first his dad, then Talia, then Star. “May I follow my path all my days.”

“May I guide you correctly.” Star bows in return. “I swear that I shall do all in my power to guide your son truly. This I swear, by my name.” She cuts her left hand, John follows suit, and the clasp hands, then Star leans forward and whispers her name into John's ear.

Star repeats the actions with Talia, then faces Stiles once again. “If I am to guide you, you must trust me to do so. You must trust my word, you must trust my action. I swear, Genim Mateusz Stilinski, to always guide you true, to place your needs along my own, place your well-being as my own.” She cuts her hand a third time. “I swear this on my name.”

“I swear to trust you, in both word and deed. I trust you to guide me truly, to place my needs along your own, to place my well-being as your own, and I vow to do the same.” Stiles cuts his own palm, and she takes his hand, whispers, “Estelle Katrina Taylor.”

A crackle of energy circles through, and the cuts heal, leaving behind faint scars – even on Talia.

“So mote it be.” Talia tips back and howls, eyes red.

“So mote it be.” John repeats, looking queasy.

“It could have been worse, dad.” Stiles is still trying to not laugh at Star's name; it's not as bad as his, but it's still pretty funny.

“Yeah, how?”

“We could have had to do it in Latin or Gaelic or something.”

“Jesus.” John mutters.

Star winks at John, then nods to Stiles. “I'll find you.”

And she's just gone.

“God, that's creepy.” John glares at the spot where Star had been standing.

“Useful, though.” Nothing ever phases Talia.

“I'm hungry.” Stiles points out, because it's suddenly true.

“Of course you are, you just expended a lot of energy.”
“He did?” John looks between them. “All he did was say some words.”

Talia sighs. “He forged a bond. Trust me, energy was spent. Let's feed your son, and I’ll try to explain what happened again.”

Stiles rolls his eyes at his dad's grumbling, knowing it was mostly for show. “I don't feel any different.”

“Were you expecting to?” Talia's eyes laugh at him, and Stiles blushes again.

“I, yeah. I mean, I just pledged myself, shouldn't I?”

“You pledged yourself a year ago, Stiles.” Talia points out. “This was just making it official.”

Huh.

21 August, 2012

First day of school.

Derek wasn't as excited as Stiles obviously was, but he was happy school was starting.

To be honest, most summers were boring, and while this one hadn't been, Derek finds he misses boring. Not all of it was bad, most of it wasn't, but the constant pall of Kate being out there was wearing.

So he was looking forward to school, looking forward to having something to do other than train with Jeff or hang out with Stiles or Cora and Issac.

Something to take his mind off it.

And this year, he had two classes with Stiles – P.E., of course, and AP physics.

Stiles was annoyed that Harris taught physics; the only reason Derek cared was how Harris had treated the kid, after Kate...

Asshole.

The rest of his classes were normal, and he was pleased to Mrs. Granada, back from maternity leave. Though their first meeting had been awkward, as she joined the group of people who blamed themselves for Kate.

Damn it, was everything going to remind him of that vile bitch?

At lunch, Stiles steered Danny and Boyd over to sit with him, and Derek sighed to himself. Stiles wasn't going to give up on his quest to give Derek friends, but at least he started with Boyd.

And Stiles 'remembered' Boyd as being Pack, so there's that as a bonus. Maybe he would be, one day, and Derek wouldn't feel like a liar.

Danny had been hesitant when he first sat down, so Derek focused on Boyd, and Danny slowly relaxed. By the time Scott and Allison joined them, Danny was smiling his normal smile, and Derek relaxed. When Jackson sat down, though, Derek almost panicked.

Jackson was Deucalion's; he couldn't just keep acting like he didn't exist. But Jackson was, in
Stiles' words, a douche, and Derek didn't like him.

Stiles noticed, of course Stiles noticed, he rolled his eyes and kicked Derek in the knee. When Derek glared, Stiles gave him a sunny smile and shrugged.

Danny looked between them and frowned slightly, so Stiles turned his attention to his boyfriend and left Derek alone.

But he was right; Derek was overreacting. So he nodded hello to Jackson and continued his conversation with Boyd.

“But the new coach looks good.”

“New coach?” Derek is the first to admit he doesn't pay attention.

“Yeah, Der.” Cora plops down on his other side, trailed as always by Issac. “Coach Ennis.”

Derek almost chokes on his drink. “Jeff is coaching track?”

“Jeff, huh?” Jackson gives Derek a speculative look.

“And he's assisting with lacrosse.” Cora nods, evil smirk firmly in place.

“Huh. He didn't tell me.” But it made sense, of a sort. Jeff wasn't just here to train Derek, and sometimes Laura; he was here to watch over Stiles. Maybe Jackson, too.

“If you're buddies with the guy, this mean you're gonna cave and join the team?” Jackson honestly seems curious, without his normal sneer.

Taken aback, Derek automatically looks to Stiles.

Stiles snorts. “Don't look at me, dude. I'm the worst player on the team.”

“Nah, there's always Greenburg.” Jackson grins at Stiles. “And you've gotten better over the summer.”

Stiles flushes. “Thanks, dude.”

Jackson just shrugs.

“Do you want to play, Derek?” Danny asks quietly.

Derek doesn't have to think, just shakes his head. “Never had any interest in lacrosse. Track, now I could get into track, if it's not Finstock in charge. He'd harass me more than he already does.”

Danny chuckles. “True, he's really enthusiastic about lacrosse. He makes all of us join cross-country, so we'll stay in shape. But Boyd's right, Finstock isn't coaching track or cross-country anymore, the new coach is. We could use you.”

Derek gives Danny a tentative smile, realizing that this was Danny offering an olive branch. “If it's not Finstock, I think I will.”

“Wait'll Coach hears about this.” Jackson chortles. “He'll have a heart attack – can I tell him?”

Stiles rolls his eyes again. “Coach loves you, why are you always so gleeful about shit that'll upset him?”
“Dude, it's because he loves me.” Jackson gives a dramatic shudder, hamming it up. “That's what I worry about. I’m just irresistible, you know? Why do you think Danny’s my friend?”

“I feel sorry for you, jackass.” Danny throws a fry at Jackson.

He bats it away, grinning. “You know you're in love with me, Danny.”

“You're not my type.” Danny says dismissively.

“I'm everyone's type.” Jackson declares, fluttering his lashes at Danny. Stiles all but falls over, he's laughing so hard.

“Jesus, Whittmore, warn a guy before you go trying to steal his man!”

Danny just snorts, and Derek grins.

Okay, this wasn't so bad.

**September 1st, 2012**

Stiles stared at the ceiling, wondering what was wrong.

Last night had been the full moon, and most of the wolves were still out; it was barely five am.

Moodily, Stiles kicked the covers and rolled over, feeling like his skin was too tight.

Gunshot.

Stiles sat up. That was a gunshot. Couple miles away, from the sound, but...

“Dad? Chris?”

“What is it, son?” John yelled up the stairs.

“Is Chris here, too? And Vic?” Stiles left Derek’s bedroom and padded over to the stairs.

“Yeah, they're passed out on a couch. Why?”

“You didn't hear it?”

“Hear what, kiddo?”

“The gunshot.”

Talia slunk around John and planted herself in front of Stiles, still in wolf form.

“I don't know, Tee.” Stiles answered her look. “It was a couple miles away. I thought maybe Chris or dad... but if they're all here.”

Talia growls softly.

“Yeah. Maybe it's just a regular hunter, poaching or something?”

Any further reassurance was wasted, as a howl went up from less than hundred yards away.

Talia was off like a shot, John and Stiles chasing her.
“Alpha!” Jon's scream was frantic, and Stiles made himself move faster.

“What the hell?” Stiles didn't pause with his dad, kept moving to his Packmates who need him.

Jon staggered out of the forest, carrying Terry, sobbing and almost hysterical.

“Laura and Derek are carrying Brian, but Alpha...”

Terry had an arrow in her stomach, blood flowing down like water.

Talia whined and pawed at Jon, clearly trying to get him to lower her, so that she could give her human Packmate the Bite.

Stiles inhaled sharply, coughed, and yelled, “No!” as loud as he could.

“What!” Jon snarls. “She'll die if Talia doesn't Bite her.”

“She'll die if she does! That's Mountain Ash, Cannibal!”

Both Talia and Jon freeze, then look at Stiles. “How do you know?”

“Can't you smell it?”

“They can't smell Mountain Ash,” Alan says.

Stiles jumps, then glares at the older Emissary. “Don't do that. And, they can't?”

“What are we gonna do?” Jon sobs.

“Call an ambulances.” Alan says grimly.

“She won't last that long.” John says gently.

“No, wait.” Stiles steps forward slowly, so as to not upset Jon further. “I can pull the Ash out, Jon.”

Jon stares at him, needing a moment to understand, then he yanks Stiles forward by his collar. Talia growls warningly, but Jon ignores her. “Do it!” He orders.

Stiles exhales slowly and nods. “We need the arrow out. I know it's supposed to be the wrong thing, but it's plugging the Ash inside.”

“I'll get it.” Alan gives Stiles a sour look, but kneels next to Terry and removes the arrow carefully. “She's actually lucky, it missed the major arteries.”

Stiles quickly closes his eyes, trying not to gag.

There's a small commotion as Derek and Laura stumble into the front yard, supporting Brian between them; he's got a bullet in his leg, and Alan goes to treat him.

“Derek, you're fastest, I need my chest.”

Stiles leans over Terry, chanting softly, whiles Jon holds Alan's shirt over her stomach, trying to slow the blood loss as much as possible.

Derek’s back in seconds, chest in his hands. Stiles doesn't bother relocating it, just flips it open and pulls out the chalice, the athame, and another pinch of Mountain Ash.
Still chanting, Stiles cuts his wrist and holds it over the chalice, dropping the Ash on top. Then he presses his own bloody hand over the hole in Terry's stomach.

When he pulls his hand back, a thin thread of blood follows, darkened by the Ash injected into her with the arrow. Stiles pulls on the thread, directing it into the chalice.

He repeats this three times; the third time, the blood was almost totally free of Ash.

Stiles slumps backwards, drained.

“Okay, Tee.” He whispers, voice gone hoarse. “She's clean.”

Talia nods gravely, then bends over the woman and carefully bites her left side.

Jon relaxes somewhat, scooping his mate into his arms. “Thank you, thank you.”

“That's m'job, Jonny-boy.” Stiles slurs happily; he's useful, finally useful.

“Good job, kiddo.” John says quietly, laying his hand on Stiles' shoulder.

“What happened?” Stiles demands. “Brian was shot with wolfsbane, Terry with Mountain Ash, how?”

“Kate.” Derek spits.

“We think,” Laura sighs, sounded exhausted. “Derek thought he smelled her, but we didn't find any other trace. We were on our way back, the four of us, when Terry walked up.”

“Why was Terry out there?” John asked, giving voice to Stiles' confusion.

“She said Jon texted her, asked her to bring him new clothes. But he didn't; he'd left his phone here.” Laura gave them a worried look.

“S'one hacked the phones.” Stiles concludes.

“You're about to pass out.” Derek tells him.

“Pr'bly. Are they 'kay?”

Derek bends down and picks him up after setting his chest on his stomach. “Yes, we're all okay, the whole Pack is fine. We were the last ones out.”

“Rose?” Because if someone lured out Terry, they could also try for Rose.

“She's with Star tonight.” Laura reassures him.

“Rih. Wi' Star. Kay. We all goo?”

Derek gives him a fond smile. “I promise, Little Red, we're all good. We're all safe.”

“Kay. Nih.”

Interlude: Golden truth, silver loss

Gerard had never wanted to gouge his own eyes out before. Other's eyes, he quite often wanted to remove the eyes of others, those who shouldn't have the ability to see the beauty of the world, the
beauty they corrupted by their mere presence.

But today...
Today, he saw an true abomination.

He and Kate wouldn’t be welcome if they were discovered. It was one of the many things that angered Gerard, how far his son had slipped his leash.

He’d though Vicky a good choice for his son, a strong Matriarch raised in the old ways, the ways Gerard had tried to teach both his children. Only Kate had truly learned the lessons he taught.

Vicky should have been perfect; she was strong and steady, with an unwavering belief in their work. Chris and his bleeding heart would bow to his implacable wife.

Instead, somehow Chris had infected Victoria Plata, now Victoria Argent, with his liberal virus. It was bad enough that Vicky had sided with the wolves two years ago, hunting down those who killed the Alpha – pardon, the Alpha's mate, as if that meant anything else. That, at least, had a pragmatic reason, though Gerard didn't like it.

But he could see the logic; so long as the local wolves kept to their kennels and didn't fight their collars, they made good cover for their work.

Vicky had threatened Gerard. He could respect that; he admits that he, himself, would have been less than rational had someone instigated a Hunt in his territory without his knowledge.

Hell, he can even understand why they’re helping the eldest of the Hale sons – the animals were fiercely protective of their cubs, and showing support for the teen would only lead the local Alpha to trust his son and daughter-in-law more.

Damned inconvenient, but understandable. If Gerard accepts it at face value.

He’s going to be ill.

Because he can’t; he cannot accept it at face value, not anymore, not after what he’s just seen.

He and Kate came to investigate, after her little toy fell out of contact. The toy – what was his name... Jeremy, Jacob... Jared, that was his name – had last reported that he’d had no success in luring any of the Hale Betas away, but that he had a plan to convince one.

Kate had loved the plan, of course, and approved it without even checking in with Gerard first. And Gerard had, belatedly and begrudgingly, approved. After punishing Kate for her insubordination.

It should have been the perfect plan; isolate the girl the eldest son was infatuated with, then give her the Bite. Either the girl would turn, forcing Hale Junior to choose between his little girlfriend and his Pack, a choice that was no choice, or – more likely, from the medical information Gerard dug up after Kate first told him the plan – the girl would die.

Either way, young Hale would be grief stricken, ripe for Kate’s plucking.

Then the dog, Jared, had disappeared. Kate waited twelve days past his last expected check-in before breaking (if he were to be honest, Gerard was rather impressed with her patience. He would never tell her that, of course; she was too often impetuous, and any hint of approval over timing would only feed that impetuosity.) and purchasing tickets to Sacramento.

They’d scoped the town as carefully as they could, reading through the last weeks' newspapers and
piecing together the stories and rumors.

The girl and her parents were apparently attacked in an ‘animal attack’ that practically screamed werewolf; both parents were dead, and the girl was missing a week and a half of her memory. They'd been found by one of the Hale Betas, according to the papers, and the girl was rushed to the hospital where it was discovered she only suffered some minor claw wounds.

Those wounds were proof that she had not been given the Bite. She was alive and well, aside from the memory loss. Kate had talked to her, offering sympathy and trying to gain more information.

All she's discovered is that the Hale Pack was being overly protective... and so were the Argents.

It was the only time either of them had been able to speak to the chit; every other time, she was with a Hale, or one of Gerard’s insubordinate family.

Likewise, the Hale Kate had been set to snare was always with someone; while in public – the most likely place for Kate to draw his attention – those “someones” were almost always Peter Hale, the Alpha’s Second, and Gerard’s own son.

And now!

Much as he loathed to admit it, Gerard knew his son. He rarely cared for anyone, was one of the worst actors Gerard had ever seen.

So the look he gave the Beta was real.

His son wasn't just working with the animals as part a long game.

He’d gone to their side, in all ways.

Gerard’s stomach clenches, and he gives up the fight, bends over the sink and vomits, unable to decide which is worse – that he son has fallen in love with an animal, or that he has fallen in love with a man.

His son was truly gone, taken by the monsters as his mother had been.

Gerard is going to kill Vicky for this.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Levels and layers -- Kate's plans are like an onion...
When you cut into it, it'll make you cry.

Chapter Notes

First, my apologies to everyone.
I'm old and decrepit, or at least disabled, and this last week was torture-and-needles week for me. It's been hellish, and i've been drugged to the gills just to get through it. It's not quite done, but it's getting there, so hopefully, *crosses fingers*, it won't take quite as long for the next chapter as this one took!
Second, damn, this is fighting me! Sorry, so sorry. I know exactly where it's going, so I haven't got the faintest clue why it's being just a pain in the ass to write! Sigh.
Third, as always, i have no beta/editor, so if anyone sees mistakes, please point them out!
Fourth, Scott!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

September 3rd, 2012

Derek scowled at his desk, annoyed that Harris was living up to Stiles' worst expectations.

Bad enough they already had a project, the second week of school. But, even though Harris said they could pick their own partners, he'd stepped in when Stiles and Derek automatically started to sit together.

“No, you two cause issues when you work together.” Harris smirked.

Derek had raised an eyebrow, annoyed. “What are you talking about?”

“They last time you two were allowed to work together, a good woman was wrongfully imprisoned.”

“If that were actually the truth, wouldn't she have, I don't know, attended her trial and proved her innocence?” Stiles was shaking, slightly, but managed a sneer.

Harris had glared right back. “In this town? Pre-judged? She never had a chance.”

“If you continue this harassment, I’ve got no problems going to the principle. Again.” Stiles said flatly.

“You always run and hide behind her.” Harris has mused. “But this isn't harassment; I think you two would better serve your classmates by working with other people. Stiles, Kira here needs a
partner. And Derek, Jennifer is new to the school. Maybe you can find more than monosyllables for her?"

It was easier to go along with it, but that didn't make Derek any less mad.

“I'm sorry.” The girl said softly.

Derek sighs. “It's not your fault.” He mutters. “I just. Stiles is my friend.”

She offers him a shy smile. “Well, I know I’m new, but I could be your friend, too?”

Stiles looks up at that and smirks at Derek; he sighs, then looks at her. “We'll see. I'm Derek Hale.”

“Jennifer.” She beamed back. “Jennifer Blake.”

“Nice to meet you.”

That was it, so far as 'friendly' conversation went, until the end of class, when Jennifer suggested they get together to work on the project.

“We're still moving in, so my place is out. Maybe the library?”

“Nah.” Stiles interjected. “Kira and I are going to work at Derek’s, so you might as well come along. What Harris doesn't know won't hurt him.”

Derek nods, feeling a rush of relief – if neither girl protests, he can still work with Stiles, at least as part of the bigger group. “It's a big house, room for everyone.”

Jennifer smiles shyly again. “I'd like that, thank you. Let me give you my number, you can text me directions and the time I should show up?”

Derek looks at Stiles, who gives a small nod. “Sure. Let me see your phone.”

After he'd gotten her number and given his in return, Stiles and Derek headed to P.E.

“So.” Stiles said, a little too loudly, and he modulates his voice as he continues. “She seemed nice.”

“I guess.” Derek shrugs.

Stiles cackles and shoulder-bumps him. “Dude, you guess? She likes you.”

“She doesn't know anyone here, Stiles. She's trying to make friends.”

“Yeah, in your pants.” Stiles chortles.

“You are a child, I swear.” Derek huffs.

“What's he done now?” Danny asks. Derek just rolls his eyes, doing his best to ignore the scent of jealousy that always flavors the air when Danny saw Derek and Stiles talking.

“He's got himself a new girlfriend.” Stiles says, a little too gleefully, if anyone asked Derek.

No one did.

“He what?” A smile twitched on Danny’s lips, and for the first time since he came back from
Hawaii, he seemed less worried by Derek.

It made Derek want to hit something.

But he pasted on a small smile, willing to endure this weirdness from Danny as a small price to pay for having Stiles around. “She's not my girlfriend, I just met her, Jesus. You'll have us married by our third date.”

Stiles just laughs louder, and Derek smiles a little bigger, trying to hide his worry.

Because something Derek said had scared him.

**September 20th, 2012**

Stiles throws his phone on his bed in annoyance.

This is worse than when Scott got together with Allison.

And Derek swears up and down that he's not dating Jennifer – and no one, not a single other wolf, calls him on this. At all. They believe him.

So he can't be lying.

So why is he spending all his gods-damned time with her? To the point of blowing off official Stiles-and-Derek hangout time?

Again.

Bad enough that they have to have said official time; between all the training Stiles has, school, lacrosse, cross-country, and now Derek’s training, not to mention Danny and Scott...

Well, they had to have official, scheduled time. Fuck, Stiles had to schedule time for everyone, but his priorities were, in order, dad and Talia (since he was mostly seeming them together, now, even if there hadn't been an official moving on anyone's part), Danny, Derek, and Scott.

But Jen was the new girl, Derek kept saying, and didn't have any friends and wasn't good at making them. She wasn't trying to make them – the only person she tried to talk to, ever, was Derek. She's nice enough, Stiles guesses, when anyone talks to her, but she doesn't make any further effort.

And she glares at people who ask Derek to do things, if they're stupid enough to ask when she's around.

Clearly, she thinks they're dating.

“Fuck it.” Stiles spits, knowing he's alone in the house.

He heads over to Scott's; Allison was currently at the range with her mother.

He gets there just as Scott's leaving for a run, and feeling the need to not be alone, Stiles elects to join him. It quickly turns into a goofy game of hide-and-seek in the woods.

And then something else, altogether, when Stiles stumbles upon his dad.

“Stiles?” He's not used to his dad looking spooked.
“What's going on?” Stiles can hear deputies, in the distance, and that's never a good sign.

“Lost kid.” His father says, sounding weary and frustrated.

“Is that all?” Stiles pitches his voice low.

“I don't know.” Is the not at all reassuring answer. “It almost feels like a Hansel and Gretel setup, but the mother's too scared.”

“Who's the kid?”

John shakes his head. “Not local.”

“Scott and I can help. Give us an area.”

“Stiles, you're just – ” Stiles raises a sardonic eyebrow, silently reminding his father of his own words just last month, and John gives a defeated sigh. “Yeah. Yo, Scott. Come over here.”

John gives them a search area – shared, they're two fifteen year olds, after all – and they spend the next couple of hours walking through the woods, yelling “Ethan! Aiden!” at the top of their lungs.

Because they're not looking for one kid, the Sheriff had finally figured out, but twins.

They're Stiles and Scott's age, or just about, but their mother had been damned near hysterical when they hadn't shown back up at their RV last night. Apparently, they were a traveling family and the boys were home schooled. It was kinda of cool, if weird.

The sun sinks, and they still haven't found either guy, and Stiles is getting worried himself. He'd though he and Scott would have better luck, knowing where teens would go.

“I'm gonna check up top.” Stiles decides, staring at the old distillery. Lots of kids spent their free time in here, but how had two non-local teens found it?

Scott couldn't step a foot in inside; it triggered his asthma. “Yeah. I’ll keep watch, dude.”

“Be back in a few.”

Stiles hit pay dirt; two sleeping mirror images.

“I know way too much about selkies.” Stiles mutters to himself when he stumbles across them. “And how they started that twin-panic, when they had that anti-human crusade back in the eight hundreds. Because these guys are hot, but creeping me out. And what am I supposed to do? Run for dad or a deputy and hope they don't wake up? Or wake 'em up myself and try to talk to them?”

“Too late.” One of the says, and holy shit, how had he heard Stiles?

“Please tell me you aren't actually selkies?” Stiles almost begs.

Derek frowns as a spike of unease hits him and looks around Jennifer’s house, looking for the cause.

“Something wrong, Derek?” She cocks her head, looking annoyed.
Derek flushes at her tone. “What do you mean?”

“You just... you're sort of jumpy. I don't bite, you know.”

“I just... what's the phrase, felt a goose walk over my grave?” Derek shrugs, trying to pass it off.

The unease grew.

Jennifer frowns. “Am I doing something else wrong?”

“Something else? What do you mean, else? You're not doing anything wrong.”

“Obviously, I am.” She snaps waspishly.

“Now I’m confused.” Derek says slowly.

“I like you. I’ve told you I like you. I keep finding excuses for you to come over, I wear things you like, I pay attention, I give you every hint and signal.” She's almost ranting, tears in her eyes, and Derek isn't sure if he feels more like an idiot or a jerk.

“I thought you were just... I mean, we've only known each other for three weeks, and I – “

“Is that all?” Her expression smooths into a sunny smile.

Derek feels faintly ill.

“I...”

“It's okay, Derek. I’m not going to be offended if you kiss me.”

Derek isn't sure he wants to. But he finds himself leaning forward.

They both turn and give him equally strange looks. “Are selkies real?”

“Yes.” Stiles says uncertainly.

“Well, we're not.” The second one said.

“And yet you heard me, from way over there, when I was talking under my breath.” Stiles narrows his eyes. “Have you checked in with the local Alpha?”

Both boys wince, and Stiles feels a shot of vindication – he was right – then worry.

“We weren't supposed to be around long enough to need to.” The first says with an awkward shrug. “But the RV broke down, da got pissed, and we've been stuck.”

“And since da's the Alpha...” The second one flexed his hands.

“Tee's cooler than that. Just come explain.”

They give him equally disbelieving looks. “Why does a random human know that?”

Stiles rolls his eyes. “Yeah, not random. I’m Stiles, ban-draoi and apprentice Emissary to the Hale
Pack. On top of that, my dad's the Alpha's mate, and Sheriff of Beacon Hills.”


“Dude. Alpha of the Hale Pack is always a woman.” Stiles scoffed at the ignorance of these two. “And the Hale Pack is one of the most respected in the country. How do you not know these things?”

They exchange a very... fraught... look. “Let's just say, da like being solitary.” Says the first.

“Look, I can't just keep calling you one and two – which of you is Ethan, which is Aiden?”

“I'm Aiden.” the first nods. “And how did you know our names?”

“Did you miss that whole 'my dad's the Sheriff' part? I’m actually part of the search team for you two.”

“Fuck.” Ethan hisses. “What is she doing, going to cops?”

“Being worried?” Stiles looks between them, not liking their spike of fear.

“She knows better. Da's not gonna be happy.” Aiden chews his lip, clearly worried, while Ethan looks off, distracted.

“What are you guys doing, anyway?”

“Looking for da. Or we were, but...” Ethan looks almost ashamed. “I was just...”

Stiles looks them over again; they actually look older than he does, which makes sense – werewolves always have that super-model look, with the cut physique and all, and that makes teens look older. But they also look dirty and ragged and...

“When's the last time you guys ate?” Stiles manages to only sound like he's offering hospitality, instead of the pity he's actually starting to feel.

“That's what happened. I hadn't eaten in too long; made me sleepy.”

“And somehow, him sleeping dragged me under.” Aiden finishes, sounding almost embarrassed.

Stiles nods in understanding. “Well, if we get to dad now, he can call off the search and your dad never needs to know, right?”

The twins spin in place, identical looks of fear flashing over their identical faces as they face the door.

Stiles hears a scream, and he knows it's Scott.

“Fuck.” He breathes, not panicking.

But he's moving, he has to get to Scott, now.

He flies down the stairs, flanked by the twins, which Stiles can't give any attention to right now however odd it is. Stiles pulls the small bad of Mountain Ash he keeps on him at all times, ready to anything he can.

Scott stumbles in the door right as Stiles hits the bottom, staggering and bleeding, a thin trickle
from under his shirt.
The twins freeze in place and whimper, and Stiles pieces it together.
Their dad – their Alpha – was outside, angry, and he'd just bitten Scott.
An Alpha had just bitten an underage guy.
Scott.
“Fuck!” Stiles screams it this time, throwing the ash at the door and throwing his will into it.
An large wolf-thing bounces off the doorway, growling and snarling.
“Stiles!” Scott is panicked, and he's got every right.
“I know, Scott. Sit! Take off your shirt, let me see.”
“But why isn't it coming in?”
“Don't worry about that.” Stiles pulls his phone, snaps a picture of Scott's bite, then the enraged Alpha, sending both to Tee. Then he calls her, while doing his best to staunch the blood.
There wasn't much blood.
That's good.
“Stiles, please tell me this is a prank?”
“No. Distillery. It's me, Scott, and the twins.”
“The lost kids?” Stiles can hear Talia moving, knows she isn't alone.
“Pups.” Stiles corrects.
Talia hisses in a breath, then snaps, “Explain!”
“They were only supposed to be passing through, they said. Their RV broke down, their dad got pissed and took off. They've been trying to find him, since. They, the twins, didn't know about you. Don't know if their dad did – they said he likes being solitary, just him, mate and boys.”
“Then why the hell is he Biting children? Who, I can only assume, he didn't ask?”
“How the hell am I supposed to know? He keeps charging the Ash line, like it's not there, snarling and growling like he's got rabies. He's not in wolf-form, Tee. He actually looks like the Wolfman. As in the movie. What the hell?” Stiles knows he's babbling, a little, but it's him, it's what he does, he babbles.
“That's bad.” Talia breathes. “Hang tight, we're almost there.”
“You two okay?” Stiles ties off the strips he'd wrapped around Scott, torn from his shirt, and looks up at the twins.
They exchange another look. “Will she kill us?” Aiden asks, worried.
Stiles snorts at the almost insult. “She'll calm your dad down if she can, or they'll knock him out.” But Stiles knows that's only temporary; he'd Bitten Scott. Who was fifteen.
“How is Mrs. Hale gonna knock out a monster, Stiles?” Scott grabs his hands, frantic. “Call your dad, she'll get bitten like I did.”

“She's an Alpha, Scott. She can handle this. Dad's just human.”

“Wait. Mrs. Hale. Your dad is human... But she isn't? What is she? What's that?”

“He's a werewolf, Scott.” Stiles rolls his eyes, having almost no patience for Scott's idiocy when the guy was so clearly a werewolf.

Even if werewolves weren't supposed to look like... like that.

His phone rings. His mother's Alpha ring tone.

Derek jerks back, then gives Jennifer a sheepish smile. “Sorry, it's my mom.”

He doesn't even get the chance to say hello, just gets a punch in the guts.

“It's a 101.” She snaps off. “Code Red.”

Oh gods. Derek can feel the blood drain out of his face, and he starts shaking.

“Orders?” He asks levelly, shocking himself with how calm he sounds.

“Distillery. Now!”

She hangs up, and Derek stands, shoving his books into his backpack.

“What's going on?” Jennifer’s tone can't decide if it's worried or angry.

“Family emergency.” He says tautly. “I'm sorry, I really need to go.”

“What is it? Is someone hurt?” She’s saying the right things, but not the right way... Derek’s losing his mind, he has to be. She's a concerned friend. Or... whatever.

She clearly wants to be more than friends.

Derek can't think about that right now.

“Stiles.” That's the important thing, Stiles. A possibly feral wolf, and Stiles, somehow. How the hell that happened, only Stiles would stumble across a feral wolf in Beacon Hills...

“What is it with you and that kid?” Jennifer explodes. “It's like you're having an affair!”

Derek freezes, then slowly turns to look at her.

Whatever she sees on his face, it makes her shrink in her seat. “He is my best friend.” Derek says flatly.”He's like family. You don't have to be friends with him, but don't ever insult him again. Not if you want to be friends with me.”

Derek flings his bag over his back and stalks to the door.

“Wait, Derek, that wasn't what I meant!” She slides in front of him, blocking the door. “Please, just,
can we talk about this, don't go – “

“I can't right now. I have to go. What part of 'emergency' don't you get?”

“I just, I’m sorry, I can't help it, I’m jealous!”

Derek realizes he's growling, and closes his eyes, breathing deep to control himself. His wolf is going nuts, clawing to get out, break this stupid human who's keeping from Stiles, and it's all he can do to control it.

“There's no reason to be jealous, Jennifer. Now, move.”

“There's every reason! He's the reason you won't do anything with me!”

Derek can't help the incredulous look on his face. “He's got a boyfriend. But this is not. The. Time. Move, or I’ll move you.”

“Derek...”

“Right now, I’m willing to ignore this idiocy, because this is really bad timing. But I’m about to get pissed, because my best fucking friend might be hurt, or worse, and you are keeping from going and helping. Now. Move!”

Face pinched, Jennifer moves the minimum amount for Derek to open the door, forcing him to turn sideways and brush his entire body across hers to get to the door.

“I'm sorry.” She whispers, tears in her eyes. “I hope he's okay.”

She's not lying.

Derek gives a short nod, then lopes to the car, moving barely slow enough to not cause problems.

Stiles needs him.

Stiles relaxes when he hears Talia says “Thirty.”

He turns back to the twins.

They shift uncertainly, but they haven't tried to do anything to him, even though the saw him with the Ash, knew he was the reason they were trapped in here.

So he gives them his best reassuring smile.

Neither is noticeably reassured.

There's a sudden howl, from very close, and it's answered by many other howls immediately.

Scott goes pale and passes out.

“Oh, gods, please don't die, Scott! You can't die, you're – “

“He's only fainted.” Ethan says confidently.
“Oh thank gods.”

The ravaging Alpha pauses in his nonsensical assault, then suddenly breaks for the trees. He then skitters back, and tries to break to the west.

He's quickly ringed, pretty much the entire adult Pack in there.

Talia steps forward. “You are trespassing on Hale territory, and have given the Bite to an unwilling child. Give yourself up.”

Snarling, the Alpha charges Talia.

Stiles whimpers.

Peter, Jon and Laura dive at him, Laura slinging herself around his neck and straining to bend him backwards and immobilize his head, while Peter and Jon each grab and pin an arm.

Sarah, Terry and John start firing trank darts at him.

It takes at least six before he start wavering, and they have to re-load. John doesn't bother, the two women are so much faster at reloading that they've shot him twice more each before he'd have finished.

The Alpha collapses backwards, out.

“Stiles.”

Answering the unspoken command, he walks over and scuffs the line with his foot. Talia gives him a quick look-over, then nods towards his dad.

Stiles looks to him, and is unsurprised when John hands him a sack.

“What's that?” Ethan hasn't left the doorway; clearly, he and Aiden aren't feeling comfortable.

“Wolfsbane infused rope.” Stiles informs them absently.

Talia looks to the twins. “I'm sorry, boys.” She says it gently. “We aren't sure what's going on, but – he has Bitten a teenager, yes?”

Ethan and Aiden exchange another of those looks, then Aiden answer. “Yes, ma'am. He's in here. He's fine... well, as fine as... I mean, he's not rejecting it.”

The unspoken 'yet' hovered there, making Stiles want to scream. But he couldn't do that, he had to tie up this fucking douchebag insane Alpha who'd possibly killed his best friend.

Laura, Peter and Jon are still holding the fucker, which is only prudent, so Stiles calmly motions for them to flip him, then starts chanting under his breath as he ties him up.

“What Pack are you?” Talia's still being gentle, because she's the coolest, most awesome Alpha ever.

“His.” Ethan points at his father.

“Obviously. But what is your Pack...” Talia stares at them, taken aback by their confusion. “You don't know what Pack you are?”
“We're da's pack.” Aiden repeats.

“But what is the name of the your pack?”

“Name? Our da's name is Tom.”

Talia huffs. “Tom what?”

They shift nervously. “Um.” Ethan waves his hand. “I don't actually remember what name we're using this week?”

“Thompson?” Aiden offers.

“No, that was Oregon, he always changes when we cross state lines.”

“Why would he do that?” Peter drawls the question like they're having tea.

The twins shrug in sync. “He just does.”

“The only name we use all the time is Roland, and that's only ever for school.”

Derek finally gets close enough to park and all but leaps out of the car, turning it off but not bothering to take the keys out of the ignition.

He's less than a quarter mile from the distillery, and a growl erupts from his chest as the smell of the foreign Alpha hits him, hard, along with the smell of his Beta.

The Beta must be unusually strong, going by his scent...

Then Derek was passing Cora, watching the perimeter (why were there several deputies about, filtering back towards the closest parking lot?) and she hissed a quick update.

Stiles wasn't hurt directly. But this was worse, from Stiles point of view.

Derek groans and throws out a quick burst of speed, entering the distillery yard and looking around frantically for Stiles.

Derek’s gaze snags on the foreign Beta, standing all too close to Stiles, chewing his lip; guy looks like he's between Stiles and Derek, age-wise and –

Wait.

Ah, that explains his smell. Twins.

Derek frowns to himself, then allows the worst of his panic to subside as he sees Stiles, calmly tying up the foreign Alpha, who's naked on the forest floor. At the moment, Stiles is fine, so Derek looks to his Alpha for orders.

Talia tips her head towards the building, and Derek enters.

Scott's been propped against a wall; he seems to have passed out. Probably from fear, by his smell. A makeshift bandage is wrapped low on his torso, but he seems fine, otherwise. His temperature is
only slightly elevated, his heartbeat normal.

Derek lets out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding; Scott wasn't rejecting the Bite.

“Should I bring him out, or just watch over him here?”

“We're moving this to the house. Jon, go and get Scott, will you? Derek, please carry Stiles. Peter, if you'll grab him.” From her tone, Talia meant the foreign Alpha.

“Give me twenty.” John is saying, as Derek returns to the yard, going to stand next to Stiles. “I'll bring the mother to your house.”

Talia looks over to the two young Betas. “Is your mother also a wolf?”

They nod as one, and Talia turns to Laura. “Go with him, please.”

John rolls his eyes but doesn't protest.

The two twins stare as Peter hefts their father, thankfully returned to human form thanks to the wolfsbane rope, and Derek studies them, frowning.

Sixteen, give or take, they were wearing old, beat up clothing. That, in itself, didn't mean anything – Derek had lots of clothes that were in similar condition; when you were going to run as wolves did, it was a waste of time and effort to dress in better clothing.

But it was much-mended, indicating that they weren't wearing the clothes because they'd been going for a run, but because they had little else. It, and they, were filthy, as if they'd been out for a few days, living wild. And while they were well formed, both boys were still slightly thin, which given their probable age could only indicate malnourishment.

Derek has never seen a malnourished wolf that wasn't feral.

These two clearly weren't feral, even if their Alpha might be. They stood near Stiles calmly enough, given the situation, serious looks on their faces.

One spoke up; “Maybe we should go with him, to get our mom?”

Talia looks between them, searching for something, then shakes her head. “If you don't mind, I’d rather you come with us. I’m hoping you'll keep your father calm, should he come to.”

The twins exchange another of those looks, then shrug in unison. The second turns to John. “Please tell her that we're fine, and our safe word this week is 'Nova'. She won't believe you, otherwise.”

“What else does that word tell her?” Talia asks, eyebrow raised.

They give her cautious looks. “That we are with safe wolves.” One of them says.

“Hm,” Talia doesn't remark further, just waves her hand, clearly telling her Pack to get on with it.

Derek is all too willing to scoop Stiles up, taking it as an excuse to check for himself that Stiles was fine. Which he was, under the sweat of several hours of running around, which was odd; it was Thursday, why was Stiles running around the forest on a Thursday? He normally...

Fuck. This was Derek’s fault.

“I'm sorry.” He says quietly as he settles Stiles in his arms.
“For what?” Stiles asks, astonished.

“If I hadn't caved to Jennifer’s begging, I’d have been with you, and you two wouldn't have been out.”

Stiles smacks Derek on the head. “Don't be an idiot, sourwolf. It's just as likely that he'd have called, bored because Allison was busy, and we'd have all been here. But if you'd been here, you'd have gone inside, looking for them, and then Scott and I would have both been outside when he showed up.”

Stiles shivers when he refers to the Alpha, and Derek unconsciously tightens his arms.

“He wouldn't have touched you.” Derek protests. “You smell of Pack.”

“Doesn't Scott?” Stiles points out.

“Not as much as you.” Derek argues.

Stiles snorts. “But enough, that any sane wolf should have noticed and backed off. Trust me, Der, that Alpha wasn't sane, for whatever reason.” He shakes his head. “I threw down an Ash line, to keep him out after he Bit... he Bit...”

“I'm sorry.” Is all Derek can say.

“Yeah, well. Anyway, I threw down a line, and threw himself at it, over and over, like he literally couldn't understand why he couldn't get through the door, and that this time, he'd make it. No one who was sane would do that.”

Derek just nods, not feeling at all better. “Still.”

Stiles groans. “No. No, you are not blaming yourself. This was not your fault, Der, and nothing you can say will make me believe it.”

“He's right, eldest boy.” Talia says from beside them. “Don't beat yourself up.”

They spill out into the clearing of their house in a ragged line, led by Talia, Derek and Stiles. Peter lays the unconscious Alpha on a lawn chair while Derek sets Stiles down. Jon looks to Talia for direction, then lays Scott on another chair.

“Stiles, can you lay down a circle for him, and remove the ropes.”

“Sure, Tee.”

“Just don't activate it until you're outside the circle.” Talia orders sternly.

Stiles nods, and gets to work, after wordlessly pressing into Derek for a hug.

Derek gives it to him, worried about the way he trembles.

Stiles sets up the circle quickly, leaving it un-activated per Talia's orders, then unties the rope, looping the pieces into a neat circle as he goes. Then he carefully steps over the line, bends down and touches it, activating it easily.
“Done.” He informs Talia, then goes to check on Scott.

“Do you think he can be... can be turned back, the way Paige was?” Derek asks his mom, trailing after Stiles like he's afraid if he lets Stiles out his sight, he'll disappear.

Stiles isn't complaining; he feels better with the sourwolf in touching distance, himself.

“Hey, buddy, you need to wake up.” Stiles pats Scott's face, not yet worried, but not exactly blasé.

“We're sorry.” One of the twins – Ethan, he thinks – says. “If we hadn't gone looking for our da, or at least checked back in...”

Stiles snorts and rolls his eyes. “Nope. You don't get to blame yourselves, either. Sure, the Sheriff’s office wouldn't have been out, but we spend a lot of time in the woods. That's actually how we ended up helping to find you – Scott and I were on a run.”

“Oh.” They stare at Stiles, seemingly at a loss. “Even though there are wolves around?”

He sounds... almost distressed. It's about what Derek sounds like, when Stiles throws himself out of a tree from higher than Derek wants him to.

Stiles scoffs at that. “Please. I spend full moons with these furballs, why would I worry on any other night? I’m Pack.”

“You might be.” The second one argues. “But your friend isn't.”

Stiles gives him a look of amazement. “Can't you smell him, dude.”

“But he's human.” They protest in unison.

“I'm human. So's my dad.”

“You're the Emissary. And you said your dad's the Alpha's mate.”

Stiles stands back up and stares them down. “And? We're not the only humans in the Pack.”

“But he didn't even know about wolves!” Aiden protests.

“Doesn't mean he isn't Pack.” Stiles argues. “He just didn't know it. Now he does. Though, that makes me think... Tee, we should the others. Erica and Boyd, at least.”

“Something to discuss later.” Talia says off-hand, making Stiles grumble to himself. Talia was staring at the unconscious foreign Alpha, a moue of distaste on her lips. “For now, please call Star.”

Stiles looks the question to her, but Talia just keeps glaring at the twins' da, so Stiles sighs and traces the runes that comprise Star's true name and 'please come ASAP'. That's not what the runes really mean, of course, but Stiles would be the first to admit he sucks at Fae languages.

A bare second after Stiles finishes, Star is... there. The twins jump, moving away from the spot where she appeared. “She smells like cinnamon and honey. What the hell?” Aiden mutters. They're both looking creeped out.

On her part, Star gives them a once-over, then rolls her eyes. “It's the Voltron twins, how exciting.”

“Voltron twins?” Stiles can't help the excitement in his voice, because that? Sounds awesome.
“They can combine into a huge Alpha. It's actually rather fascinating. Deucalion taught them.”


“Do you care how he gets here?” Star drawls the question, sounding way too amused.

Talia pins her with a look. “As long as he's here before that,” She nods at circled Alpha. “Wakes.”

“Then yeah, I can do it without actually interfering. Be right back.” Star waves cheerfully, then Chesire Cat's out.

As soon as she's completely faded, she reappears. “He'll be here in less than ten.”

“Good. The other thing I'm hoping you can do... Remember, you're Pack. And this jackass Bit Scott.” Star gives Talia a tentative nod. “Make him talk, and truthfully.”

“Once he wakes.” Star nods again. “That doesn't violate anything, you could make him, him just quicker...”

“Can you help with Scott?” Stiles can't help asking.

“Help how? The Bite's taken, he doesn't need my help.”

“What if he doesn't want to be a wolf?” Stiles can't help his worry; Scott wasn't the most rational of guys at the best of times. “And why won't he wake up?”

“Hmm.” Star studies Scott's sleeping self. “His body's processing the Bite. He'll be out for at least three more hours.”

“No.” Stiles says flatly. “That's... no, he's got to be home before then.”

“I can speed it up.” Star offers, more to Talia than Stiles, but she's the Alpha, that's okay.

Talia considers the matter before nodding. “As long as it won't harm him.”

“Nope.” Star touches Scott, who jerks once, before snorting and turning onto his side. “He'll be awake shortly. But he's going to freak once he does wake up, the trauma of being Bitten like that, attacked, is floating in his psyche, I can see it.”

“I'll handle that.” Alan says from the tree-line, followed by Allison and Vic. All three hurry to Scott, and Stiles leaves them to take care of him.

“I thought you were the Emissary!” Ethan whispers to Stiles.

“In training!” Stiles returns, shrugging. “I did say I was assistant Emissary; pay attention!”

“Vic.” Derek speaks over him. “Can Scott do what Paige did?”

“I'm sorry.” Vic says sorrowfully, “That only works if the Bitten is rejecting the Bite to begin with.”

Before anyone can say anything else, they're all distracted by Jeff, arriving with Duke. “Who's that?” Aiden asks.

“That is Deucalion.” Talia informs the twins. “He will be judging your father.”
They study Duke with eerie identical head-tilts, then give him a nod in equally-eerie unison. Duke studies them as intently as they study him, a strange smile spreading over his face. “Roland’s grandpups. How wonderful.”

“Sir?” It's almost an echo, they way they speak sometimes.

“Your grandfather was one of my most trusted lieutenants, before your father killed him for his Alpha-ship. I hadn't known you were still alive. And twins; true twins are rare for us. You two will be extraordinary, with a little help.”

“Voltron twins, I told you.” Star almost sings it. “Stiles named 'em, two years from now.”

They goggle at Star, then at Stiles. “Two years from now?” Aiden repeats.

“Star doesn't go through time the same way we do.” Stiles confides. “It's just something you get used to. Though she doesn't normally drop future-news like that.”

Star shrugs off the accusation. “Just wanted everyone to know that it was you who named them. I’m a geek, sure, but compared to you...” She grins at him.

Stiles grins back, relaxing at the banter. “Good to know, teach.”

“Can someone please explain?” Ethan asks plaintively.

Derek huffs. “Long story short, Star doesn't move through time day after day. When she leaves here, she might go to three months from now, or last November; just accept the weirdness and ignore it. It's what we do, for our sanity's sake.”

Star might be the person to talk to, about Jennifer. There's something wrong about her, the way she was acting. He thinks.

No, he'd speak to his mom first – no reason to be paranoid.

Before he could argue with himself further, John arrives with the twins' mother.

“Ethan, Aiden!” She comes charging out of his squad car, tears streaming down her face. “Boys, my boys, are you okay? He didn't hurt you, did he?”

“We're fine, mom.” Ethan accepts her glomming onto him, but Aiden squirms away. “But he Bit that boy, mom.” They both look scared.

The mother just looks resigned. “The Alpha's-mate told me. But you haven't been hurt?” She runs her hands over Ethan’s face, then Aiden's.

“I swear neither your children nor your mate have been harmed.” Talia says.

“Husband.” The woman corrects.

Talia pauses. “Excuse me?”

The woman forces herself to look away from her sons, to look at Talia, though she won't meet her gaze. “I'm not his mate, just his wife.” Her voice barely betrays her bitterness.
“I don’t understand.” Talia says slowly. “If you’re married, and have borne him children, than – “

“I’m sorry, Alpha Hale, but no. He tells me on a regular basis, I’m not his mate. He refuses to have a mate at all. The only reason we’re married is his father forced him to marry me when I got pregnant, and he only keeps me around to take care of the boys. Now that they’re mostly grown, he’s been looking for a Pack to take me off his hands.”

Derek isn't alone in staring at the woman in horror.

“We'd stay with you, mom.” Aiden says it quietly, like he's used to having to hide the sentiment.

She doesn't respond, just strokes her son’s face.

Deucalion clears his throat. “It sounds as if his crimes are many.” He notes. “Whatever he tells you, madam, you are his mate, by our laws and traditions.”

She flinches. “I don't wish to be.” She quickly says.

Deucalion nods. “I can understand that, and I can grant you a dissolution, if you wish. Either way, his crimes are his own, and you are not responsible for them even as his mate.”

The woman relaxes some at that, but is still too tense.

Derek speaks up. “Forgive me, but none of us know your name, except the Sheriff.”

“No, forgive me, Beta.” The woman gives Derek a nod that reminds him too much of a bow. “Please, call me Marissa.”

“Did Tom take Roland as his surname?” Duke asks her gently.

She shakes her head. “We don't have one, or rather, we don't keep one. He changes it frequently, to stay under the radar.”

“Why does he feel the need to stay under the radar?”

“Aren't you hunting him?” Marissa sounds bewildered.

“It was a legitimate challenge.” Duke points out. “Much as I hate Alpha challenges, I can't deny centuries of tradition, and Tom challenged.”

“But he cheated.” Marissa whispers.

Deucalion goes rigid. “Excuse me?”

“You... you didn't know?” She starts shaking. “We've been on the move for sixteen years, and you didn't even...” She breaks down, laughing and crying at the same time.

“Marissa... Marissa, please, calm down.” Talia kneels in front of her. “We need you to be calm. I offer you and your sons sanctuary, if Deucalion doesn't insist on the right.”

“Sanctuary?” She whispers it, sounding awed. “You would give us... Alpha...” Choking, the woman wipes her face and forces herself calm. “How can I help?”

“Your mate...” Talia frowns, then shakes her head. “Your former mate, I mean. He Bit Scott, he invaded our territory to do so. Do you know why?”
“I…” Marissa looks at Tom, then back to Talia's chin. “I don't, not exactly. He's been... acting odder than normal, of late. He goes off, for hours, sometimes days. Comes back, smelling of another woman. The mechanic told me that the damage to the RV's engine was deliberate…”

Marissa looks over to Scott, frowning. “But I don't understand why he would Bite anyone, he thinks Bitten wolves are... let's just say, a large part of his problem with me has always been that my parents were Bitten, and that my sisters were born human. He wouldn't have married me, if Roland…” She shakes her head again, falling silent.

Talia growls, looking over at Duke, who echos her growl. “Marissa.” The Eldest says her name gently. “You are the second child of Joshua and Mary Talbot, are you not? Of the Wester Pack?”

“Yes, sir.” She nods, looking at Duke's feet.

“They reported you missing over a decade ago, child. Why have you not contacted them?”

“They what? Tom told me that they banished us!” Startled, she actually looks at Deucalion's face, then flinches away. “Because he wouldn't give the Bite to Trisha…”

Deucalion sighs. “Your former mate's idiocies grow by the moment.”

“They didn't banish us?” She asks in shock.

“They thought Tom had killed you.” Deucalion reports grimly.

Marissa looks at the ground, shame wafting off her in sour waves.

Talia looks ill, hell most of the Pack looks ill, and Derek isn't sure that he's going to be able to keep his own snack down.

Actually... Derek allows himself to vomit, feeling better immediately – until he sees the rage in Deucalion's eyes.

“Marissa, did your family have reason to believe he might kill you?” The question is gentle, if one doesn't look at the Eldest.

“His is my Alpha, sir. Whatever he wants to do…”

“No!” Duke snaps loudly. “That isn't –“

Tom wakes with a start, and doesn't seem to be tracking. “Keep it the fuck down, bitch!”

“I suggest you speak to your mate with politeness, Thomas.” Deucalion says icily.

Tom flips to his feet, a sneer on his face. “She ain't my mate, old man.”

“She has born your pups and stayed by your side.” Talia points out. “By every definition and tradition, she is your mate.”

“And you will treat her as such.” Duke orders menacingly.

Tom scoffs and looks away, then seemingly realizes that he's not where he was. “Where am I, and why am I here?”

“You've been brought to Hale house.” Talia says calmly. “For trespassing and inflicting the Bite on a child, one who did not give permission.”
“Not to mention assaulting a minor, child neglect and spousal abuse.” John chimes in, sounding almost as if he's having fun.

Actually, knowing how John feels about domestic violence... he probably is.

“My pups.” Tom snarls. “And my bitch, to do with as I please.”

“That isn't the way it works.” Deucalion spits. “You have a responsibility to care for your Pack.”

“I give them the care they deserve.” Tom sneers.

Alan stands, and Derek swallows. He's never, ever, seen Deaton look angry, but the look of quiet rage on his face was terrifying. “Why did you Bite Scott?”

“Scott? Scott who? I didn't bite no Scott.”

“Yeah, dude, you did. He's right there, your Bite on him.”

“I Bit Stiles.” The Alpha rolls his eyes at Stiles, not understanding his many, many transgressions, and the whole Pack snarls and growls at his words.

“No, dude. I’m right here, un-Bitten.” Stiles narrows his eyes. “But it's interesting, that you think you Bit me. Why would you want to, anyway?”

“You're Stiles?” Tom stiffens, looking dismayed for a moment, before he covers it in another sneer. “Why the hell does she want you Bitten? You're just a scrap of nothing; at least the brat I Bit had some meat on 'im, no wonder I thought he was you.”

“Who wanted Stiles Bitten?” Talia demands.

“Fuck off, bitch.”

“That's Alpha Hale.” Aiden informs his dad hastily.

“I know who the bitch is, brat.”

The twins both pale.

“Look at me.” Star croons at Tom. Reluctantly, Tom turns to face her. “That's it... who wanted you to Bite Stiles and why?”

Derek shakes his head, throwing off Star's Charm – it wasn't even aimed at him!

“Katie.” Victoria hisses from Scott's side. “Katie Silver. She didn’ say why she wants him Bit, just that she did.”

“Why are you doing anything for her?” Star's voice is damned hypnotic; Stiles pinches Derek to bring him out of his, then moves to pinch Peter.

“She's sweet. Well, no, she's psychotic, but she's sweet in bed. And she pays well.”

“And that's all?” Star's voice grows sharp.

Tom winces. “She promised, if I helped her with this brat, she'd cure my son.”

“Cure him of what?”
“That bastard!” Ethan hisses, his hands fisting.

“My son’s got the same sickness this Stiles brat has.” Tom confides to Star. “I have a fag for a son. An Alpha's son? It ain't right.”

“You fucking son of – “ Aiden cuts himself off, throwing an apologetic look to Talia. She waves him off, focusing on Tom.

“And, if she cures my son, then we've got more plans.” Tom chuckles evilly. “I know the cunt’s a Hunter, but the game she's got her eyes on, well. A woman Alpha, that ain't natural.”

“Jesus.” Stiles hisses.

“I'll take him with me.” Deucalion says. Orders, really. “Stiles, please remove the circle so that I can remove this piece of shit from Hale land.”

“Gladly. He dirties up sewage. Ern, sorry guys.” Stiles apologises to the twins.

Aiden shakes his head. “No, you're right. We've been planning... we don't want to be his sons.”

“Don't blame you.” Derek tells them. “Mom'll take care of you.”

They both nod their thanks to Derek as Stiles moves in to break the circle. Star backs away – being not fully human, she's as affected as any wolf is by it.

Time slows to freeze-frame speed as Stiles breaks it; Tom shifts to his Alpha-form and jumps at Stiles. Stiles takes a step back, arms coming up, and he manages to deflect the leap over his head but lands on his back as the Alpha lands behind him.

Derek throws himself between Tom and Stiles, and can't even breathe when the Alpha's left hand enters his stomach, then he's tossed aside like a rag. Tom crouches over Stiles, mouth open to bite, and Derek pushes himself to his feet, struggling to get there, to stop him.

Dimly, he notes his mother, his Uncle Peter, Jon and Sarah, all trying to get there, but they're too far away. Star seems frozen, literally incapable of moving, and she's trying to –

CRACK!

Tom falls to the side, Derek collapsing over him, seeing the hole in his forehead but ignoring it. “Stiles!” Derek wheezes, crawling to get to him. “Stiles, talk to me.”

“I'm here, Der.” Stiles groans, then gasps. “Derek! Stop moving, now!”

“No, Stiles, are you hurt?”

“Dude, I’m fine, but you've got a hole in your stomach, stop moving!”

Derek ignores the order, pulling himself to Stiles' side to check him over. Talia reaches them at the same time, checking Derek and yelling for Alan.

Stiles is bleeding, his right arm scored by Tom's claws, but other than that, he's fine.

“What the hell is going on?” Scott demands. Allison sobs a laugh, and Derek looks up to see Chris, gun still pointed at Tom...

“Derek!” He blinks at Stiles, why is he crying?
“You're bleeding, Red.” Derek points out, but is his voice so quiet?

Stiles laughs, but it’s sad. “You're one to talk, sourwolf. Alan's here, just hold on, okay?”

“I'm fine, Stiles.” Derek says faintly. “Just...”

Black.

“Derek!” Stiles fumbles for his pulse, trying not to panic.

“He's just passed out, Stiles.” Talia says tightly. “This isn't enough to kill him, I assure you.”

“Then why are you so close to panic?” Stiles demands, voice shrill enough to make even him wince.

“Because he's my son and his stomach is open, because you're my son, and that fucker almost got you, take your pick!” Talia actually snarls at him, until dad lays a hand on her shoulder, then sits by Stiles.

Alan gently pushes Talia to one side and finishes ripping open Derek’s shirt. “Star, I know you aren't allowed to interfere, but do you think you can speed up his healing?”

“After that little immobilizing?” Star looks pissed when she appears next to Stiles. “I'll heal Stiles, too. And anyone else who needs it.”

“I'm fine.” Stiles tells her, but she ignores him, healing his arm in passing. Then she lays her hand over the hole in Derek’s stomach, not even covering the damned thing, but it closes rapidly.

Stiles takes a deep breath when the color returns to Derek’s skin, finally able to look up.

The whole damned Pack is crowded around them, except for Vic and Allison speaking quietly with Scott. Over Peter's shoulder, Stiles can see Ethan and Aiden holding their mom, looking not at all upset about their dad, just worried for her and themselves. Deucalion is standing behind Marissa, hand on her shoulder, reassuring her probably, and Jeff is with him, staring at Derek with an unreadable expression on his face.

Derek wakes up. “What the hell?”

Stiles punches him, right in that perfect jaw. “What the hell were you thinking, you jackass? He could have killed you!”

“I heal, Stiles, but you don't!”

“He wasn't trying to kill me, Der!”

“We don't know that!” Derek glares at him, and he glares right back. “Why are you crying?”

Stiles blinks at that. “That's the most stupid question you've ever had, sourwolf! I thought –“ Stiles chokes, and throws himself on Derek, shaking. Derek lets out a sigh and circles Stiles with his arms, holding him tight.

“Me too, Little Red.” Derek admits. “I thought he was going to kill you.”
His dad's hand convulses on Stiles' shoulder, and Talia sobs once before composing herself. “Chris, you're my new favorite person.”

Peter puts his hand on Stiles back, it's shaking. “He's everyone's.”


“I'm fine.” Stiles ignores his tears to reassure his dad.

“Go, check on them.” Derek sits up, but doesn't let Stiles go. “We're okay.”

Stiles and Derek just cling to each other for a few minutes, Pack surrounding them, everyone needing to convince themselves that they were both alive.

Finally, Stiles is able to stop his damned tears, and he pulls away. Derek lets go reluctantly, still looking shaken up, but Stiles needs to check on the twins.

Luckily, Derek knows him almost as well as he knows himself, and helps Stiles up, then follows him over to where his dad is talking to the twins and their mother, being watched over by Deucalion.

“Dude.” Stiles clears his throat, damning his voice for being shaky. “Are you okay?”

“Us?” Ethan asks in disbelief. “You're the one who was attacked by our father!”

“But you're the ones who just watched...” Stiles trails off, not able to bring himself to say it.

But the hint is enough to cause the twins to flash red Alpha-eyes, and Derek gives a low warning growl. Aiden holds up a hand, asking for calm. “He should have – he didn't deserve to go so –”

“Cleanly.” Ethan spits the word. “He didn't deserve to go easy. But. Sir.”

Once again in sync, the twins turn to Chris. “We owe you.”

“No, boys, I think I owe you.”

“You were saving Pack-mates.” Aiden points out.

“He was your father.”

“No.” Ethan shakes his head vehemently. “He may have given us DNA, but he wasn't...”

Aiden shrugs. “That was him being calm, you know. The only reason we weren't ever taken away from him is because we healed.”

Marissa gives Chris shining eyes. “Thank you.” She whispers.

Chris shifts, vastly uncomfortable with being thanked. “I don't – let's just let it go, then? I’m sorry, ma'am, but... Peter tells me that your – I mean, that he. That he was possibly in contact with my rogue sister.” All three stiffen at that, clearly wondering if Chris was working with the woman who hired their Alpha to betray their kind. “I’m sorry, but do you have anything, letters, or...”

“It's alright.” Deucalion assures them. “Mr. Argent is a Hunter, yes, but he is also part of the Hale Pack, and has been vetted by me personally. His sister, on the other hand, is.. well.”

“She's a psychopathic bitch.” Chris all but snarls it. “And she needs to be stopped. If you have
anything at all that might tell us what she's doing..."

"The FBI would be grateful." John points out. Stiles groans; nomadic wolves aren't going to be reassured by mention of the FBI. "She's wanted in five states, for multiple homicides. Not to mention what she did to my son, and to Derek."

Chris growls at that, causing Stiles to smother a grin. They've been around the Pack too long, normal humans growling like wolves. A Hunter growling like a wolf.

It was awesome.

"She... what did she do to you?" Ethan looks at him.

Stiles looks down, shaking his head. "It doesn't matter, specifics don't. I mean. She's bad news."

"She always smelled like dead roses." Aiden notes.

Derek stiffens at Stiles' back.

"Dead roses?" Stiles can feel him nod. "That sounds like her. Do you have anything she touched recently? or..." Clearly, Derek doesn't know what to ask for.

Stiles does, he's paid attention to his dad's work. "Any letters from her to Tom? Or, does he have email? Or a cell phone?"

"Yes, on the second two." Marissa speaks up, surprising Stiles. He thought she'd checked out, truthfully, and he wouldn't blame her if she had. The sheer relief of knowing her abuser couldn't abuse her anymore had to be overwhelming.

"May I search your RV, ma'am?" His dad always knows how to speak to people, and it's all Stiles can do to not swell with pride. "And may I go through his phone and computer? You, of course, can be present, if you like, or you can wait while I get a warrant if it makes you feel better."

Marissa shakes her head firmly. "No. I want to get this done as soon as... Deucalion's been kind enough to offer to train my boys. I know that Alpha Hale offered us sanctuary, but twin Alphas seem a bit much to ask her to handle..."

"Marissa," Talia smiles. "As you prefer. I think it's a good idea, that they get some training from Duke, but they also need to be boys. All three of you are welcome."

Deucalion clears his throat. "Perhaps a compromise, of sorts. They need to learn to basics, but that won't take long. A few months. Then they can return, and work with Derek and Jeff?"

"That would be awesome!" Stiles beams at the twins. "Derek'll be glad to have more wolves his age around, all he's got right now are Laura and Cora, and he keeps telling me sisters aren't the same."

Derek huffs against his neck, making Stiles shiver, but then he says, "Hate to admit he's right, he'll have a big head for the next week, but... it'll be cool to have more wolves our age to hang out with."

"And you can help Scott, too!" Stiles is so happy when things work out well. "Oh, damn, Scott!"

He whirls to check on his best friend, throwing a smile of thanks to Derek when he catch him as Stiles almost trips because he's moving too fast.
Scott is leaning against Allison and listening to Victoria intently, looking dazed and lost.

“C’mon, Der, we have to help him.”

“I’m coming.” Derek murmurs, following Stiles across the lawn.

“Scotty, my man, my bro...” Stiles sits in front of him. “How you holding up?”

“I’m... still not convinced I’m awake, Stiles.” Scott tells him bluntly.

“I know it's a lot to take in.” Derek says earnestly, sitting next to Stiles. “But we'll help. The whole Pack will, you aren't alone. You're my brother now, Scott.”

“What if I don't want to be part of your Pack?” Scott whines. “I don't want this, I just want to be a normal guy, you know?”

Derek stiffens and Vic hisses in frustration. Stiles scoffs. “Normal's over-rated, Scott. Being a wolf is cool – your asthma won’t ever bother you again, for one!”

“Yeah, but I’m going to kill people!”

“Stop saying that!” Vic snaps. “Talia is over forty, she's been a wolf her entire life, and she's never killed a single person who hadn't attacked her first!”

“People are going to attack me?” Scott gives his girlfriend's mother a horrified look.

“Hopefully not, but it's possible.” Victoria allows. “It's more possible if you don't have a Pack. Omegas are... not treated well, either by wolves or by Hunters.”

“God, I’m surrounded by werewolves.”

“The only wolf sitting here is Derek.” Allison points out sweetly.

“Then what are you?”

“We're Hunters.” Victoria grins at the way Scott recoils, and Allison gives her mom the stink-eye.

“Don't worry, we only Hunt those like the jerk who Bit you, Scott. We follow the Code, and we have a treaty with the Hale Pack that extends through most of the country by now.”

Victoria nods, backing up her daughter. “So long as you don't break the Code, we won't bother you.”

“The code?” Scott seems utterly lost.

“You've got a lot to learn, bro.” Stiles pats his knee reassuringly. “But we'll help.”

“How do I get rid of it?” Scott demands. “All the movies and everything, if you, I don't know, kill the wolf who bit you or...”

“I'm afraid not.” Vic's playing up the sadness, but it's real. “The only time that works is if your body rejects the Bite. Your body accepted it easily; I imagine you've wolves in your ancestry, actually.”

“It's a lot like being a super-hero, Scott.” Stiles has to make Scott see this correctly. “All your senses are better, your stronger and faster and you'll never get sick again. You can heal almost
anything.”

“You make it sound like Wolverine.”

“It’s an apt comparison.” Derek agrees. “But you don't get the cigar until you're at least forty.”

Stiles snorts. “Or ever, if you care about the humans around you. Like, I don't know, your mom.”

That reminds Stiles, “Tee, you gonna tell Melissa?”

Talia comes over and kneels next to Stiles. “That's up to Scott. How are you holding up, Scott? I know it's a lot to take in, but we'll help you.”

Scott splutters a bit. “I'm sorry, I just...”

“I know, I heard, but Scott.” Talia gives him a wry smile. “You've little choice, now. I won't force you to join the Pack, but Vic is right – Omegas aren't treated well. My Pack won't bother you, I wouldn't let them and neither would Stiles – “

“And how do you fit into this anyway, bro?” Scott demands, voice rising. “You said you aren't a wolf, and you're not a Hunter, so why are you with them? And why didn't you tell me about this?”

“Not my secret.” Stiles snaps. “And I’m part of this because I'm training to be the Pack's Emissary. Which... man, you've got a lot to learn, I get that. Don't be an ass, though. Don't take it out on me.”

“But it's your fault!” Scott yells. “That guy was going after you; if it wasn't for you, he wouldn't have bitten me!”

“If it wasn't for me, you'd have been alone, he'd have Bitten you and taken you away!” Stiles has no problem yelling right back, and Scott deflates, looking to Talia instinctively.

“Is that true?”

Lips pressed in a hard line, Talia nods once. “It's the most probable likelihood. He was operating by smell, you hang out with several of the Pack at school, enough that assumed you were Stiles. You'd have passed out quickly, and woken alone with him.”

“I'm sorry.” Scott whispers to Stiles, and Stiles gives him a small smile. He's still pissed, but he gets where Scott's coming from, really.

But he really needs to put on his big boy pants and deal.

**Interlude: Hunting Gold**

“I've got a new friend, daddy.” She smiles at Gerard, hoping to coax a smile from her father in return.

*He just looks at her. “Tell me about this newest friend?”*

“She's the Second of a medium-size Pack, but she hates her Alpha. It's almost funny, female wolves are just as strong as male wolves, but they still have misogynists how?”

“The stupidity of animals cannot be overestimated, daughter.” Gerard pontificates, and it's all Kate can do to not roll her eyes.

*She loves her father, really she does, but he can be...*
It's not like he's any less of a misogynist, really. He lets Kate do what she needs to, but he's always angry about it. If it didn't pay such high dividends, he wouldn't let her do it.

Gerard makes fun of the Conclave, but he agrees with them on almost all points; he believes women shouldn't fight directly, for example, that women should 'lead', by which he means they should stay back and keep things ready for the menfolk.

Kate knew she was damned lucky that her mother had insisted she get the same basic training that Chris got, and even luckier that Chris was forever a disappointment to their father; if Gerard at been at all happy with his son, he'd never have paid any attention at all to Kate.

Thankfully, Chris would never live up to their father's expectations, and he hated the wolves more than he hated what Kate did to kill them.

And he really did love her, loved her enough to forgive her every time she got herself dirty in the name of cleansing the world.

“They still have these problems because women aren't capable of leading themselves, let alone a Pack or a family. You, my dear, are an exception to every rule.”

Kate beamed at the surprising and rare praise. “Thank you, daddy. But if I'm an exception, it's because of you.”

“That's true.” Gerard nods. “Now, tell me more about this friend, and her Alpha and Pack.”

“Like I said, it's a medium Pack. Barely more than a dozen wolves total, almost half of 'em kids. My friend, Dorothea, is the daughter of the last Alpha, it's why she's the Second. The new Alpha doesn't know the first thing about being the Alpha; when the old Alpha died, it shocked everyone that this kid ended up as Alpha. Dor's mate was supposed to get it, and when the kid – he's twenty, daddy, can you believe it? – when he became Alpha, however that happened, her mate attacked him. The kid killed him, claimed it was accidental. You can imagine how Dor feels about that.”

Gerard smiles slowly. “She wants revenge.”

Kate mirrors the smile. “But had no support in the Pack; her mate wasn't well liked.”

“You find me the sweetest presents, Katherine.”

“I do try, daddy.”

“I suppose you want a reward?”

Kate suppresses her smirk. “Daddy, your happiness is all the reward I need.”

Gerard pins her with a look, and Kate works hard to not squirm. “It may be all you need, but we both know it's not all you want.”

“I want what you want, daddy.”

“Then isn't it lucky we're on the same page?”

Kate nods, crawls in his lap when he moves his paper out of the way. “Thank you, daddy.”
Should I add warnings/tags for the Gerard/Kate implication? I have no clue...
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Can one say that history is repeating itself when, really, it hasn't actually happened yet?

Especially when history has been changed...

Chapter Notes

i don't even know what tags i NEED. if anyone wants to suggest tags, please, feel free.
and, as always, if you see errors, please let me know!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

September 21st, 2012

This is why Derek doesn't like Scott.

Because Scott is a spoiled, self-centered, self-indulgent brat.

“No! I don't want to be part of any Pack! I don't want to train, I don't want – “

And that was Derek’s last nerve. “Too. Fucking. Bad!” Derek growls it out around his fangs, barely restraining himself from throwing the asshole into the wall. “I get it, as much as I can. You didn't ask for this, didn't want it. But your choices are very, very fucking simple. Train or die.”

Scott gapes at him whiles Stiles just sighs. Then Scott pulls himself together somewhat, rounding on Stiles. “Are you going to let him threaten me?”

“He's not, Scotty. That's the problem. He's telling you the absolute truth. If you don't learn the ins and outs, how to control yourself, you're going to hurt someone. Maybe kill someone. And then...” Stiles doesn't finish the sentence, shouldn't need to.

“Then what? Why are you so convinced I’ll hurt someone, dammit! I don't hurt people.” Derek isn't sure if he's pleading or just holding onto yesterday, when his world still made sense.

Honestly, if he wasn't being so... childish about this, Derek would feel bad for him.

“You're a werewolf, Scott! Yes, I think it can be amazing, wonderful, awesome, but it doesn't come without costs!” Now it's Stiles yells at the top his lungs, and three teenagers shouldn't be taking up all the air in Stiles' bedroom, but they are, panting and gasping like they're drowning.

“I know that, but it doesn't mean – “

“Yes it fucking does!” Stiles roars, crowding Stiles. Derek knows what he's doing, they've planned
this as well as they can, so he holds himself back, heart in his throat. “You. Are. A. Werewolf. You don't have the luxury of blowing this off until you process, because by then you'll have hurt someone!” Stiles isn't quite jabbing Scott's chest with a finger, but it's close. “You're going to feel anger and bloodlust and you don't have the first fucking clue how to deal with it!”

“I'll be fucking fine, Stiles.” Scott growls, eyes already glowing, fangs starting to drop.

“There! Right there! Fangs, Scotty!”

“I don't have fffucking fffangs!” Scott's inability to articulate correctly angers him further, and he flexing his hands, not noticing his claws. “Fuck off!”

“Not until you listen, Scott!”

“No, I’m done listening, you listen!” He hisses, focused on Stiles' face. “I've listen for hours, and all I’ve gotten is info overload. I can't deal with this.”

“Too bad.” Stiles snaps. “You don't have a choice!”

And Derek was braced for it, waiting for it, looking for it – and still barely managed to get Stiles out of the way before Scott swiped at him, intent on removing Stiles' vocal cords if it was the only way to shut him up.

Derek gets in the way, takes the first hit – badly placed, not enough force, because Scott doesn't have the first fucking clue, as they'd been saying, talking themselves hoarse.

It barely draws blood, but it's enough to send Scott over completely.

Three hits from Derek, a pinch of Mountain Ash and a few words from Stiles, and they stand back, let him rage it out.

It takes forever, Scott roaring and howling, until he finally slumps down, exhausted. He slowly slips out of Beta form, regaining his human appearance, and with it, rationality.

What little Scott normally has, anyway.

“What was that?” It's almost a whimper.

“That was you almost killing your best friend and brother.” Stiles says flatly.

“No.” That is a whimper, and Derek is closer to feeling bad for the kid. “No, I’d never hurt you, I – “

“Want to watch?” Stiles sounds so cold, but Derek knows better. Not just because he can smell him – a mix of anguish and pain and even a small amount of fear – but because this is Stiles.

If there was any other way to get this through Scott's thick fucking skull without risking someone, Stiles would do it.

But there isn't, and Stiles hits a couple keys on his laptop, replays the scene while Derek watches Scott.

He can't even feel guilty about the tears that track down his cheeks when Scott watches how he almost tore Stiles' – his best friend! – throat out, can't bring himself to feel anything but relief.

“Let's start over.” Derek says as gently as he can. “No, you don't have to join our Pack. So long as
you stay in our territory, you'll be fine. But you do have to train, every day, until you're safe. You have to spend every full moon with us, until my mother – the local Alpha, mind – decides that you're safe to leave alone. Her, and no one else. You have to listen to her, Scott.”

“Why?” It's a pitiful whine, but Derek answers anyway.

“Because we're werewolves, and that's the way it works. You don't have to join the Pack so long as you're working to keep yourself, and by extension everyone else, safe.”

“It'll be okay, Scott.” Stiles says soothingly, scuffing out the Ash circles and hugging his friend. “We'll help you, you'll have control before you know it, we're all here for you. You've got me and Allison and Derek and Issac and Cora, and all the Hales and my dad and he's talking to your mom right now, well he and Tee are, and she'll help too, you know she will, it'll be okay Scotty, I promise...”

Derek tunes out Stiles babble, reassuring as it always is, somehow, and finally starts to relax.

**September 24th, 2012**

“I want to talk to you.”

Stiles looks up and groans mentally; he so doesn't need this shit today. Sure, Star healed the worst wounds, but she left all the bruises and scrapes, and everyone's been looking at him all day. It's not even lunch yet.

And now he's got Jennifer Blake slamming his locker shut almost on his fingers.

“So talk.” He grits out, shoving his books into his back pack.

“I want you to stop bothering Derek.”

“Bothering?” Stunned, Stiles can only stare at the slender girl. “Bothering?”

“It's like you can't let him be happy, every time we have a date, you have some – “

“Hold it right fucking there, chica.” Stiles snaps out. “First. You didn't have a date. Derek and I had plans, that he canceled because you called and begged him for help for a test. Second, I didn't call him, his mother did. Because third, you insensitive, self-centered bitch, I was attacked! Derek is my best friend. That isn't changing. So either accept it or fuck off, I'm in too much pain to care.”

“You may be his friend – god only knows why, you're such a stupid, mouthy little shit– but I’m his girlfriend. And I’m telling you, stop bothering him! Stop being clingy, stop scheduling all this time with him, stop trying to keep us apart like the jealous little – “

“I'm gonna stop you right the fuck there. Pot, paging kettle! Because if you're his girlfriend – which, by the way, he denies – it's because I’ve been trying to convince him to date you!”

“You. What?” And thank fuck, it's someone else's turn to gape, because Stiles is sick of being the one doing it.

“Derek doesn't do well with new people. The only reason he went to help you on Thursday is because I told him he should!”

“Sure you did. And that's why you went off and somehow managed to be in the right place to be assaulted, again, and needed Derek to come and rescue you, again. Is that the only way you can get
his attention? By provoking adults into attacking you?"

“Pretty sure anyone attacking him gets my attention.” Derek says, shocking Jennifer even more than he startles Stiles.

“Derek, hi!” Jennifer tries to beam at Derek, play the whole thing off. “I was just talking to Stiles about what happened on Thursday...”

“Save it.” Derek says curtly. “I heard all of it. And, you know, I was starting to like you. You're smart, and funny, but this shit? No. A world of no.”

“Derek.” Stiles cuts him off. “She's scared, dude. She obviously really likes you, and she doesn't get it. If I weren't gay, it wouldn't bother her, you know?”

“No, I don't know. Because you're not gay, you're bi.” How does Derek actually know that? It's true, but... “And it doesn't matter, anyway. What's next, I can't hang out with Erica because she's a girl? I can't hang out with Cora? Or Issac and Boyd, even though they're both male and straight?”

“Issac's bi.” Stiles blurts without thinking.

“Don't help.” Derek says curtly. “My point is, you're not my girlfriend, Jennifer. We were friends. But friends don't do this.”

“That's why I did this!” Jennifer pleads, tears in her eyes. “I really, really like you, I don't want to be friends! I want to be your girlfriend, but every time I think we're moving that way, this...” She waves at Stiles, and he's both offended at being reduced to an object and amused that she can't even find a good adjective. “This happens. I keep getting cockblocked, and I’m not even a guy! I don't know what else to do!”

“You could have tried talking to me, Jen.” Derek's voice is cold, and this is not good. No, Stiles doesn't really like Jennifer, but Derek’s lonely even if he doesn't seem to realize it, surrounded by couples and feeling left out, and Derek does like her. Did? Does?

“You're kind of hard to talk to, Sou – Der.” Stiles manages to not call him by his favorite name. “No, she didn't talk to me right, but I get what she's trying for here, even if she doesn't get what we are or what happened. Don't... don't give up a friend over me.”

“Stiles.” Derek says his name with uncommon affection. “If she can't be friends with you, she isn’t a friend of mine.”

“But we are friends!” Jennifer blurts out desperately. “I'm just...” The tears spill over, streaking her face with eyeliner, and Stiles just. Can't.

“Yep. We've got the physics project this week. Hey, wanna pair with Kira and make it another group thing? It worked last time. And you're eating with us, right? Because you seriously owe me all the curly fries, girl. I know you're wound up, but all the curly fries.” Stiles bites his tongue to stop himself while he's maybe ahead.

Derek gives him a strange look, almost lost, and Stiles automatically twitches his fingers in the signal for “Masquerade”, causing him to huff out a small laugh. “You're ridiculous.”

Stiles can't help smiling at the evident fondness in Derek’s voice. “Of course I am. We'll see you at lunch, big guy.” Throwing his arm over Jennifer's shoulder, he leads her off, away from Derek and his broody nature.
“Let me tell you a little about the care and feeding of Grumpy McBrooderson, Ms. Blake, since you've got no clue. Derek and I are best friends. Once you accept that we're a package deal, everything else is smooth sailing. Well, except for how he's emotionally constipated and likes to move at a speed that frankly leaves glaciers bored. But if you can handle that...”

Derek listens to Stiles sooth Jennifer with a line of bullshit that never, actually, crosses over into lying. It's actually amusing, or would be if it wasn't about him, and sort of amazing how he manages to say so much without saying anything.

Or lying.

He just wishes he knew why Stiles was so set on him being friends with Jennifer.

And whiles Stiles has a point about how Derek doesn't always do well with 'feelings' – at least, not with people who aren't Pack – when it comes to Stiles, he tries.

So he corners Stiles in P.E. “Explain.”

Derek watches Stiles face, sees the moment when Stiles decides to try and start a random line of babble-bullshit, and raises a brow. Stiles deflates, and smiles ruefully. “Yeah, okay.”

Then he sighs, scrubs his hands through his hair – if nothing else, Derek owes Danny for convincing Stiles to grow his hair out – and nods towards the bleachers.

Derek silent pads after him, sitting next to the boy and letting him figure out how to explain whatever the hell this is.

“Look, I don't know if I like her. Sometimes I think she's cool, other's... she borders on stalker-creepy. I don't know which is real, because I don't think either is. But. She really does like you. And she's lost, a little scared, and she's... got the green.”

Derek stiffens; 'green' is how Stiles describes how druids smell. “She's active?”

“I don't know.” Stiles flicks his eyes everywhere, making sure no one can overhear them even though Derek would know if anyone got close. “It's faint, I've only caught it here or there. Barely. But there's... you know how my 'memory' is, sourwolf. There's something, okay? I think we need to keep an eye on her, and this is the best way. Plus, she really does like you, and you...”

“Me?” It's a growl, though he doesn't mean it to be.

For the first time in this conversation, Stiles meets his eyes, though it looks like it pains him to do so. “You should be happy, Derek.” He says, almost breathlessly, and Derek’s throat gets tight.

Because this is how Stiles sounds when he's actually hurt, and this doesn't make sense, and neither does the burning in his eyes. “I am happy, Red.”

“No. Content, maybe. But you're lonely, Derek.”

“I'm not.” He protests automatically. “Why would I be? I’ve got you and Cora and – “

“And all your friends are paired off, Der. I know how it feels to forever be the third wheel, and gods Derek, you're so amazing. You deserve everything! But you just won't see it, and it kills me.
This girl really, really likes you. And maybe she isn't a girl you should date, I don't know and neither do you. Because you haven't given her a chance, you haven't even kept her at arms length, that'd be an improvement over how distant you've kept her. Just. Give her a real, honest chance? Not alone, maybe, not at first, since the things you don't say tell me she's pressuring you... I think that's the problem."

The abrupt subject flip makes Derek flinch, just a little. “What?”

“I think your problem is that she's kind of pressuring you, and after Kate, well, it's got you kind of wound up? But dude, she's not Kate, you know?”

Derek hadn't actually thought about why Jennifer made him run hot-and-cold like she did. “Huh. You might be right. Maybe... can you talk to her about that? If you can't, that's o – “

“Yes!” It almost explodes out of the kid. “Dude, I can so explain this to her. I'm on it!” With that, Stiles throws himself on Derek, in a full 'Stilinski special', hugging him as hard as he can.

“I need you happy.” Stiles breathes as Finstock starts bellowing at them from the floor of the gym.

Derek tightens his grip when Stiles starts to move away, long enough to say, “I need you happy, too.”

Stiles beams at him, then stumbles down the bleachers, and Derek shakes his head at that. Eventually, Stiles has to start phasing out the extreme clumsy act, because people are starting to notice how fake it is. Until then, it's amusing as hell, and for the first time since Derek got that heart-stopping call from his mom on Thursday, he feels like things are okay.

October 27th, 2012

“Look at you!” Stiles coos at Jennifer, dressed as some sort of fairy, trying his damnedest to not laugh at the girl for it -- next to Star, she's... sad. But. “Those wings are amazing!”

“Thank you.” She actually blushes a little. “I worked my butt off on them, but I'm glad to see you.”

Stiles blinks at her; she's never glad to see him. “Why?”

She pouts and hooks a thumb at Derek, wearing jeans and a henley. “I was feeling over-dressed.”

“I'm a werewolf.” Derek grumps, and Stiles grins.

“Because it's not a full moon; I get it, dude.”

Derek just rolls his eyes.

“So he said.” Jennifer bitches, but it's mild for her, so Stiles lets it go. “But what are you?”

Stiles widens his grin and stretches out his arms, covered in multi-hued ink. He's wearing a red faux-leather vest over black skinny jeans and combat boots, and pretty much every visible inch of skin – or inch that might become visible, at least in public – is likewise covered in Peter's amazing art. “I'm an urban shaman, Jen.”

“My boyfriend, the gamer geek.” Danny snarks, sneaking a hand into Stiles back pocket.

“Like you've got any room to talk, Legolas.”
“Legitimate movie character.” Danny returns almost absently, already eying the crowd in Lydia’s living room.

Cora – dressed as a flapper and dragging Issac-as-a-pimp – crashes into her brother, almost breathless. “Stiles! This DJ sucks, dude, help me school the bitch!”

Laughing, Stiles allows her to herd him, watches with faint, fond awe as she almost makes the dude cry, then gives him a set-list the group will like.

Even if most of the students don't recognize the music, his friends will, and it's Lydia's party; so long as she's happy, no one would dare complain.

Couple hours later, Stiles feels Derek hovering behind him. “What's up, sourwolf?” He asks quietly, knowing no one else will hear him.

“Can we go?”

“What about Jen?” He tries to care, even though she's not invited to the after party.

“Her mom came and got her half an hour ago; something about her dad needing the ER? I didn't catch much, honestly. And I’m bored, this party is stupid, Stiles.”

Stiles sighs, because he's having fun. “Just another hour, I promise.” Stiles looks at the clock. “Maybe less, it's already eleven. And this is Scott's first trial, you can't leave him, and he won't leave til midnight at least.”

Grumbling, Derek shuffled off, but he wasn't really unhappy.

At twelve thirty, their whole group, minus Jennifer, if she counts, which she doesn't really, not yet, moves to the Hale house. Somehow, Talia was agreeable to a double-slumber party, which had his dad on edge but only sort of, since he knew all about werewolves and their super-sense.

Cora leads Allison, Lydia and Erica to her room to peel themselves out of their costumes while Danny and Scott follow Stiles to Derek’s room, since Derek doesn't really have a costume to remove, and Issac goes to his own room followed by Jackson and Boyd.

They reconvene in the great room for old, hilarious horror movies.

His phone goes off shortly before six. “Stiles?!”

“Yeah dad? What's wrong?”

“Where are you? Who’s with you?”

“We're at ho – at the Hale’s.” Stiles corrects himself – he and dad both view the Hale house as home anymore, but officially they don't live here. “And it's me and Danny, Derek, Cora, Issac, Scott, Allison, Lydia, Jackson, Erica and Boyd. Why?”

“I...” John clears his throat, and Stiles stomach clenches. “I need you to get Talia and Peter and come to the station, okay? Tell the rest of the kids to stay. Put.” Said in what Stiles has dubbed 'command voice', that was his dad giving an Alpha-order to the werewolves in the room.

“What's – “

“Just listen to me, son.”
Stiles shuts him mouth with a snap of his teeth, he does it so fast. His dad sounds wrecked, pissed and maybe actually a little drunk. At work.

“Yeah. Be there soon.”

Stiles hang up and meets Derek eyes, worried as his own must be, then clears his throat. “My dad needs me, probably locked himself out of a program or something. You guys keep watching, I’ll be back soon.” He presses a kiss to Danny’s mouth that's mostly one-sided, Danny being almost asleep, then sends a text to Peter as he heads upstairs to collect Talia.

Peter meets them at the SUV, and they silently climb in; John had called Talia right after he hung up on Stiles, so she was ready to go before he finished climbing.

They made the drive in silence, Stiles jittery but too discombobulated to actually articulate any of the thoughts that jumped through his head, worried as hell. What if it was another rogue? But then why call for Stiles? Or was it a magic-user, or users? But then would Stiles really be the first choice? Unless dad needs Star, then okay, but then why Peter? All Stiles knew was that his dad wasn't hurt but he needed Stiles, Peter and Talia.

This couldn't be good.

It wasn't.

“Heather?” Stiles doesn't sit so much as he folds down onto a chair that just so happens to be in the way, looking at the crime scene pictures in horror.

“Oh, hell. You know her?” His dad sounds horrified.

“Yeah, that's Heather O'Neil, we were in junior high together, but they moved, so she now goes to Beacon Heights instead of Beacon Hills...” Stiles gulps, then tears his eyes away from the photos and looks up at his dad. “Why am I here?”

“What do you see?” John isn't harsh, exactly, maybe the word is hard.

Stiles leans forward to look again, knowing if his dad is still asking after discovering that Stiles knew - had known? - the girl, that this was important.

“Her throat's been cut, but also the back of her head...”

“And?” This was more a snap that a word, and Stiles focuses on the oddity of Heather's neck.

“Gods... she was also... dad.” Stiles licks his lips, swallows, looks at Peter. “Am I... is this just... it can't be, I mean, it's...”

“Breathe, Red.” Talia grips the back of his neck, glaring at John and pictures both.

“I see it, Stiles.” Peter says softly.

“No, no, no!” Stiles whimpers. “No, this can't be – Deucalion hasn't gone evil, he didn't make Kali kill her Pack, so the Darach wasn't created, no no no!”

“Slow down, Stiles.” John orders, and the whip of his voice braces him. “Start over and tell me what you 'remember'.

“There was... okay. So. Almost three years ago, in the other... in the before. Gerard Argent was hunting much more indiscriminately than he's doing now – in that time, he had, if not Conclave
backing, at least they were looking the other way. So Deucalion was here with his Pack, and so were Ennis and Kali, with theirs. They wanted to negotiate with him, because he wasn't targeting only rogues, but any wolf he found.”

“But Gerard is an evil bas – jerk. He met with Duke under truce, but broke it, killed the wolves that came with him, killed his own men, and blinded Duke. Did other stuff. It drove Deucalion insane, and he... started the evil version of the Alpha Pack, where they kill of their entire Pack to gain their power. Including their Emissaries. Kali's Emissary was Julia... Anyway, Julia was the Darach, because Kali didn't quite kill her, came this close,” Stiles holds up his thumb and index finger, not-quite touching, to show how close she came to death. “So Julia – the Darach – was here hunting the Alpha Pack for revenge, and to gain the power to do so, she did all the sacrifices, fifteen in all. The three-fold death, that's what this is, blow to the head, strangulation or garrote, the slicing their throat. Ritual, done at specific points... three virgins, then three warriors, healers, philosophers and guardians. um... I sort of remember the other two virgins, one was a guy who dropped his dog off at Deaton's, one was a freshman college girl out with her girlfriend. The warriors... one was Mr. Harris, my teacher, and one was a music teacher, I think? One of the philosophers was Tara, your deputy, and one of the healers was Alan... the guardians were you, Ms. McCall and Chris.”

Stiles scrubs his face, hard, hands shaking. “But dad, it can't be her, because it didn't happen! And there's no Ms. Blake teaching!”

“Blake.” Talia says it slowly. “Like, Jennifer Blake?”

“I – Blake's a really common name, and she's our age. She's sixteen. The Darach was a teacher, and it didn't happen yet. Not for at least...” Stiles closes his eyes, tries to focus, because the time lines don't line up right, because of how he skipped a grade... “I was a junior when it happened before, but it should have been over a year from now...”

“Where's the Blake girl?” It's not quite a growl, but Talia was close to it.

“Her dad had to go the ER, I guess?” Stiles lifts a shoulder, still staring at the photos. “I don't really know, that's what Der said... but, Tee, Blake wasn't her real name, her real name was Julia Baccari.”

“So I’ll swing by and check on them tomorrow.” This time it is a growl, and Stiles knows when to shut up and not argue.

“This is bad. Very, very bad.” Stiles whispers. “And it doesn't make any sense! The nemeton isn't active, there isn't an evil Alpha Pack... Kali's weird, but not psychotic, and Deucalion is... well, okay, he's scary but he isn’t – “ Stiles cuts himself off, knowing he's close to a panic attack.

“You said the sacrifices were done at specific points.” John points out, used to how Stiles brain jumps around, and hoping that coaxing more information from the boy will help ground him.

“Yeah, yeah.” Stiles blinks rapidly, trying to remember something that never happened, maybe, or is about to happen, is in the process of happening... “It's... that's why she poisoned Danny with mistletoe, because he did a paper on Telluric Currents... and Harris tried to stop him, it was from him that we learned she was a Darach, he did this thing with grades that we found after she killed him – dad, Mr. Harris knows!”

Peter takes a step backwards, eyebrows flying up, while John and Talia exchange startled look. “We'll talk to him, too, cutey.” Talia says firmly. “We'll figure this out. I’m amazed you remembered this much, honestly, you're amazing.” This is said more softly, Talia's voice trailing off as Stiles begins crying.
“Why?” The boy whispers, voice rough with tears. “Why is this happening again? Why now, when it's early and there's no damned reason? And Heather—again! That's just... before, I blamed myself, you know? Because if I'd just had a condom on me... but I was sixteen then, not fifteen! And Heather was so sweet, so cool...”

John clears his throat. “I really hate to ask this. Because I absolutely am not asking this. But Stiles. Are you... are you safe from this specific...”

Stiles chokes on air, then starts laughing hysterically. “Oh, gods, doesn't that give a new meaning to the phrase 'safe sex'? Of Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ! Fuck me, dad—“

“Language.” John says absently.

“I don't know! I guess it depends on what this crazy bi—witch, no, not, I meant, I don't know! It depends on what this crazy woman considers virginal, okay?”

There's a moment of silence, John and Stiles staring at each other with red faces, while Peter absently examines his fingernails and Talia stares at them.

John clears his throat and Stiles jumps. “But dad, I’m not ready for—neither is Danny! We've talked about this, and I am not doing that just because this cray-cray...”

“No, that's, no. Don't do that because of... of this. That's good. Wait until you're ready.”

“Yes.” Stiles pops the 'p' hard. “That's the plan.”

“Good.”

“Yeah. Good talk dad.” Stiles giggles hysterically again.

“It was. Because if the magic number is three. Well. Good news, Heather was the third virgin.”

“Shit!” Stiles buries his face in his hands. All three adults ignore this further cursing - not that Peter would care - seeming to realize how close Stiles is to outright panic. “Dad, warriors are next. Maybe push up when you're planning to go see Mr. Harris?”

“We don't know it's going to follow the same...” John trails off, sounding embarrassed, and Stiles gives his dad a sardonic look. “Well, just because one of the victims was the same... we don't know the other two were, and we don't know that this person is the same, or doing the same...”

“That's a point.” Peter says, sounding almost cheerful. “As you pointed out, Red, the nemeton isn't currently fully active, and Star works hard to keep it that way. Things are different.”

“Gods. I don't know if that's better or worse.” Stiles groans.

“It is.” Talia says calmly. “Unless you need anything more right now, love, we're going home. Stiles needs sleep. Don't complain when you get home and he's cuddling Danny.”

John opens and closes his mouth a few times, then nods wryly. “Can't have it both ways, can I? After all, if this person may be doing things diff—“

“Great, good talk dad, really, see you at home for lunch?” Stiles jumps up, knocking over his chair, panic a hot, bright bloom in his chest. “I'm just gonna go and... and say hi to Tara and Linda and Rémy on the way out, c'mon Peter, let's let them say good-bye!”

“What happened to people over twenty one not being allowed to do those things?” Peter teases.
“I've decided life's too damned short to care what anyone does so long as no one gets hurt and everyone's happy.” Stiles say with forced cheer, not looking back.

Peter's mocking laughter follows him out of his dad's office. At least some things don't change.

**October 28th, 2012**

Derek sighs and leans back on the couch, twitchy as hell and wondering where the hell Jennifer is. They'd been studying for Econ when her aunt called and asked her to run something to her dad at the hospital. Derek had offered to leave, they still had a week until the test, but she'd been adamant that she wouldn't take long, all but begged him to stay.

Honestly, Derek was only here because of Stiles, insisting that there was something. He didn't know what, but Stiles thought it was important, and Jennifer wasn't as bad as most of the kids at school. At least she was smart, and not afraid to show it.

But it grated on Derek, how she acted like they were together.

Not helped by the bright stab of jealousy Derek had felt this morning, waking up to the sight of Stiles and Danny wrapped around each other on his floor. It been almost physically painful to see, in so many ways... made worse by how Stiles had an arm flung towards Derek, reaching for him in his sleep even though his boyfriend was right there.

And Derek needed to be over this, whatever the hell it was; Danny wasn't going to take Stiles from him, couldn't take Stiles, Stiles was Pack.

But sometimes, Derek saw them together and it was like all the air was gone, a punch in the gut from nowhere, and he just...

And this thing with Jennifer. Okay, truthfully, he liked her, she was okay. But not as much as Stiles seemed think he did. Not enough to keep hurting Stiles, and he knows it's hurting Stiles. Oh, Stiles acts like it's fine, he's been supportive and encouraging, but the bright note of fear in his scent, almost drowned out by the sadness that seeps from his pours, every time they talk about her...

It's not worth it, to hurt his – to hurt Stiles like that. Jennifer just wasn't girlfriend material, not for Derek. Maybe not for anyone, she was so... odd, sometimes.

Derek’s claws pop, and he realizes he can't feel them – not mom or Cora or Peter or Sarah or Stiles, oh gods he can't feel Stiles! His skin is itching, eyes watering, and he lurches up.

“Derek?” Mrs. Blake sounds concerned, and Derek grits his teeth to rein in the wolf, to deal with her.

“I'm sorry, Mrs. Blake, could you tell Jennifer that I'm not well?” He feels like shit, he actually does feel ill, and he needs to get out of here now, now!

“You don't look well.” She agrees, reaching a hand towards his face. His reactions are off, wrong, he jerks away from her but doesn't get far, and she presses her wrist to his forehead. “You're burning up.” She gasps out.

“I need to go home, Mrs. Blake.” He grinds out. “Please excuse – “

“I should take you to the hospital.” Mrs. Blake talks right over him.
“No, thank you. My mom can do that.”

“I can't let you drive in this – “

“I'll call John, we're two blocks from the station!” Putting action to words, because John needs to know, whatever the fuck this is John needs to know and right fucking now, Derek pulls out his phone and hits John's number before the woman can say anything. Abandoning his Econ book, Derek stumbles towards his car and starts talking as soon as John picks up the phone. “I'm sick, John.”

“Define.”

“Burning up, itchy...” Derek has to be far enough away to whisper. “I can't feel them, John, come get me right now, it's bad!”

“Moving.” John says almost clinically.

Derek’s phone beeps. “Stiles is calling, hold on.” John grunts, and Derek clicks over.

It's horrifying. Stiles obviously doesn't know that he's called him, and the cacophony is... deafening.

Terrifying.

“I've got Beth, but where's Mary? Princess Mary, I know it's scary, but we need to go down! It's too hot! No! On the floor, smoke goes up Mary, on the floor... I don't know, Sarah! Last I saw Tee, she was carrying Issac...”

Derek click back over to John long enough to say, “Call the fire department and GET HERE!” Then he clicks back to Stiles phone.

“That's it Mary, doing good. Stay down, breathe through your shirt. I know, it's scary, but someone will be here soon to open the doors, oh thank gods Peter, where – “

A crash, then a buzz, and the line drops.

John pulls up, sirens blaring.

“I don't think it's that bad.” Mrs. Blake jokes.

Derek ignores her and gets in the car.

“Report.” John snaps out, eyes blazing, and Derek is forcibly reminded that John was a Marine for a decade.

“Stiles, I don't think he realized the call went through. He had Beth and was coaxing Mary to crawl on the floor, under smoke. Was assuring her that someone would be there soon to open doors. He said something to Sarah and Peter at different times, then it cut out. It keeps going straight to voice mail now!” Derek takes a deep breath, trying not to panic.

“Call everyone. Start with your mom, work down.”

Derek is amazed at John's control; he's as terrified as Derek, but he sounds calm, is driving well if scary-fast.

His mom's phone goes to voice mail, as does Peter's, Sarah's, Cora’s, Issac’s... Derek tries Stiles
again, then Jon.

Jon picks up on the third ring. “Derek, we're having adult – “

“The house is on fire and everyone there is trapped and unable to get calls, move!”

Derek doesn't wait for a response, just moves to the next person he can think off, getting Chris.

“What's up, Derek?”

“House, fire, they don't seem to have service!”

“Moving.” Comes the grim response.

Derek starts to call, then pauses and looks at John. “Laura's an hour away.”

“Call anyway, to make sure.” John says gruffly.

“Der-bear?”

“The house is on fire, we're going now, but...”

“Don't waste time talking to me, Der, move!” Laura hangs up, but Derek knows she's coming.

“Do you know how to get a hold of Star?” John's voice quavers and Derek’s stomach flips.

“I – sort of. I’ll try both ways.” Derek calls the 'only in emergencies people are dying and there is literally no other option' number, leaves a quick message with date and time, the sketches the runes for Star's name, Derek’s name, and the elven equivalent of 'SOS'.

Star is sitting behind them. “What's going on? I can't feel Stiles.”

“We don't know.” John says flatly. “Stiles accidentally called Derek, talking about how he had Beth and coaching Mary how to stay below smoke. The implication of what he said was that the house is on fire and they're all trapped inside.”

Star spits something in a Fae tongue, disappears for about five seconds, then is back.

“Exactly right.” She reports in a monotone. “The house is triple ringed in Ash, wolfsbane and a mixture of salt and iron; the fire hasn't spread completely, it's mostly in the kitchen and dining room, and the bedrooms above it. The attic hasn't caught yet. All the doors are blocked from the outside, including the tunnel doors, and there are jammers set up somewhere, blocking cell signals. Have you called – “

“Everyone!” Derek snaps. “Everyone I could think of!”

“The fire department?”

“Ten minutes ago.” John swallows, and takes the last turn onto their mile-long private drive. “They'll be here any minute, but those rings are going to be a problem. How do we – “

“You, John. Unless Chris or Vic or Allison get here first, since Stiles is inside it.”

“Fine, tell me how, quickly!”

“Just scuff them, thinking of them broken. Hell, just fucking walk over them! I’ll get Beth, but
that's as much else as I can do.”

Derek shoots her an incredulous look, then pauses, noting the tears on her face. Remembers that she's half-Fae, Fae enough that she can't lie, Fae enough that she's constrained.

“We can get it from there. Get the baby, Star.” Derek agrees quietly.

John leaps from the car almost before it's stopped, not even bothering to turn anything off, and Derek has a hysterical moment to wonder if he even put it in park before he can move forward as John breaks the circles.

Neither spare a moment's thought for themselves, though Derek does give Star a nod when she yells that she's taking the baby to John's house and she'll let Jon and Terry know.

Then he and John are ripping the barricade off the front door and screaming at the top of their lungs, as the fire trucks pull up, and everything is crazy.

“That's it Mary, just breath slow.” It's all Stiles can do, to do the same. He'd had to crawl into the dining room to get to Beth and Mary, where they'd been watching something he couldn't quite see out past the treeline in the backyard.

He'd been in the great room idly working on perfecting his rune-art when, for no reason he could figure out, he'd suddenly felt cut off from everything not in the house. It was like losing all his senses, sort of, and it paralyzed him for several moments.

Then there was the crashing sound of glass, from several windows, as extremely volatile Molotov Cocktails came hurtling through windows in the kitchen, dining room, parlor and great room.

Later, he's sure he'll find it hilarious that the bottle thrown into the great room landed in the fire place. At that exact moment, all he could think about were the babies, in the dining room, where fire was exploding over everything.

“Mary, Beth!” He didn't think, just ran forward, jerking the front of his shirt up over his mouth and nose, then diving under the dining room table just as something else crashed in.

Another bottle.

And another.

He reached out, snagged the corner of the bouncing chair Beth had been happily ensconced in, and jerked it towards him, tipping her out to the relative shelter of the floor under the table. He repeated to the move on a screaming Mary's leg, ignoring her pained shriek as her arm hit the edge of a flare and pulling her to his lap.

“Shh Princess, it's okay, you're okay...”

“Syl, what's hapnin!”

“I don't know, Princess, there's fire, and we have to get to the door, okay? I need you to crawl ahead of the to the door, can you do that?”

“I'm not a baby, Syl, I can walk!”

“I know, Princess, but I need you to crawl, okay?”
Somehow, he managed to crawl to the front door with Beth in one arm.

The door wouldn't budge.

Sarah reared up from... somewhere, but she couldn't get it to move, either. She cupped the back of Stiles head, aimed him at the basement entrance in the great room, then took off up the stairs.

All the kids were up there.

He's got the babies, he has to get the babies to safety.

It seems to take decades to crawl the fifty feet or so to the entrance, and it takes entirely too long for Stiles to find the hidden catch to the escape tunnel, but he gets it open just as Sarah appears out of the smoke.

“Who's here?” She yells, not quite panicked but getting there.”

“I've got Beth, but where's Mary?” She'd been right there, where did she – there she is, half under the chaise... “Princess Mary, I know it's scary, but we need to go down! It's too hot! No! On the floor!” The last was a yell, he never yells at the kids, but...

“I'm a big girl, Syll!”

“No, smoke goes up Mary, on the floor...” He pushes her back down. He can't hear over the roar of the flames, makes out what she asking by guess and lip-reading, 'where's Talia?' “I don't know, Sarah! Last I saw Tee, she was carrying Issac upstairs because he sprained his ankle somehow...”

And Jesus fuck Issac had a sprained ankle how was he going to get down here in time?

No, focus. He's got the babies. “That's it Mary, doing good. Stay down, breathe through your shirt. I know, it's scary, but someone will be here soon to open the doors, oh thank gods Peter, where – “

Stiles recoils, because Peter's right side looks cooked, and it brings back awful, visceral moments, being chased through the hospital, fighting out in front of this house, gutted by a fire so much like this one...

“Okay, okay, Peter, listen, here's Mary, here's Beth, you hear me? It's day time, not night, someone will see. My dad's supposed to be home at seven, and it's six forty five now. Hold Beth, Peter, you hear me? Hold Beth, I'll send Sarah back, I have to find Tee and the kids...”

“Stiles. You saved my baby.” Peter rasps. “You saved her.”

“Peter. She's my goddaughter and you're my Big Bad Uncle Creeper. Keep Mary here, okay?”

Stiles feels sick, looking at him, he can't help, can't imagine the pain. “I'll find everyone.”

“Be careful, Red! Promise me!” Peter grabs his hoodie and jerks him forward by it, baring his fangs at Stiles for the first time in this life. “Promise me that you will be careful and you. Won't! Die!”

“I promise I’ll be careful and do my best to not die! I love you, Uncle Creeper!” He squeezes Peter's hand, brushes a kiss over Beth's head, another to Mary, then he's up the stairs again.

The great room is, somehow, still free from fire. He ducks into the parlor just to be sure it's empty, then crawls over to Talia's office.

The door is hot enough to blister.

Stiles flips on his back and kicks out the bottom pannel.
The room is empty, aside from fire. Stiles spares a thought to any books, but knows most of those kept in the room will be in the safe, rated for even higher temp blazes than this, so he crawls on.

James is trapped in the mudroom, somehow a beam fell just right to block the door, and the outside door is also apparently barricaded.

“I've got it, James. Hold on!” His voice is cracked, but Stiles ignore it, flipping over and kicking, kicking the beam, ignoring the licks of fire on his leg, until it finally move, then James is there and slapping at his leg.

“Where is – “

“Peter's half-charred, below the great room with Beth and Mary. Sarah's upstairs, looking. Go with Peter, James!”

“Adam's in here, Stiles! He's passed out!”

“Okay, okay, let's get him to the stairs...” It takes work, dragging him out of the small mud room, half aflame already, then between them they drag Adam to the stairs down. “I’ve got it from here!” James yells. “Go, go! Wait!”

Stiles pauses whiles James suddenly shrugs off the back pack Stiles hadn't even noticed before, and hands Stiles a bottle of water from it.

Stiles takes a grateful gulp, then dumps half of it on his shirt. “Give the rest to the babies and Peter! Get DOWN, James, we'll be back!”

“Go!” James starts struggling to get Adam down the stairs; Adam is a year younger than James, but weighs a bit more, and James' wolf-strength seems to be missing.

Fucking Hunters, Stiles thinks bitterly.

He can breathe easier now that he's got water over the fabric-filter of his hoodie, and he crawls up the stairs quickly.

Derek’s room is right above the kitchen, and Stiles sends a quick prayer to whomever cares, that Jennifer had wheedled study time right now; no one aside from Stiles dares goes in Derek’s room if he's not there.

James' room is next to it, and James is downstairs.

Cora’s is next, the door open, room empty.

Next is the attic door, also open. There doesn't appear to be any flame up there.

Fuck, it's hot.

Brian and Rose's room, door closed.

He touches it. Hot, but no hotter than the floor, so he cracks it.

Bodies. Passed out bodies.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!”

Brian's a wolf, Rose isn't. Stiles manhandles Brian to the stairs, goes back for Rose. He arranges
Brian as carefully as he can, sets him to slide down with crossed fingers, then starts dragging Rose after him.

The fall wakes Brian, thankfully. “Stiles? What's...”

“Fire! I don't know. Get Rose down below the great room, go!”

Back up the stairs. Talia's room.

Fuck. Just.

More bodies.

Full of trank darts.

Stiles crawls over. Talia, Cora, Issac, Sarah, Shelby.

Shelby's the youngest, and the lightest. He starts dragging her, when he feels a 'POP!', and suddenly he feels Derek and dad and Jon and... everyone and everything.

“Dad, Derek, up here!”

He keeps dragging Shelby, meets them on the stairs. “Tee, Cora, Issac, Sarah – tranked in your room, dad! Stay low. I think... I hope, I think!”

“There's wolfsbane in that.” Derek notes, eyes wide.

“Fuck fuck! Fucking hunters! Go, my box is in the great room, we're going to the tunnel under it, that's where everyone is right now, get them down, please...”

“We're going, keep going.” John orders, clapping his shoulder in passing. Derek pauses long enough to run his nose over Stiles' pulse, whisper “Stay safe or I'll rip your throat out. With my teeth.”

An atavistic shiver, deja vu amped to a billion, steals his volume. “Promise.” Stiles whispers back, and when had Shelby gotten so heavy?

He gets her to the great room, and calls down, “The front door is open, c'mon!” while grabbing his box.

James pokes his head up. “I can't move them!”

“Dad and Der are hear, they're getting the others...”

James drops Mary next to him.

“Where's Beth?”

“Star.” James snaps as he scoops up Shelby. “C'mon, let's get them out then come back.”

Wordlessly, Stiles picks up Mary and they stagger-crawl to the front door, see fire trucks and firemen running towards the house, but they ignore the door and head towards the dining room.

Whatever.

“Mary, run towards my dad's cruiser, okay? James, take Shelby to the cruiser,” James looks ready
to argue, so Stiles just screams, “Go!” and he does.

He gets back to the stairs down in time to see Peter struggling under Adam's weight, crawls down to help. “Beth, Star got Beth. Dad and Der and getting Sarah and Tee.”

“Thank you.” Peter croaks, as they struggle to the door. “Vic. She's in the attic.

Stiles freezes for half a second, then shoves his box into Peter's other arm. “Cruiser, go. I got it, just go, Peter, go!”

Dazed and acting on instinct more than anything, Peter drags the child in his arms to the cruiser.

Where did Brian and Rose go? He whirls around to see them crawling behind him, and how had he forgotten them. “Shelby and Adam are at my dad's cruiser!” He yells, is then struck by something else. “Where's Denis?”

“He's not with Adam?”

“Fuck, I'll try to find him!” Brian is barely crawling, and Rose is still out. They weren't tranked, he's not sure why they were passed out.

Derek staggers by, Cora over one arm and Issac over the other, his dad's on the stairs fighting with gravity and Talia and Sarah's bodies, so Stiles dashed up to help him get that sorted.

“C'mon! Son, let's go!”

“Vic and Denis! I'll be right back!”

His dad is burdened with two unconscious bodies, can't stop him, and Stiles takes off up the stairs. Up the attic stairs.

Vic's been tranked. Denis hasn't, and that actually pissed Stiles off more, because Denis is only eight fucking years old and who the fuck leaves an eight year old to die in a fire like this? He's screaming, not actually trapped by the fire, he could get by but he's too scared, and he's screaming “Aunty Vic, please wake up, please, I can't get out, you have to, Aunty Vic!”

More glass breaks and Stiles falls, barely doesn't get hit by another trank, and he slithers across the floor so fast he thinks he burns himself with friction. “Denis! Right here Denis! Stay down!”

It's too late, he'd jumped up, and a fountain of red meets Stiles.

He screams, he can't help it, a wordless scream, and drags the boy to the stairs, he's a wolf, he'll be okay, then goes back for Vic.

A couple bullets land around him, but the fire has to be screwing up whatever they're using to target him since they can't see him directly, he yanks Vic to him, spares a second to wonder what the fuck they gave her, because she's on fire, her hair is mostly gone even if her face is untouched yet, and Stiles beats at the flame as he drags her, one handed.

His side stings, he slaps at the wetness, gods was Denis bleeding that much, and gets her to the stairs, to be faced with Derek looking horrified as he spots him.

Grim-faced, Derek shoulders Vic into a fireman's carry and Stiles scoops up Denis and they go down, Stiles stumbling every other step.

“He's bleeding too much, Der!”
“Just get us all out, Red. One foot in front of the other!”

“Stiles!” John meets them halfway up. “They killed four of the fire crew before Jon and Terry and Chris got here, they're chasing them off, Denis!”

They get outside on the front lawn, where Stiles goes to his knees.

He's burned, but his side...

“I told you to be safe!” Derek roars, ripping off his shirt. “You promised!”

“I did, I was, I don't – “ Stiles looks down, see the hole in his side, looks at Derek. “I'm sorry, I tried, I did sourwolf. I tried, please don't be mad at me, don't hate me...”

“I'm not mad you, Red. Never hate you. Just. Look at me Red! Stay awake, you're okay. It's not that bad, you're okay, John! Stiles, talk to me. I promise I’m not mad at you, okay?”

“Please don't be mad, I got everyone out, right? Please, everyone's out?”

“We're all out, Stiles, I promise, everyone, I promise I’m not mad, talk to me Stiles. Talk to me...”

**Interlude: Tears of Rust**

*She hates this. Hates this so much.*

*Chanting in dead languages; dead languages for dead people, Kate said, smirking. Like it's a joke, to kill people just like her.*

*Another one dead.*

*That's three, and it's enough for this. For the circles to be laid, however much she doesn't want to, but they're wolves; they're strong, they'll get out. Even if Kate’s crazy.*

*Kate has Julia.*

*So she lays the circles, one by one, 'safe' behind the invisibility bought with the blood and hopes and dreams of three dead virgins, for Julia.*

*She chants the dead words in the dead languages over the dead pieces of the dead people she watched become dead, to help this crazy bitch try and make more people dead.*

*“Good girl.” Kate chucks her under the chin like she was a pet, like she was a fucking housecat or some shit like that. “Good girl. They're not getting out of that trap.”*  

*That's when she sees the barricades in front of the doors, Rowan – Mountain Ash – and the nausea grows exponentially. She doubles up, vomits in a bush, while Kate laughs.*

*“Yeah, these animals make me sick, too.”*  

*“That's not what I heard.” She hears someone say. “Heard you were pushing hard to get Derek in your bed. That doesn't sound like he made you sick.” Oh. She's hearing herself.*

*“He doesn't.” Kate snarl-smiles at her. “He's the exception that proves the rule. I'm gonna keep him on a leash.” Kate pats her head, and Jesus, this woman is fucking psycho.*
“Be a good girl and go, you don't want to be here for this part.”

She really, really doesn't.

She didn't want to be here for any of it.

On her way out, passing the scary four-person team with guns, she sees the boxes.

It's the only thing she can do.

If she does more, they won't kill her – just Julia, just the rest of her family. Her, they'll keep alive for a long time. Kate had spent hours, going over in exhausting, exacting detail, what she could do, and how and why, to keep her alive through almost any pain.

She doubles back behind them, not trying for stealth – she's supposed to be here, sort of, and the way the spell is set, unless she intends to attack someone, they just... won't notice her. So she gets on the ground, and pretends to look for her earring, but she's playing with the box. The jammer.

She doesn't have a lot of time; Kate will be by soon. By she gives him a good three minutes, from the time she hears the blaze, before she flips the switch back on.

She just hopes it's enough.

Chapter End Notes

i don't have enough apologies for how long this took me -- life is... beyond crazy right now, and damn but this chapter was...

yeah.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Managed chaos...

when last we looked, the Hale house was aflame, though Stiles had manged - with the eventual help of his dad and Derek - to get everyone out, before collapsing.

how did Lydia, Jackson and Danny get there?

Chapter Notes

so, it's been OVER A YEAR, holy gods, wtf!!!

last year, when chapter 10 went up, i was becoming ill. didn't know what or why, but it was... bad. in and out of the hospital, and the doctors were... less than useless.

then... well, emergency surgery. 9 days in a coma. months recovering. then ANOTHER surgery.
my mom came out for my surgery.
she died in my apartment while i was in the hospital.

then the damned surgical site got infected, and it was MONTHS of... that.
i mostly feel okay now [aside from grief] so one can hope it won't been too long before the next chapter.

irony: this chapter has been half-done for over a year. sigh.

October 28th, 2012

Lydia giggles at Jackson's scowls and grumbles as Danny wins the latest round of whatever video game they're playing. She doesn't really like playing, herself, but watching her boys play is hilarious.

She just wishes Stiles was also here, because then she'd have someone to talk to as they rotated players.

Stiles.

Why was she worried, now? Stiles was at the Hales', as he was every Sunday. The entire town was waiting for Mrs. Hale and Sheriff Stilinski to make it official.

“Danny.” She can't breathe.
“What's wrong, Lyds?” Both her boys look worried; Lydia is never upset.

She struggles for air. “Call Stiles.”

“Huh?”

“Something's wrong!” Lydia snaps, fear manifesting as anger. “Just do it!”

Danny stops arguing and pulls out his phone while Jackson pauses the game and moves to sit by Lydia. “What's going on?” He whispers, for once not even pretending to be jealous of her and Stiles' friendship. “Did he say something when you guys were Skype-studying?”

“No, no.” Lydia all but gasps, still not feeling able to breathe properly. “Everything was fine, but now it's... I feel like there's an elephant on my chest, and it's about Stiles!”

“He's not answering.” Danny announces flatly.

“He always answers.” Jackson blurts out in shock.

“We need to go over there. Now.” Lydia doesn't wait for them to reply, just grabs her purse and jacket and moves towards the front door.

“Lyds...” Jackson starts to coax. “Maybe he's – “

“Don't argue with me.” Lydia's voice is syrupy sweet, and Jackson blanches.

“What are we waiting around for?” Jackson digs out his keys and the trio all but run to his Porsche. And this is when Jackson realizes that Lydia isn't just being difficult, she's truly worried – she throws herself in the backseat without a thought.

Danny sucks in a breath, eyes wide, and hurries in after her.

Jackson floors it, more worried about Lydia than losing his driving privileges for speeding again.

He all but slalomed onto the Hales' quarter mile long private drive, Lydia's fear and Danny's growing worry a goad he can't quite explain.

That's when they start to hear the sirens behind them. Ahead, they see the Sheriff's cruiser and a fire truck.

The Hale house is on fire.

Danny moans, white and shaking.

The Sheriff and Derek are staggering down the front steps, carrying a couple people apiece, taking them towards the small crowd of Hales huddled around the cruiser.

“Stiles!” Danny claws at the door, out and running before Jackson even stops the car. Lydia follows the second Jackson hits the breaks, leaving her boyfriend frozen in horror.

Stiles isn't in the crowd.

Then Lydia freezes, throws back her head, and *SCREAMS*.

The entire world seems to pause, with that scream, every person in front of the house jerking around to stare at Lydia. Jackson almost screams himself, because over half the crowd looks...
wrong. Eyes glowing, teeth growing...

Then movement is resumed as Derek wheels and disappears back into the blaze, moving almost too fast to see.

Jackson can't deal with that weirdness; instead, he rushes to his girlfriend, worried beyond words. He's never seen her cry, let alone scream... and that scream, that was something else.

“He's only eight.” Lydia's whispering, horror filling her eyes with tears. “Who would shoot a baby like? Why! He's only eight.”

“Who's only eight, Lyds?” Jackson pulls her to him, trying to help any way he can, watching the Sheriff physically stop Danny from following Derek.

“The boy. She shot him, a little boy!”

Jackson takes a breath to ask a question, but then just exhales, noticing for the first time the bleeding firemen [and one firewoman] off to the left. He gives Lydia a small shake. “I'm sorry, but Lydia, we've got to help them.” He drags her that way.

It seems to snap Lydia out of whatever spell she'd been under, and she yanks off her jacket and sweater, doing her best to stop the bleeding of the closest fireman. Jackson does the same, though they've all been shot in the chest, and he's not sure they're even still alive.

Derek and Stiles stagger out of the house, Derek carrying a woman who's had her hair burned off, Stiles carrying a young boy.

Jackson swallows back bile; the boy is probably around eight, and he doesn't think the boy is still alive. Stiles is absolutely covered in his blood.

Then Stiles goes to his knees, and Jackson realizes that no, not all the blood is the kid's; he's got a small hole in his side. Derek goes almost insane when he realizes that Stiles is hurt, yelling and screaming until Stiles passes out. Danny does something to the Sheriff that, in other circumstances, would see him in a jail cell, then skids over to his boyfriend.

“Help me, Derek!” Danny pushes on Derek until he actually sees Danny, then strips his own shirt. “Turn him on his side, we've got to stop the bleeding...”

Mrs. Hale snaps awake and to her feet in one movement. Jackson gulps, because her eyes are glowing *red*, and that's the most terrifying thing he's ever seen.

“No, Tee, you've been shot,” The Sheriff starts, but a single look shuts him up. She moves, even faster then Derek had, to where Danny and Derek are working on Stiles, and a woman whose name Jackson can't remember is trying to work on the boy.

“Sarah, Sarah.” Mrs. Hale gives the woman a rough shake. “The Banshee screamed for him, Sarah. It's too late.” The woman swings at Mrs. Hale, who merely grabs her and pulls her into an embrace. Then Mrs. Hale tips back her head and *howls*, sounding exactly like a wolf.

Every other conscious Hale in the front yard follows suit.

Danny doesn't even look up at them, just continues working on Stiles. Neither does Lydia, and Jackson can't decide which is weirder; the Hales acting like that, or his girlfriend and best friend ignoring it.
A woman and two men run back into the small clearing, one man dragging two unconscious men behind him and the other – Allison's dad, Jackson realizes – pushing a blonde woman with a broken arm ahead of him with a rifle.

It's Ms. DeWitt, and Jackson decides he should just stop thinking. The fireman he's been trying to help finally takes a breath on his own, and Jackson gives a whoop. “He's still alive!”

The Sheriff moves to help Jackson, and the woman screams, “Denis!” and runs towards Stiles and the boy.

Stiles shocks awake at the scream, and tries to move towards the kid. “What, no, Terry I got him out.”

“He's...” Talia shakes her head, and Stiles' face hardens.

“No! Star!”

Another woman just appears, and Jackson is just done with this day.

“Star, please, you have to – “ Then Stiles shuts down, seeing the tears on her face. “No.” Jackson can't hear it, just sees Stiles say it, and Jackson moves without thinking, moves over and grabs Danny and Stiles and hugs them both. “No, I got him out.” Tears are running down his face, and he looks utterly broken. “I got him out, why isn't he healing, I got him out!”

Jackson winces at the scream in his ear, but doesn't let go, afraid of what Stiles might do right now, with that look on his face. With the wails of the woman – his mother? No, Jackson remembers that she's his aunt– and the silent rage of the man, standing over them all, eyes glowing a bright yellow-gold.

“Terry! Gods, Terry, I swear, I got him out, I don't understand! Let me go, I have to – “

“Stiles, you've been shot!” Danny grabs his face, forcing Stiles to look at him. “There's nothing else you can do, you need help yourself.”

“No, no! I have to save them, that's my job!”

“You did, Red.” Mrs. Hale says softly. “You got us all out. You did, I swear, we're all out.”

“But Denis, he's not healing, why isn't he healing!”

“Wolfsbane, faggot.” DeWitt damn near simpers, a malicious light in her eyes that makes Jackson's skin crawl.

Stiles gives an inarticulate scream and tries to throw himself at her; it takes all three teenage boys to keep him from her, and Jackson ends up pausing over the black lines twisting up Derek's arms.

He shakes it off when Stiles passes back out.

DeWitt laughs long and loud until Mr. Argent knocks her out with the butt of his rifle.

“Chris.” Mrs. Hale calls him name with obvious trepidation. “Vic's hurt, badly.”

It's Mr. Argent's turn to blanch, and he tosses the rifle to someone – a deputy Jackson recognizes, but doesn't know – and hurries to his wife's side.

“Talia.” Chris yells it. “Please, you have to save her!”
“Are you sure, Chris?” For the second time, Mrs. Hale deflects a punch into an embrace. “I'm not saying no, Chris, I'm just... you're Hunters. I don't want to save her and then have her suicide!”

“We've talked about this, Talia.” Chris forces out past gritted teeth. “We're Pack. But more, we're parents, and we refuse to let an archaic code take us from Allison if there's any chance we can stay with her.”

Mrs. Hale studies the man for a moment, then nods. “Hold her for me.”

And she changes. Right there. Into a huge black wolf.

Jackson gasps when Danny just shakes his head. “Better hurry Mrs. H, there's another fire truck'll be here any minute.”

The wolf doesn't seem to hear Danny, but it does move quickly to bite Mrs. Argent on the side. Then it turns back into Mrs. Hale and she starts adjusting her clothes, where they haven't ripped away.

Jackson realizes that Derek is shaking, clinging to Stiles and all but checked out.

“Derek,” Jackson waves a hand in front of his face, almost afraid to touch the other guy. “I know this is chaotic and scary, but we need to finish this bandage and we can't get to it through you.”

Derek's eyes snap to Jackson's, glowing blue, then he slumps. “You're right. Sorry. Danny, I'll turn him back over, yeah?”

The teleporting woman comes over, and Derek grabs her arm quicker than thought. “Can you – “

“I'm sorry.” She whispers. “I already tried. He's not dying, so I can't.”

Derek nods dumbly, then lifts Stiles as if he weighs nothing. “We got it. Help Terry and Jon. They...”

“I know.” The tears hadn't stopped tracking down her face, making her eyes look silver. “Everyone else?”

“Stiles got everyone else.” When did the Sheriff come back over?

“Gods, when Rose and Brian wake up...” Derek sudden starts sobbing, but holds Stiles perfectly still through it all, amazing Jackson.

“Can I wake up now?” He whispers, because he's beyond ready for this nightmare to be over.

Danny just shakes his head sadly.

Another woman screams, Jackson guesses it's Denis' mother Rose, and he closes his eyes. “Why is this happening?”

“It's a long story.” Derek sounds... empty. “And we'll tell you. Later.”

Lydia puts her hand on Jackson's arm. “I think I know most of it. It's... the Hales are the good guys here, Jax.”

“Of course they are!” Jackson snaps back. “I just don't – things like this don't happen, crazy bitches killing entire families because a kid won't fuck her, I don't get it!”
“Stiles was incidental to her.” The Sheriff says harshly. “She wants to kill them because they're werewolves.”

“And?” Jackson stares at Sheriff Stilinski.

“No 'and', that's all.”

“That's fucked.” Jackson spits out, glaring at the woman on the ground who’d done this.

“Yes it is.” Mrs. Hale agrees softly, staring at the dead child in front of her with wounded eyes.

Suddenly, the population of the front yard seems to double, as cops and firefighters and paramedics descend en mass.

The Sheriff jerks into motion, snapping orders left and right, starting with the Deputy standing guard over DeWitt. “Get her in cuffs, Bobby, then you and Tara ride with her to the hospital. She's to have two guards in the room at all times. Rémy, you and Linda go with those two assholes, they're not as dangerous, one guard apiece. Medics, over here, Stiles, Rose...” Jackson tunes him out as the medics start working on Stiles, keeping an arm around both Derek and Danny.

“Jackson!” He blinks at the hand snapping in his face, then looks up to meet the Sheriff's eyes.

“Sir?”

The deep grief and fear on the man's face makes him look older than God, and Jackson shivers. “I asked if you could take Derek and Danny to the hospital; Talia and I need to finish cleaning what we can of this mess, but Stiles needs – “

“Of course.” Jackson interrupts. “I'll get us there.”

The Sheriff pauses, grabs Jackson's shoulder and squeezes. “I don't know how or why you three got here, but I'm more grateful than I can say. Thank you.”

Jackson just shakes his head. “This is what anyone would do.”

“No, but I can't argue right now. Drive carefully, please. But hurry; Derek's gonna go ballistic if he's too far behind my kid.”

Jackson nods and stands, grimacing at the blood soaking his clothes. “Danny, help me herd Derek, please.”

“I'll sit in the back with him.” Lydia says softly, squeezing Jackson's hand.

“Thank you.” Jackson actually takes a moment to make sure everyone's wearing seat-belts before he puts the Porsche in first and – carefully – heads to the hospital.

November 2nd, 2012

“...But she's finally responding to the treatment, so the doctors think she'll be awake soon.”

“Who'd have thought wolfsbane would be even more deadly to non-wolves?” Stiles recognizes his dad's voice, and the screaming in his head backs off, some.

“I can't figure out if they didn't know Rose was human, or didn't care?” That was Talia, and the
“Didn’t care.” Chris says heavily. “Run with the wolves, be treated as one. That's how Gerard has always been, and Kate's even more fanatic now.”

“Not your fault, Chris.” Talia almost orders.

There’s a small silence, and Stiles strains to open his eyes, pushes his hearing, almost frantic because where's –

“He’s waking up.” Derek says suddenly, and Stiles relaxed completely, screaming silenced. Derek was safe, everyone was safe (there was something wrong with that, but Stiles couldn't put his finger on it), Stiles could rest now.

“Well, he was.” Is the last thing he hears Tee say.

**November 5th, 2012.**

“So.” Jackson says nervously, perched uncomfortably on the Stilinski's couch. “Werewolves?”

Lydia rolls her eyes, Danny snorts, and Derek does his best to smile at all three.

Why had he been given this job, again?

Right, Peter was still healing, and Stiles was still mostly asleep.

So he sucks it up and nods. “Werewolves.”

“How's that happen, man?” Jackson, for once, wasn't being an ass, despite the apparent flippancy of the question.

Derek accepts it at face value. “We – my family, I mean – are mostly all born wolves. Right now, Terry's the only exception. Oh,” He adds, remembering again, “And Vic. Mrs. Argent.”

“And Scott.” Danny adds, under his breath.

“Scott?” Jackson demands. “What's McCall got to do with this?”

“Scott was attacked by a rogue alpha a few weeks ago.” Derek explains. “Only an alpha can give the Bite, but that... that was a travesty. And the alpha had been gunning for Stiles.”

Danny freezes in place for a moment, color draining from his face.

“What!” Lydia snaps, red flooding her cheeks. “Why would anyone attack Stiles, of all people?”

“Kate Argent.” Comes from the doorway.

Derek stares at Deucalion, shocked to see him in the Stilinski’s living room.

“Argent?” Lydia demands in a dangerous tone of voice.

“Peace, little Banshee.” Duke waves placatingly. “She is a rogue, hunted by every Hunter in the country. Chris and Victoria have disowned her, had done so the first time she attacked Stiles.”

“Wait.” Danny straightened his back. “You mean Ms. DeWitt is really an Argent, and she...”
“I’m afraid so.” Deucalion nods. “In fact, she did... what she did, to young Master Stiles, because she was afraid that he’d overheard her plotting to kill the Hales.” The sheer rage in Duke's eyes should have been terrifying, but after last week, Derek could only take comfort in knowing the Eldest valued Stiles as highly as the Hale Pack did.

Danny nods slowly, visibly putting the pieces together. “And the human son of the Sheriff isn’t someone she can just disappear. So when trying to rape him didn't fix her problems, she tries to have him turned, so that he'd become, what, legitimate prey?”

“Something like that.” Deucalion favors Danny with a rare smile.

“Wait.” Jackson looks from Deucalion to Lydia. “Why’d you call her a Banshee?”

Lydia turned her head, facing away. “Because it turns out I am one?”

“Okay.” Jackson says slowly. “What does that mean?”

“That I had to scream when Kate murdered a little boy.” The rage in her voice was masking a deep grief that Derek didn't fully understand, seeing as she'd never met Denis, but he couldn't deny it.

“Ms. Martin will, with a little training, always know when a death that should not happen is happening anyway.” Deucalion explains. “She will scream not only to announce it, but to allow her to focus and hear the other unjust dead, who will try and aid her in stopping it.”

Lydia closes her eyes, grief completely drowning out her natural scent. “Why didn't it happen sooner?” She demands. “If I'd felt it even a couple minutes sooner...”

“It was your first scream, Ms. Martin. It takes time to hone your instincts. And you felt something even before you screamed, or else you'd never have gone to the Hale house.”

“It was Stiles.” She whispered. “I could just tell, there was something wrong with Stiles.”

“And if you hadn't felt that, it's probable that he would have bled to death, without Master Mahealani and Master Whitmore's aid. Not to mention the firemen that you helped save; Sheriff Stilinski had thought all four dead. Grieve for the young life lost, and the family now bereft of his light, but never think that you failed.”

Derek stared in open shock at the vehemence with which Deucalion spoke. Then he shook himself and asked the question. Carefully.

“I don't mean to be rude, Eldest, but – “

“Why am I here, speaking to human, or mostly human, teenagers?”

Derek glanced at Jackson before he could help it, then looked back and Duke and nodded.

This smile was thin and cold, though not aimed at anyone present. “These three are as much heroes as Stiles, following a vague intuition and risking their lives to help one of my Packs, though they didn't fully realize the risk. When your Alpha told me where you were, I decided to come help.”

Once again, Derek found himself speechless with shock.

“I don't feel like a hero.” Jackson whispered. “All we did was some first aid. Stiles dragged how many people out of a burning house?”

“I've no doubt, whatsoever, that you would have followed him into that fire.” Duke says firmly.
“And I won't hear any arguments. Let us move on. Derek was explaining werewolves.”

Jackson opened his mouth, probably to argue, then shut it and nodded weakly.

“As Derek was trying to explain, there are two ways that one gets werewolves. The first is by procreation; the Hales are one of the oldest and most respected 'wolf families in the world. We have record of them going back almost to the time of Christ, though the name has changed over the centuries.” Deucalion smirked at the shock on the three human's faces, then shrugged. “They tend to be quiet and insular, doing their best to avoid coming to the attention of Hunters.” Duke raised his hand before Lydia could get the question out. “We'll come to that.”

“The other way one gets 'wolves is by the Bite of an Alpha. Only an Alpha. And then... here, Stiles could explain better than anyone I've ever met, but I'll try to repeat what he said in a way that makes sense.

“As we have recently discovered, almost everyone on the planet carries Shifter DNA in what is currently called 'junk DNA'. The amount of the DNA determines whether or not one will survive the Bite. Oh, not only the DNA, there are other factors, age and general health, but in essence, if one carries *enough* Shifter DNA, then one will survive. Period. We used think it was random, and it's only been in the last twenty years that we've learned differently. And that is mostly thanks to Hunters.

“Now, Hunters are complicated. In much of the First World, they co-exist with local packs of various types -- in the U.S., 'wolf and 'cougar predominate, but there are Shifter types of most large predators. They help when there's a rogue and otherwise just watch, making sure that the Code isn't broken. For us 'wolves, the Code is simple; we don't harm normal humans, and we don't Bite without full and informed consent. On the Hunter end, the Code dictates that they only Hunt those that have broken the Code, either by killing humans or Biting them without permission. Unfortunately, it's easy to fall into fanaticism, to decide anything 'different' needs to be eradicated. You see examples all through history, and I'm sure each of you can think of a dozen examples. The Conclave – the ruling body of Hunters in the United States, inasmuch as there is one – has become more and more conservative over the past century, and especially since they've been able to truly study DNA. Once they realized how *much* of the world's population could survive the Bite, and especially that over 80% of Hunters could, well...

“The more ignorant and fanatical among them starting pushing for a harder line, only able to envision a world that was purely 'wolf, and decided that striking first, before we could start Biting en mass, was the better part of valor. The fact that we would never do that was... discounted.”

Deucalion sighed, for once actually looking old. “It was a minority, but a vocal one, and until recently was led by Gerard Argent.”

“I've never understood why he changed.” Derek remarks, slightly bored by the repetition of facts he's known since he was a toddler. “He used to be almost like Chris, according to my grandmother.”

Deucalion nods. “Two incidents. The first was his brother, who was bitten by an allied Alpha when he was mortally hurt. Anthony Argent was so disgusted by being changed that he killed himself. This rocked Gerard's world-view. Then, some years later, when Kate was still a child... his wife discovered she was the mate of an Alpha. Alpha Franklin, in fact, Derek, the Pack near Seattle. Gerard... she told me Gerard was becoming impossible to live with, borderline abusive, and she left Gerard for Jason Franklin.

“Gerard destroyed nearly the entire Pack.” Deucalion doesn't even glance Jackson's way, but Derek
can feel how all his senses are trained on his great-grandson. “Only an infant was spared. And this included his ex-wife, the mother of his children. We can't prove he destroyed the Pack, but I'm certain.”

Deucalion clears his throat. “You can be sure I was careful, as my grandson, one of my last two living relatives, was a member of the Franklin Pack. That spared infant was my great-grandson, and I only learned he was alive this past summer. So Gerard Argent, and his daughter Kate, have declared themselves my enemy. The Conclave has thrown them out, declared helping them a death sentence, and have gone so far as to give aid to 'wolves and others who have been harmed by them. And all I can see, when I hear his name, his my grandson and his wife, murdered the day their child was due.”

Deucalion pauses, hand over his eyes. Daring, Jackson reaches a hand to his shoulder and offers wordless comfort. Duke takes a deep breath and nods at Jackson.

“Gerard has been experimenting on 'wolves and other supernaturals for almost two decades. I know of over a dozen children that we think he's kidnapped, mostly but not entirely wolves. He has experimented to find better ways of killing us, or causing us pain, or just for his own sick pleasure. His favorite prey, though, are the human members of 'wolf Packs. He considers them traitors, even those born into the Pack, like my great-grandson would have been.” For the first time since Deucalion brought up his family, he looks directly at Jackson. “I don't know how your parents kept you away from Gerard, grandson, but I would give them literally anything in my power for saving you.”

“What?” Jackson asks soundlessly. Derek swears to himself; this wasn't the way Duke was supposed to this, and definitely not the when!

“Your father was my grandson Bryant.” Deucalion blinked rapidly. “I'd thought you dead until Stiles showed me a picture this last summer; he thought your parents had been part of a Pack, because of the way they were killed, but never considered that you might be related to me. It was... emotional.” Duke pauses and studies Jackson for a moment. “Don't ever worry, grandson – I would never take you from your family and friends. But you came perilously close to death, last week, were too close to Kate Argent, and I needed to meet you. Tell you.”

“But... but, I'm not – “

“Your mother was a bitten wolf. I used to tell Janice that she didn't need the Bite, she was more wolf than most born wolves I'd met.” He once again graced his great-grandson with a smile, this one rueful and sad. “Genetics are a tricky thing. One of Derek's cousins in human, while that child's siblings are wolf. You are another human child of werewolves. On the plus side, it's a guarantee that you would survive the Bite, should you decide you want it once you are of age.”

“Sur – like McCall?”

Danny rolls his eyes. “Not quite. McCall was bitten without permission, lack of consent is bad, Jax.”

“No, I mean... he's been mean, these past few weeks. You know?”

Deucalion nods. “It's an adjustment, at first. If you do take the Bite, you'll have all the help you need. But never think you have to, Jackson. Almost half of my descendants were normal humans.”

Jackson stares at his great-grandfather for a long moment, then shakes his head slightly. “I can't... I don't even know you; you don't know me. We should... we should work on that, before we...” He
makes a small gesture, seeming to mean everything werewolf.

Deucalion nods back, almost gently. “I would like to meet your parents.”

Jackson pales slightly. “Oh, dude, how are we gonna explain?”

“Truth worked for us.” Lydia snarks.

“That's different!”

“How?” Danny demands.

“Well, Lydia already knew most of it, she said. And you seemed to.”

Derek zeros in on Danny, because he'd also been wondering at Danny's reactions the day of the fire.

Danny flushes. “My nana...” He clears his throat and starts over. “Family tradition states that we learn about the Menahune and other hidden peoples. Werewolves aren't really part of the tradition, but nana... well, since we moved to California, she decided to learn about anything we might meet here. And she believes it, and she's not crazy, so. So they might be real, and Stiles... sometimes knows things. He's something. And...” Danny shrugs helplessly. “It just... fit? I can't really...”

“Stiles never said?” Derek knew he hadn't, but better he ask, than his mother.

Danny shakes his head hard enough his hair flies around his face. “He'd never do that, Derek. He never even said anything about himself, let alone you guys. I just... suspected, until the fire.”

Danny left the pensive look on his face, and stared at the floor.

“I know.” Derek all but whispers. “There's no one more loyal than Stiles.”

Danny glares at Derek for a second, then gives an apologetic look.

Derek nods back, then looks at Lydia. “And you?”

She rolls her eyes again. “Dreams. And more dreams. I was beginning to wonder if I was losing my damned mind, having dreams about you and your family changing into werewolves!”

“The Martin line used to be a strong ally of the Hale Pack.” Deucalion notes. “The last Banshee of your line was your grandmother, but she was poisoned and shoved into Eichen House by Edwin Argent. I doubt your mother remembers her, Derek, but if she does, it's only by her first name, Natalia.”

Lydia looks almost bored with this revelation. “I found letters she'd written to me. I have a cousin who's in Eichen House now, that I never knew about. I think she's also a Banshee, but it...” Lydia swallows carefully before she finishes. “I think it drove her insane.”

Deucalion frowns. “She must not have an anchor. I'll convince Star to teach you the basics, Ms. Martin; if you listen to her and learn well, you need not fear the same fate.”

Lydia lifts her chin. “I always learn well.”

“She's the only person I know smarter than Stiles.” Derek assures Deucalion.

“Then you'll be fine.” Deucalion looks pleased. “Now I just have to figure out why the foxes are here.” He remarks to himself, then nods to Derek. “Unfortunately, I can't stay. Kali is... acting
odder than normal. I see the situation is well in hand. Grandson,” He turns to Jackson, “Please, get my number from Derek and call if you need anything. And I will make time to meet your parents.” He doesn't give any of them time to react, and leaves.

“Uh...” Jackson stares after him, then pins Derek with a look. “Is he really...”

“As far as we can tell.” Derek nods. “Any other questions?”

“Yeah.” Danny gives Derek a small smile. “We riding to the hospital together?”

Derek blinks at him for several moments, then nods. “If you don't mind.”

“Why didn't your mom Bite Stiles like she did Mrs. Argent?” Lydia asks once they're in the car.

Derek's eyes flash before he can stop them. “Stiles wasn't, isn't, dying. Without that, there's no way in hell my mom – or any decent Alpha – would Bite someone underage.”

“But he's still...” Her voice trails off, leaving Derek only the scent of her worry.

He shakes his head. “Star says he wakes up, and recovers completely. She'd know.”

“Star.” Danny says, musingly. “How would she know.”

Derek sighs and settles in to try and explain Star, something he's never successfully done before. First time for everything, right?

**November 10th, 2012**

“...Don't understand what's happening to her, at all. Star said something about competing genetics, I know Rose is related to Star, but it's never come out before.”

“Is it dangerous?” Stiles' dad asks Talia.

“No.” Talia replies firmly. “If anything, having some Fae powers should make her – and us – safer. We just don't understand why it's happening.”

“Su'viv's.” Stiles manages to say.

“Stiles?” John had almost teleported to the bed, he moved so fast.

“Hey, dadio.” Stiles smiles weakly. “I take it messed up, somewhere.”

Talia stifles a sob. “Don't ever say that again, Red!”

“Wha?”

“You saved most of my family, my Pack, on your own! Never say you messed up!”

Stiles winces, remembering now that it's been mention. “Oh, Jesus, Tee – Denis!”

Talia closes her eyes in pain. “You did everything you could; the bullet lodged in his right ventricle; there was literally no way to save him. Too much wolfsbane, shot directly into his heart.”

Stiles starts crying. “But I got him out...”
“Yes, you did. And we're all grateful. He wasn't burned to ash in the house.” Peter says from the door, half supporting Sarah. “And you saved the rest of us.”

Stiles shakes his head, sobbing on his father's chest. “He was only just eight, dad.”

“Ballistics confirmed, it was Kate's shot that killed him. She's never getting free.”

“No.” Stiles all but spits it. “She got out before, what's to say – “

“She's going to a max pen, son, and has extradition to four other states, two with the death penalty. She's being held in solitary, and isn't being allowed any visitors.”

Stiles relaxes slightly, but doesn't stop crying.

**November 15th, 2012**

Derek wheels Stiles into Rose's room carefully; the bullet hadn't hit anything vital, but it wasn't all that healed, yet, and Derek was terrified he'd reopen the wound.

“Little Red.” Rose rasped from the bed.

Stiles blinked big eyes at her, trying to hold back tears. “Rose-bush...”

“Can it, kid.” Rose says, rather harshly. “You carried my son down two flights of stairs after you'd been shot. No one, I mean no one, could have done more.”

Derek winces, at their grief and his own.

“Still, Rose... if I'd stopped to try – “

“He was already dead, Stiles.” This time, Rose speaks softly, and her eyes are glowing bronze. “You did everything you could, saved Adam and the babies... not to mention the rest of us.” She shakes her head. “You did everything you could. Sometimes, it's just not enough.”

Stiles snarls like a wolf. “I almost do hope Kate escapes again, because this time, I'll kill her!”

“We all will.” Rose agrees flatly. “And the Conclave gave permission for her and Gerard, both.”

Stiles nods, then gestures at her eyes. “Is that... you gonna start being stopped, like Star?”

Rose shakes her head. “I'm barely a quarter Fae, and I've never shown any Talents before now. Hell, Stiles, Alan's still more powerful than I am, let alone you. I'm minor, and it's gonna stay that way. Just... now, maybe, I'll be able to help a bit more.”

“I guess you'll be training with me and Star?”

Rose shrugs. “Yeah. I still have kids to take care of, and I'm never letting that bitch touch any of them again.”

“Me, too.” Stiles whispers. Derek squeezes his neck, and Stiles shoots him a grateful look.

**November 23rd, 2012**

Stiles frowns at the door, wondering who's hovering out there. It's not quite 1 pm.; the adults –
aside from Peter, who had left to get his own lunch ten or so minutes ago – were mostly at work, the kids in school.

There's scuffling sounds, and Stiles reaches under his pillow for his athame (his dad wanted him to have a gun, but Melissa was adamant that hospital policy not be broken that far. As she pointed out, there was a deputy on the floor, and he or she would have a gun.)

When the door finally opens, Stiles drops the athame in shock.

“Ethan? Aiden?” He blinks at them, wondering if this is another duladid-induced dream.

The twins shuffle sheepishly into the room.

“Hey, Stiles.” Aiden addresses the floor.

“What – I mean, don't get me wrong, it's awesome to see you, but what are you guys doing here?”

“You didn't know?” Ethan drags his eyes up off the floor, but can't seem to get higher than Stiles' chin. “Duke's been here since the day of...”

He swallows painfully, and Aiden takes up the narration. “We came with him, the whole Pack did really, but this is the first day we’ve been allowed to come visit.”

“We'd have come sooner, otherwise.” Ethan assures Stiles' hands. “We've been worried sick about our hero, ya know?”

“Your – guys, I'm not a hero!” Stiles blinks back bitter, frustrated tears.

The twins give him identical looks of shock.

Aiden finds his voice after a long moment. “I don't know what else to call a fifteen year old who ran back into a burning building to rescue more people.” His gaze finally finds Stiles' face, eyes burning with something fierce and unnameable. “You're not a wolf, not any sort of shifter, can’t heal like we do, and you just kept going back!”

“I didn't save Denis!” Stiles shouts back, shuddering with repressed sobs.

“Didn't you?” The question comes gently, and Ethan steps closer. “You ran up two flights of stairs in a burning building, dodged multiple bullets, then carried him back down after you'd been shot. After you had pulled pretty much everyone else in that house out – James told us he was trapped under a burning beam, that Adam was even more trapped in the mud room. Your Alpha and most everyone else in the house had been tranquilized, your Second had burns over half his body that took him over a week to heal.” Ethan shakes his head. “Your magic was blocked for most of it, you did that as a plain old human kid!”

“But Denis –”

“Your Alpha...” Aiden closes his eyes against the sting of tears. “She told Duke there was literally nothing anyone could have done, he was dead the second the bullet hit him, Stiles.”

“I should have stopped him from moving!” Stiles screams it, loud enough to hurt his side, a fist coming up so he could bang his head against it. “I knew there were wanna-be Hunters around, I should have gone to him instead of –”

“This was not your fault.” Ethan says implacably, and they both flash Alpha eyes.
Stiles can't help the hysterical giggle that escapes him. “Can't Alpha me...” His giggles overtake him, and turn into full-body sobs in seconds.

The twins bracket him on the bed, just hold him while he shakes apart, offering wordless support and comfort while he screams his rage and grief incoherently.

He finally calms down enough to realize Peter's in the room, standing at the foot of his bed with the most terrifying look Stiles can imagine.

Not because it's anger, it's not rage or calculation like Stiles would expect.

No, it's devastation. Raw grief.

This pisses Stiles off even more – that Peter Hale, of all fucking people, would look like that where two veritable strangers could see him.

“Oh gods, Peter.” It's all but a whimper, and Stiles reaches for him. Peter crumples in slow increments, tears inching down his face as he carefully crawls up the bed and curls up half in Stiles' lap.

“Not your fault, Red, never your fault.” He rasps once his own tears finally slow. “Without you, we'd all be dead

“Denis.” Is all Stiles can think to say, weeping inconsolably about the eight-year-old who was always willing to play Lego Batman with Stiles; and who'd giggle whenever Stiles helped him build a blanket fort; who sit in Stiles' lap, rubbing his cheek over Stiles' neck and shoulder while Stiles read Harry Potter to him, or the Narnia books, or one of Heinlein's juveniles.

“Kate Argent.” Peter spits her name like an oath. “She sat there in your father's interrogation room and bragged about how she forced a druid to Circle the house, then giggled over how she couldn't be 'bothered' to waste a trank dart on a 'puppy' she considered helpless. Then laughed at the look on your face when she shot him!”

The bed abruptly deflated as one of the twins lost control of their claws and pierced it, air whistling out as they thumped down to the frame. Stiles couldn't help a shriek of pain, and Melissa ran into the room, eyes frantic.

She stopped, taking in the tableau – three werewolves sheepishly drawing Stiles' pain while the limp edges of the former mattress curled over the four.

“For the love of – those beds cost thousands, children!”

“I'll pay for it, Mel. It was my fault.” Peter's voice is quiet, still thick with tears.

Melissa just sighs. “I somehow doubt it was anyone's 'fault'. This whole situation is just...” She shakes her head, then pulls out her hospital phone and orders a new bed for Stiles. When she's done, she pins the trio of wolves with her best Nurse Glare. “No. More. Claws.”

Peter raises his hand, thumb holding his pinky, other fingers pointed straight up. “I swear.”

Melissa rolls her eyes. “You were never a Boy Scout.”

“You sure about that?” Peter asks, his smile a ghost of it's normal cheekiness.

“I hope.” Melissa returns the smile, striving for normalcy in their banter.
“What's a Boy Scout?” Aiden sounds only mildly curious, and Stiles can't help that his jaw hit the floor.

“Are you seri – you don't even know what the Boy Scouts – Jesus, your father was – “ Stiles just splutters, he's so shocked.

The twins blink at him in confused unison. “Is it something fun?” Ethan sounds intrigued, now.

“'Cuz if it's something fun, that's why we couldn't.” Aiden points out, barely sounding bitter. “But I bet we could now.”

“Hrm.” Peter contemplates Ethan, then Aiden. “Wouldn't they be amusing as hell, as Eagle Scouts?”

“I – you can't – they – Peter!” Stiles gives up on coherency and just laughs, snuggles between the three ‘wolves and lets Melissa explain Boy Scouts to the twins. It'd probably be good for them, if they're staying in Beacon Hills for any length of time.

“Denis was in the Boy Scouts.” He says softly.

Peter nods. “He loved it, we'd had a huge family argument, because of the official anti-gay policy, but the local troops are very accepting.”

“Anti-gay?” Aiden bristles.

“It's getting better.” Stiles soothes. “It's sort of like the military was, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, except it was mostly only the Troop leaders – is that what they're called? – weren't allowed to be gay, because crazy people think gay men are somehow automatically pedophiles. Despite that being utter bullshit and against Reality, it's just stupid people being stupid. But the local troop is awesome, and Danny's an Eagle Scout, he's been out of the closet since he was twelve, seriously no one around here cares if someone is gay or bi or anything.”

“Danny?” Ethan raises his brows in obvious question.

Stiles isn't sure why he blushes. “My boyfriend. If you stick around, he'll be stopping by after school.”

Aiden grins hugely. “Well, well, Stilinski, we can't pass up the chance to meet someone you think is good enough to be your boyfriend.”

“If only I were actually cool enough to be his!” Stiles laments dramatically. “Seriously, though, Danny is the coolest. I mean, literally everyone loves Danny, even racists and homophobes love Danny, it's a lot to live up to.”

“He saved your life, Stiles.” Peter points out, solemnity marred only by the mischievous twinkle in his eye. “Of course we love him.”

“He did?” The twins demand in unison.

Stiles smiles shyly. “He did. If he hadn't shown up with Lydia and Jax, I might have bled out before the medics got there. He's awesome.”

The new bed arrives, and the next several minutes are spent transferring Stiles to the new bed. Once that's done, Ethan and Aiden re-bracket Stiles, Peter opting to sit in a chair this time while Melissa fusses with Stiles' I.V. and does nurse-y things.
Once she finally leaves, Aiden pokes him in his non-holed side. “So, Danny. We wanna hear aaaaall about this boyfriend, ban-draoi.”

Ethan smiles, all teeth and predator gleam. “Details, kid. We want ’em.”

Stiles groans and flails, smiling truthfully for the first time since he woke after the fire. “Twist my arm, why don't you? But fine. You're gonna regret it.”

Peter smiles quietly to himself, happy that his Little Red was thinking about something that wasn't the fire. Maybe he wouldn't kill Deucalion for sending the twins, after all.

Derek was glad his mother had sent him in the SUV; otherwise, they wouldn't have all fit.

Even as they were, it wasn't, strictly speaking, legal. Derek and Danny were up front, but the rest of the car was... full. Lydia was sitting on Jax, Allison on Scott, Cora on Isaac and Erica on Boyd. Jeff was squished in the back with Kira, and then they stopped at the middle school to pick up James.

But Derek didn't care. Nothing could phase him today.

Stiles was finally getting better, the hole pretty much closed. Rose was home, watching the kids, and completely recovered, at least physically. So was Peter.

Jax, Lydia and Danny had been awesome in the past couple weeks, supportive of Derek and the Pack. Jax was actually being nice (it was freaking Stiles out, which was hilarious). Jennifer had backed off almost entirely, no longer pushing for something Derek couldn't bring himself to feel, and was actually cool to be around now. Lydia had almost entirely quit playing the vapid queen bee, hanging almost exclusively with the Pack and Pack-adjacent group, and Derek was really seeing what Stiles saw, how she was scary but awesome.

And Danny had, not stopped being jealous, but stopped caring that he was.

So what if they were mostly living in a hotel because Derek's crazy wanna-be 'lover' tried to kill his family (and Denis, no no don't think of Denis, Derek was having a good day)? She'd inadvertently solidified the Pack; because of her Jax and Lydia and Danny were here, now, and mom promised that as soon as Stiles was out of the hospital, they could tell Erica and Boyd.

Derek parked, laughing quietly as everyone spilled out of the SUV turned clown car, and popped the trunk so everyone could grab their presents for Stiles. This was the first day non-'family' was allowed to see him, and they were all understandably excited. They trooped upstairs en masse, giggling and playful, until all the wolves stopped like they hit a wall.

“What is it?” Lydia demands, almost sharply.

“I don't...” Scott sounds confused, and Derek shares an eye-roll with Cora.

“It's the twins. Didn't know they were in town.” Derek explains.

Jeff shakes his head. “My fault, I meant to tell you.”

“Twins?” Jackson arches an eyebrow.

Derek gives Scott a hesitant look, unsure how the new 'wolf was taking this. “They... Stiles and
Scott found them, when they got lost in the Preserve. Their father was...” Dereck can't think how to explain, when neither Erica nor Boyd knew about their world, yet.

Isaac frowns. “Honestly, he sounds like he was a combo of my dad and Scott's. But Scott and Stiles found them, and because of it their dad is totally out of the picture and they're much better off.”

Jeff opens his mouth, then closes it, looking thoughtful. Scott just grimaces, nodding ruefully. Jackson studies them both, then looks back to Derek. “Anything else?”

“They're sixteen, I think. Some sort of distant cousin of ours, it turns out.” Derek raises his brows at the other boy, willing him to get it.

Jackson nods thoughtfully. “They gonna be sticking around? Because we need more good 'Crosse players.” This is aimed at Scott, with a smirk and a wink.

Scott growls at Jackson. “I am a good LaCrosse play, you overgrown do – “

“And! We're at Stiles room!” Allison says brightly. “Why are we standing out here like creepers? Let's go in before Mamma Mel sees us and tells us we're too many!”

Derek winced, he hadn't thought of that. Including the twins and Peter, all three of whom he could smell in the room, that was sixteen people.

“Yes, in the room.” He all but barks, and starts herding them in.

Then he freezes in the doorway, growling because Ethan and Aiden are sitting on either of side of Stiles' bed.

Peter pushes through the crown towards the door, and kicks Derek's shin – hard – when he gets there.

Embarrassed at his rude and territorial behavior, Derek tips his head in silent apology to the two Alphas. They give him identical shy smile, forgiveness and teasing in one.

Lydia breaks the silence, turning to Allison with a bright smile. “I want one!”

Allison giggles. “Which one?”

“The straight one, of course!”

Jax glares at both twins, knowing better than to glare at Lydia, while everyone else – except Ethan and Aiden – burst out laughing.

“Told you boys you'd fit in.” Stiles says smugly. “Let me introduce you; you already know the Hales, and Jeff of course. You remember Scott and Allison? Did you meet Isaac before? 'kay, he's Cora's, I know his cheekbones are glorious, but Ethan you have to remember that Cora? Is pure evil in a sweet package. This glorious red-head is my personal Goddess Lydia, and her not-a-douche-anymore boyfriend Jackson, yes he is everyone's type. The smokin' blonde there is my Catwoman, Erica, and that hunk she hanging on is her boyfriend, Boyd. This sweet little thang is our new friend, Kira. And this one,” Stiles smiles widely, reaching for Danny's hand and pulling him closer, “Is my Danny. I've spent the past hour talking about you, Danny-boy, they probably know you better than your mother at this point.”

Ethan's pupil's visibly dilate when Danny gets closer, but no one aside from Derek seems to notice.
“I'll have you know, it's probably all lies.” Danny demurs, looking a little flustered.

“Not a word of it.” Stiles says intently, meeting his eyes with a serious expression. “You're Danny, literally everyone loves you, because you're just that awesome!” Danny blushes brightly, and Stiles cackles, pulling Danny down for a kiss. Danny throws out his arm, his hand landing on Ethan's for a moment as he kisses back.

Ethan's eyes bleed red, and he quickly closes his eyes and bows his head. Peter draws in a sharp breath and mutters “fuck!” low enough that only Derek hears it. Then he claps his hands sharply, getting everyone's attention.

“There are too many people in this room, we don't want to get Mel in trouble. So you kids need to rotate, okay? Aiden, Ethan, I told Duke I'd take you back to your hotel, but don't worry, you can come back tomorrow. Danny, why don't you stay in here with Lydia, Jackson, Erica and Boyd. The rest of you, come wait your turn...”

Derek throws a smile at Stiles, not too fussed; like his siblings and Scott, he'd been allowed to see Stiles pretty much since he woke up, he didn't mind waiting.

And he needed to know what Peter knew.

It took Peter several minutes to arrange a rotation that satisfied everyone, to pry the twins off Stiles bed, and to herd the majority out. Then he pasted a smile on his face, hooked an arm over Derek's shoulder, threw a look at Jeff, and dragged his chosen minions to the parking lot.

No one said a word until they arrived at Peter's car, where Peter immediately leaned against it with an insouciance slouch.

“Are you okay, Ethan?” The question was quiet, and not at all what Derek had expected.

“I... don't? Beta Hale?” The kid was shivering, huddling against his brother and looked ready to either cry or run. Aiden was running his hands up and down Ethan's sides, looking just as confused with the unwelcome addition of worried. Jeff just looked pensive.

Peter sighs, and casts his upwards in an apparent plea for something. “Yes, this is... uncommon and unfair and why I am not surprised that your so-called father couldn't be fucked to tell you about the birds and the bees?”

Aiden clears his throat. “To be fair, he actually gave us a... complete education.” Shame and misery poured off of both of them in acrid smelling waves.

Peter raises a sardonic eyebrow, then makes the connection and looks sick. “I...” For once, Peter was at a loss for words.

“Wait.” Derek feels at least as sick as Peter looks. “You're saying... no, I need brain bleach, what are you saying?”

Ethan and Aiden study the asphalt beneath their feet. “Our fourteenth birthday. It's how he figured out I was gay. The hooker said I was the easiest hundred she'd ever made.”

Derek spins and throws up in the bushes.

When he's done, and he wipes his chin and turns back around, desperately trying to think of something to make this better. The smell of the twins' mortification is strong enough to over-power his vomit, and this isn't right he has to fix it!
“Your father was a vile, evil, self-serving – “ Peter cuts himself off with a growl. “I honestly don't know which was worse – yours, Isaac's or Jeff's.”

The twins blink in unison.

Jeff clears his throat and looks away. “My da’ didn't do anything to me. He ignored me, for which I've always been thankful.”

Peter sighs again, heavy with grief, and the twins just look more confused. “I apologize, Jeff, that wasn't something for me to say. My personal issues with your father and his neglect aren't something that should be aired.”

Jeff shrugs. “They know about it, it just wasn't anything like...” His eyes slide over the two boys, then flick up towards Stiles' hospital room, then back down to the ground.

“At a later point, we'll have a talk about how negligence is abuse. But now's not the time. Tell me, Jeff, did you catch what happened up there?”

Jeff favors Peter with a dubious look. “I saw Ethan flash his eyes for some reason.”

Ethan whimpers. “I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, I'll do better!”

Peter reaches for Ethan's shoulder, pausing when he flinches back into his brother. Peter just lets his hand stay hovering, not touching but not withdrawing. “You did nothing wrong, Ethan.”

This shocks Ethan into silence and both brothers into immobility.

“But da always – “

“No.” Peter cuts Aiden off firmly. “You need to forget pretty much anything your father ever said. In general, yes, flashing your eyes can be dangerous. But not that much, for only a second? And definitely not in this situation.”

Derek finally speaks up. “What situation?”

Peter finishes his earlier movement, running his hand from the boy's temple to should, then leaning back again and crossing his arms. “Let's start at the beginning. What did you feel when you met Danny?”

Ethan's pupils dilate again, leaving only a thin red circle. “He was... honestly, he's the hottest guy I've ever seen. And when he got close enough, to where I could smell him...” He trails off, looking lost. Aiden pushes up on tip-toe, rubbing his cheek over his brother's hair.

“Um-hmmm. And when he touched you.”

Ethan whispers. “Gods, I just... he can have whatever he wants, I don't even care. He was happy kissing Stiles, so I wanted him to kiss Stiles, but I also wanted to tear Stiles to bloody pieces!”

Derek growls, letting his eyes flash.

Ethan shakes his head wildly as Jeff adjusts his position. “No, Derek, no, I adore Stiles, you know that, that's why I'm so freaked, I'd never hurt him, what the fuck is wrong with me!” This last comes out as a wail, edging into a howl, and the kid looks miserable.

“Nothing.” Peter says flatly, and Derek turns his anger on his uncle. Peter gives him a half-hearted
smirk. “No, truly, there is nothing wrong and much to be rejoiced over.”

“No, truly, there is nothing wrong and much to be rejoiced over.”

Rejoiced? He just said he wants to tear my! – our! Our Stiles to bloody pieces, Peter!”

“He also said he wanted Danny to kiss Stiles, because it made him happy.” Peter points out, way too calm for the situation.

But Derek takes a step back, both metaphorically and literally, and thinks about it.

“Oh, Jesu Christos,” Derek breathed, suddenly getting it.

The three Alpha pin him with confused stares. “What is it?” Aiden demands for his brother.

Derek swallows. “Fuck. Just... fuck!”

“Exactly.” Peter smirks more naturally this time.

The brothers swivel as one to glare at Peter. Even Jeff shoots him an annoyed looked. “Don't draw this out, whatever it is. Cut the suspense and just tell us, Beta Hale.” Derek groans, because when Jeff gets formal, it either means the shit has hit the fan, or he's pissed.

“I'd apologize, but I'm silently freaking out about all the ways this could blow up.” Peter draws in a steady breath. “What do you gentlemen know about mates?”

**Interlude: Poisoned Blood**

*Gerard stares at the doctor in disbelief.*

Kate isn't so still; she slams her hands on his desk and pushes herself upright, every line of her body quivering with righteous fury. “What do you mean, there's nothing you can do!”

“Please, Ms. DeSilva, I know this is a fraught situation – ”

“Fraught? Fraught! I'll give you fraught, you over educat – ”

“Katherine.” Gerard spoke quietly, but it brought Kate to heel immediately. She flowed back down into chair like water, anger and respect warring on her face.

Gerard stared at her until she meekly turned her face down, then turned back to the oncologist. “What do you recommend?”

“There's little than I can recommend, other than hospice.” The doctor shuffled papers nervously, casting apprehensive glances at Kate. “There is little traditional medicine can do you for you, other than making your time more comfortable.”

“Traditional. Implying that something... non-traditional may be the key?”

The doctor closed his eyes, exhaling loudly. “I cannot recommend anything outside my purview.”

“But?” Gerard’s question was a silky purr.

“But.” The doctor swallowed heavily. “I have... heard of those, in similar situation, who found... other means.”

“Such as?” Gerard was becoming impatient with this little dance.
The doctor seemed to realize it; he gave a sharp nod to himself, then met Gerard's eyes.
“Specifically, either Werewolf or Werehyena would be your best bet; while the large cats don't
share the same diseases, the prevalence of certain cancers among the various felines implies that it
would be less safe. The few birds are... physically temperamental, and the cold-blooded species are
very difficult to safely transition when one is in perfect health. Both wolves and hyenas are
physically robust, are easy to transition to, and are easier to adjust to after transition. Of the two,
wolves are much more common.”

Gerard gives a slow nod, while Kate glares lasers at the man. “I see. Thank you for your time,
doctor.”

“Of course. I only regret that I didn't have anything better; I hate having to give news of this
nature, even when there's a solution.”

“I can imagine.” Gerard agrees, with false sympathy, offering the man his hand.

“I do appreciate you taking it... well?” He stared at their joined hands, puzzled by the sharp sting
he'd momentarily felt.

Gerard carefully extracted his hand, leaving the doctor paralyzed in his chair. “I do apologize,
doctor, this isn't at all your fault.” He smiles at the doctor with false comfort.

Kate had her purse open, pulling out two syringes, one of which she screwed a small needle onto.

“Ah, thank you, my dear.” Gerard opened the man's mouth, carefully squirting one syringe down
his throat. “It's a difficult, dangerous world we live, doctor. Any sign of weakness, and the animals
try to tear you down.”

Kate finished prepping her syringe as Gerard pulled on latex gloves, then lifted the doctor's
tongue. Kate jammed the needle into the vein that ran across the bottom of his tongue, depressing
the plunger harshly.

“Therefor, no one can know of the weakness; no one who can trace it to me, anyway. The
information you have in your files is all false, of course, but you know my face. Luckily for your
staff, we've only met after they've left. Someone will find you, tomorrow I daresay, dead of a heart
attack. But I am merciful; the compound that paralyzed you also takes away your ability to feel
pain, so you've been spared that. This is an easy death. Be grateful.”

Kate bags both syringes, then pulls out a cloth and starts carefully wiping down anywhere they've
actually touched, then moving things around so that it's not at all noticeable that she had done so.
Gerard merely watches the doctor, eyes cold and flat.

“That's everything in here, daddy.”

“Is it? Good.” He sighs, feeling tired. “On the plus side, you can have the Hale boy. Sadly, you
won't be able to keep him for long.”

“Daddy?”

“What do you expect?” He snaps at his daughter. “Me to not become an Alpha? No, we'll take the
boy, you can have your fun as we kill the rest, then once the Alpha falls to him...”

Kate goes quiet, pensive for a moment, then nods. “Of course, daddy. Besides, once you're the
Alpha, you can get me all the puppies I want, can't you?”
Gerard graces her with a grin as feral as any werewolf. “Of course I can. Know who you'll have first?”

She return the grin. “That faggot bitch, of course.”

Gerard laughs. Yes, his daughter was truly his child. And once they'd destroyed the Hales, cured his problem, and whipped the rest of the family into shape...

Well, there were so many other animals crawling around, polluting the world with their filth. And he'd be even better placed to return them to Hell, where they belonged.

Each and every one.

End Notes

Please, let me know what you think? Kudos let me know that you didn't think it was worthless...

i have too much invested in this, i think. ah, well, it wouldn't be fandom if we didn't go a little insane, right?

right?

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!