from the little spark (may burst a mighty flame)

by cl410

Summary

Darcy's mother taught her only a few important things in the short time they’d had together. Don’t stay in one place for too long. Uphold the Code in everything you do, and never trust those that stray. Step too near the Under-Hill and you’ll be lost forever, your soul enslaved by the Fae lurking in the shadows. And finally, tell no one about the power surging through her veins, passed down from generations of Lewis women.
But most of all, Darcy's mother taught her to be afraid.

*you do not need to know anything about Teen Wolf to read this... it’s just an excuse for werewolves tbh*

Notes

Title is a quote from Dante.

This is my first time writing for any fandom, mostly because I just CANNOT get the story out of my head. I started writing it down and long story short (but not really), I already have 30k words written of this thing and so much more planned out.

I have an adoration for everything Darcy Lewis and also for the Teen Wolf characters.. Fair warning, I have taken bits and pieces of canon I liked and then set the rest on fire. If you're a stickler for canon details, you should probably run the other direction.

For all the non-Teen Wolf fans willing to give this a shot:
1. First of all, you're very brave and I love you for it.
2. I've tried to make this easy for you guys to catch on, especially after chapter 1.
3. Werewolves in this verse can only do a (stupid-looking) half-shift. Elongated fangs, claws, glowing eyes, but they remain bipedal if fuzzy humans.
4. The Hales are a family of werewolves, one of the most well-respected packs in history. Alternatively, the Argents are the most notorious werewolf hunters around.

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

There's trouble on the river

And whispers in the trees

I can feel it all around, all around

- Joy Williams, Until the Levee

~*~

Darcy's mother taught her only a few important things in the short time they’d had together. Don’t stay in one place for too long. Uphold the Code in everything you do, and never trust those that stray. Step too near the Under-Hill and you’ll be lost forever, your soul enslaved by the Fae lurking in the shadows. And finally, tell no one about the power surging through her veins, passed down from generations of Lewis women.

But most of all, Darcy's mother taught her to be afraid.

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She’d learned to stay on the outskirts of towns. A young girl wandering alone set off all kinds of alarm bells, and Darcy knew better now. It was different, without her mom. Somehow the adults just knew Darcy was all by herself now. She’d already escaped the clutches of the system once, slipping through the fingers of baffled social workers.

Darcy knew she couldn’t stay in one place for long. Mama drilled that into her head as soon as she could talk. We have to keep moving, baby. This won’t be forever. Just until we get far enough away. Darcy grasped the ring in her hand tightly. I won't let them find you.

They did. And now Mama was gone. Darcy stared at her mother’s ring, crouched in the woods on the edge of a small, no-name town. She remembered how Mama died, how sharply she’d felt her mother being ripped away from her, like a butcher’s knife carving her own heart from her body. Darcy had gasped for air, unable to scream, hidden safely miles away. She’d passed out from the pain and the loss and the fear, and woke up alone in the woods a few towns back. It seems that had happened again.

Darcy opened her other fist. It held a silver pendant with a snarling wolf, dropped by the woman who’d killed Mama. She'd found it beside her mother’s body.

Kate Argent. Darcy didn’t know how she knew the name. But she was certain. Kate Argent had murdered her mother. Something deep inside Darcy flickered, and she was lost.

~*~

In all, Peter Hale was having a pretty shitty night. He’d lost his keys, shattered his phone in his hand like it was a child’s toy, and, in his temper, accidentally popped his claws in the shower while holding a bottle of conditioner. Even werewolf reflexes couldn’t keep him from eating shit on the
shower floor. He gave up, stomping out of the shower and into his room. The door slammed behind him. He was left staring at the remains of his phone, scattered on his bed.

Chris’s text had upset him, to say the least. It was one thing for Chris’s father to force him into marrying a woman he didn’t love. It was a whole other thing to blackmail them into moving away by threatening the safety of his own granddaughter. Peter had already watched the love of his life marry someone else. He wasn’t sure he could bear it if Chris left him again, for good this time.

Fucking Argents.

Peter tugged on a pair of sweatpants and sat on the edge of the bed. He rubbed his face, sighing. He’d destroyed his phone before replying to Chris’s text—Gerard’s threatening to take Allison. He wants us gone tonight.

Thumps sounded from upstairs. Just Derek, based off the teenaged angst seeping through the walls. Peter frowned, listening to his nephew pace his room. Concern nipped at him. Derek had been withdrawn, more so than usual. Secretive. Peter scoffed at himself.

“Because carrying on a secret gay affair with a werewolf hunter makes you the better werewolf,” he muttered under his breath. Peter rubbed at his face again. His head rose at a knock on the bedroom door.

“Uncle Peter?” Derek’s hesitant voice floated through the wood. Peter crossed the room and swung open the door. His nephew looked uncertain, hair in disarray and clothes askew. Peter nudged the door open a little wider to invite him inside.

“Couldn’t sleep?”

Derek wrung his hands together. His anxiety burned Peter’s nose. “I feel like something’s wrong,” Derek said quietly. He didn’t move from the doorway, instead shifted urgently from foot to foot.

“Something is wrong. I just shattered my fourth phone in six months,” Peter grumbled. Derek shook his head.


They turned in unison as Laura came stumbling across the hall. “I feel it, too.” She was wide-eyed and clutching a teddy bear her siblings gave her hell for still having. Derek didn’t even glance at it, peering out Peter’s window instead. Peter gave up on his sulk and herded them down the hall to Talia’s room. The Alpha could deal with her own distressed children at three in the morning. They ran into Andrew on the way, holding his youngest daughter close.

“Dad?” Laura fisted a hand in his shirt. “What’s going on?”

“Your mom is looking into it,” Andrew said calmly. The kids gravitated towards him. Peter met Andrew’s steady gaze and nodded, slipping away to find his sister. She was standing on the porch, frowning at the tree line.

“What is it?” Peter asked lowly.

Talia shook her head. “I don’t know. I thought, maybe-” A shot rang out, so unexpected in the quiet night that Peter almost didn’t realize what was happening. Talia fell, holding her stomach. He lunged for her. A second shot, and then a burning pain in his shoulder. He could absently hear the kids shouting upstairs, followed by Andrew’s snarl. Peter moved fast, dragging his sister back inside and slamming the door closed.
“Hunters?” Talia gasped. “Who the fuck- god damn it, Peter!” He pressed harder on her wound. Peter could smell the wolfsbane in the bullets, achingly sweet as it burned fire through their veins. His arm was searing in pain, but Talia had a gaping wound in her belly. His Alpha- his sister’s - pain took priority. The kids thundered downstairs after Andrew.

“Mom!” Laura darted over. She gaped at the wound, face pale. Derek could only stare from the doorway, breathing fast. Andrew dropped Cora beside Derek, ensuring they were away from the windows’ sightline.

“Laura, I need you to put pressure on this,” Peter said through gritted teeth. “Laura!” He snapped when she could only stare. His whole left arm shook. The wolfsbane would reach his heart soon. Laura jerked forward. “Andrew, we need one of their bullets.” He sat back as Laura took over, cupping his own bloody wound with a hand. He glanced up. “Drew?”

“We’re trapped,” Andrew said tightly from the kitchen doorway. Cora cried as she huddled against Derek. Derek stared at the windows, disbelief etched on his face.

Talia whipped her head around. “What?” Her husband pressed his hand against the open doorway. His hand met resistance just inches past the doorframe, unable to move any further. “Mountain ash?” Talia whispered. “How…”

The room seemed to freeze as the family collectively scented it. Smoke. They were trapped in the house, corralled so neatly in one place for a hunter to burn them all to the ground. Andrew darted towards the back of the house. A moment later, they heard his calm voice from the basement. “Talia, everything’s been blocked.”

“We’re trapped?” Laura asked hoarsely. She wore her mother’s blood up to her elbows. Talia stared at Peter. He recognized that look. Every time they’d been in trouble as kids, she’d looked at him for one of his clever plans, a way out. He’d managed to bullshit them out of trouble more times than either of them could remember.

He wondered when his arm had gone numb. Peter tried to focus. His vision swam. “Andrew, the tunnels?” Tunnels, through the basement and underground. They’d empty out nearly a mile away from the house, if they could get to them.

“Also lined.” Andrew’s voice was much closer than he’d expected. His brother-in-law tugged Peter’s hand down and replaced it with a towel to staunch the bleeding. The smoke seemed thicker, all of a sudden. Or maybe Peter was just losing time, lost in the daze of the wolfsbane poisoning him. They all froze as a woman cackled in the distance. He knew that laugh. Bitch. That bitch.

Someone was bellowing his name. “What?” Peter snapped. He coughed in the smoky room, hearing Cora do the same. She was flat on her belly beside him, shaking like a leaf. Andrew rested his other hand on his youngest daughter’s back. Derek tracked the pounding noise to the side door, staggering over to it with a hand covering his nose.

“It’s Chris!” He shouted. Peter’s thoughts flashed, for a moment, to the text from earlier. Chris was supposed to be leaving town, forced out by his father. It came together for Peter, then, in a brief moment of clarity. Gerard, probably planning for months. Kate, screaming with laughter in their front yard. Chris, breaking their door down when Derek wasn’t fast enough. The smoke quickly snuffed the thoughts out and Peter reached over to weakly grasp his sister’s hand.

Chris was suddenly in front of him, hands gripping Peter’s face. “Peter, hey. Peter, look at me!” Chris was sweaty and breathing hard, as if he’d run here from wherever the fuck he’d been shipped off to by Gerard. He turned to Andrew, speaking urgently.
“I can’t find the line. There's a witch out there. It could be 50 feet under the ground or even under the wood. I don’t know how far she made the circle, I can’t…” Chris turned his panicked gaze back to Peter. His eyes fell on Peter’s bleeding shoulder. “You’re shot, let me see.” He ignored Peter’s growl of pain, and Andrew’s echoing one when he pulled out a handgun.

“Stole some of Kate’s bullets,” Chris panted. “You never texted me back. I was coming here to see you when I saw the smoke. She… she’s fucking insane. I don’t know what the hell is going on.” Chris’s hands trembled as he emptied the clip into his hand. He opened the bullet casing and poured the wolfsbane into Peter’s wound. Before Peter could so much as yelp, Chris flicked a lighter and set the wolfsbane alight. Now he screamed, even as Chris turned to do the same to Talia. Andrew’s hand on his shoulder stopped him.

Chris stared down the half-shifted, snarling werewolf. “I swear to you, I had no part in this. If you want her to live, let me help.” Andrew glowered, eyes beta-gold, before finally releasing him.

“Still… in a.. burning.. building,” Peter panted. “With no.. way.. out.” Talia’s roar echoed in his ears as Chris burned the wolfsbane out of her system.

“I’m working on it,” Chris said. He watched as Talia’s wound started to heal. “I’ll kill her if I have to. I’ll kill her for this.” The heat was scorching now and Peter could hear the truth in Chris’s heartbeat, just over the steady roar of the approaching blaze. He closed his eyes for a moment and cursed the universe under his breath. When he opened his eyes again, Chris was staring at him in fear.

“Go,” Peter said. He watched Chris’s eyes go molten with anger. “Chris. Get out.”

“Like hell-”

“You have a daughter,” Peter interrupted. His breathing felt shallow. “And a fucking wife.”

“I’m not leaving you.”

“Chris. Go. This-” he gestured around at his family, crowded together on the floor as the fire approached. “This is bad enough. Don’t make me watch you die, too.”

“I am not - What? What is it?”

“The line?” Talia coughed. “Did you feel it break?” Laura stumbled to the front door, swinging it open. She reached out, expecting resistance, and tumbled onto the porch when she met none. Hope blazed in Peter’s chest to match the one behind him.

Andrew dragged the kids out the door, followed closely by Talia. Chris helped Peter outside, gun reloaded and pointed at his sister in the yard.

“Kate!” Chris shouted. “Put the gun down!” They limped off the porch, half-collapsing in the grass. Peter looked up to see Kate Argent, her pretty face twisted in fury. She was joined by a handful of other hunters, all with rifles pointed at his family. Gods, not his family.

“You’re a goddamned disgrace!” She screamed back. “An Argent, fucking a werewolf. You thought we didn’t know? You thought you’d get away with it?” She gave a deranged laugh.

“What the fuck are you doing, Kate? We have a Code!”

“A Code? They’re monsters, Chris! They shouldn’t exist! It’s our duty as hunters to exterminate them.” Derek made a wounded sound behind them. Andrew shoved him and Cora further behind
him.

“Exterminate? Jesus, Kate. They’re people! And besides that, they’re the fucking Hales, you can’t just kill them off! You’ll start a civil war!”

“And it looks like you’ll be on the wrong side of that war, big brother. You made your decision when you broke the mountain ash line.” Kate raised her gun, a manic gleam in her eyes.

Chris stared at her in confusion. “I didn’t break the line.”

Something flickered in the tree line behind the hunters. To Peter's astonishment, a girl stepped out of the darkness. She couldn't have been more than twelve or thirteen, with dark, tangled hair and blue eyes far too solemn for a child her age. There was an unnatural stillness to the air, as if the forest itself was holding its breath.

The girl scanned the crowded clearing, her gaze drifting past the werewolves to rest on the hunters. Peter caught a flash of black dart across the girl's skin and felt the breath rush out of him. He wasn’t sure if the urgency under his skin was terror or fascination.

"Holy gods. Talia, that's a spark."

"What?" Talia said sharply. She looked up, noticed the girl, and paled at what she saw. Young, small, and absolutely brimming with power. The girl studied Chris closely; the hunters hadn't noticed her yet. Peter tugged Chris back with a hand on his forearm, ignoring the other man's protests. He met the girl's gaze and held it. 'Not this one,' he thought- pleaded. He knew there was little anyone could do to stop a Spark, even one so young as this, but he wasn't going to lose Chris again. Not after tonight. She tilted her head- in acknowledgement or amusement, he wasn't sure- and looked to the woman still spewing obscenities.

"Katherine Argent." Her voice was high and clear, a child with tremendous power. The clearing stilled and Peter would've sworn time itself was suspended. Kate whirled around to stare at the girl.

"Who..." Kate trailed off as realization set in.

"You remember me," the girl said softly. She drifted forward, fingers trailing absently over the bark of the trees. Talia nudged the kids further back, towards the burning house. Cora clasped her mother's hand and Andrew clutched Derek and Laura tightly.

"The spark's daughter. From Texas. I remember. Your mother had stashed you away somewhere when I finally caught up to her." Peter growled low in his throat when the hunters trained their weapons on the girl. She didn’t seem to even see them, her focus entirely on Kate.

"Do you recall what you did? To my mother? I do."

Sweat beaded at Kate's brow. Peter had never seen her so uncertain, so afraid. "She was a threat-"

"She was not. You can’t lie your way out of this one, Argent. You hunted her for years, tracking us all over the country. She used all of her power to hide me. And when you killed her, that power became mine." The girl's eyes ringed with golden fire. The hair on Peter's arms stood on end. Chris's breathing was quick and he reached down to grip Peter's hand. "I felt every second of what you did to her. And I've come to return the favor."

"Sparks are monitored so the power doesn't go to their heads. You're being watched. You can't just kill me," Kate scoffed. Her hand trembled on the gun. Sweat slid down her face.
"Not without reason," the girl agreed. She stepped closer and turned thoughtfully to the trees beside her. "Not just for revenge. Here, though, the earth itself has come awake. It wants you gone." She looked back at Kate. "It wants me to make you leave."

"Oh, fuck me. She's connected with the nemeton," Peter whispered. The nemeton was the stump of a tree, an ancient sacred space, at the convergence of Telluric currents. The tree's reach expanded for miles throughout Beacon Hills, containing earth magic so powerful that it acted as a magnet for supernatural creatures, luring them in.

"Thought Deaton had that locked down," Chris murmured back. Peter shook his head, staring in awe as ink flashed across her skin again. "She's a spark. Spark trumps Druid, even on their own land."

"You've tried to murder more innocents," the girl said. She looked at the Hales again, huddled in their pjs before their burning home.

"They're monsters-"

"They're werewolves," she corrected. "A strong, stable line of werewolves that have anchored this territory for decades. Centuries. Chaos descends when the anchor dies, don't you know?" She looked Kate in the eyes. "You're going to feel every bit of the suffering you've ever caused. You're going to remember each and every soul you've hurt and slaughtered, and then you're going to die."

Kate fired, a single bullet aimed for the girl's heart. Peter lunged, too far, too late. But the bullet stopped, mere inches from the spark’s skin, spinning in place.

Chris shouted as the others opened fire. But nothing touched the girl. She didn't drop to the ground, riddled with holes and bleeding. She simply stood, waiting, with her eyes fixed on Kate. Kate snarled, emptying her clip. The bullets all halted before the girl and dropped harmlessly to the grass at her feet.

"Stand down! She's a child, for fuck's sake!" Chris surged against Peter's hold. He froze at the first scream from his sister. Kate's gun was on the grass, abandoned without a thought. Kate ripped at her hair and face, screaming as if she were being torn apart. She crumpled to the ground; Peter knew her screams would stay with him for the rest of his life.

The other hunters tried to run, guns empty and their leader shrieking in the grass. The spark raised a tiny, delicate hand and the ground itself rose up to stop them. Hunter after hunter slammed to the ground, screaming and clawing as roots dragged them under the earth. Kate's voice shattered and now she could only writhe in pain, screaming soundlessly. Only after the earth settled, with no sign of the men that had been dragged underneath, did the spark walk calmly over to Kate. She said nothing, only held Kate's gaze as the hunter's heart slowly gave out.

The Hales stood uncertainly in the flickering light, staring at the girl as their home continued to burn behind them. They tried not to flinch as she looked towards them. She frowned at the blaze and murmured something too quiet for Peter to make out. To his astonishment, the heat searing at his back began to abate until they were left standing in a mildly warm night. He glanced briefly behind him to confirm that the flames were gone. The spark staggered back, drawing his attention once more. She collapsed to the ground in an unconscious heap.

Peter tugged his hand from Chris's grip and inched forward.

"Careful," Chris said. "She may lash out." He followed, eyes sliding over to his sister's body. Peter brushed a hand down his arm but kept inching towards the girl. This close, he could see her unwashed hair, dirty skin, the sharp lines of her bones standing out from too-pale skin. A small tattoo
of an otter, the one Peter had seen move twice before this night, curled up in a tight ball at the base of her neck.

Chris stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "Not too close. She's not going to want to wake up with strange men hovering over her," he said tightly.

"Has she been on her own since her mom died?" Peter asked. He sat down a few feet away, studying the small girl. "Jesus, she's skin and bones." Peter felt more than heard Talia's approach. The kids, he knew, remained by the house with Andrew, a safer distance away.

"She broke the mountain ash line," Talia said. "The power felt the same."

"Then we owe her our lives," Peter snapped. He was angry, suddenly, so sure that Talia would send the girl away. Sparks were dangerous, after all. He wasn't sure he could stand to do that, to send this little girl back out into the world on her own.

"Yes, we do," she said calmly. The tension in his shoulders eased some.

"You'll offer her refuge?" Chris asked. "You know it may bring the wrong kind of attention, a powerful spark and the most influential werewolf pack on the west coast?" He sat beside Peter, tangling their fingers together. "Plus an Argent alliance?" Peter squeezed his fingers in response.

"We'll make a lot of enemies," Talia murmured. Peter leaned against her legs, closing his eyes and letting the comfort of his alpha wash over him.

"Apparently we already have," he muttered back. Smoke still lingered in the air, nearly suffocating to his enhanced sense of smell. Chris's fingers spasmed in his and Peter glanced over. Saw the guilt on Chris's face. "You tried to stop her," Peter told him. "You're not responsible for this."

"I should've known. I should've fucking-" He cut off as the girl stirred. They held their breath as her eyes, back to a solid bright blue, opened. She blinked at them, uncertain and afraid. She scrambled back a few feet and looked wildly around the clearing.

"Where-" her voice cracked. Peter cocked his head thoughtfully. Odd, for it to sound so different than it had before. "Where am I?"

"You're in California," Talia said gently. "My name is Talia Hale, and this is my brother, Peter and his… Chris," Talia finished awkwardly. "You just saved my family from hunters, child."

The girl was shivering now, tears brimming in her eyes. She wrapped her arms around herself. Chris made a noise low in his throat, and Peter glanced over. Saw the guilt on Chris's face. "You tried to stop her," Peter told him. "You're not responsible for this."

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The girl was shivering now, tears brimming in her eyes. She wrapped her arms around herself. Chris made a noise low in his throat and slipped his jacket off. He leaned slowly over to offer it to her. She watched him warily. Peter noticed with interest that the otter tattoo was now sitting upright on her collarbone, watching intently.

Chris waited patiently, letting her inch cautiously over. She watched his face as she reached for the jacket, as if this were only a cruel trick and he'd yank it away. The spark tugged hesitantly on the sleeve. Chris let it slip through his fingers. They watched as she slid it on over her ratty t-shirt, dwarfed her too-thin frame.

Her gaze wandered, then stuttered to a stop on Kate's body. "I remember her," she said absently. "Did… did I do that?" Talia stepped to the side, blocking her view. The spark's gaze snapped up to Talia's face. "I don't remember coming here. I- I don't remember a lot after she killed my mom."

"Do you remember what just happened?" Peter asked softly. He had a horrible suspicion as to why she couldn't remember anything and hoped to all the gods that he was wrong.
She frowned. "There was a fire? And a tree? Um. A magical tree? It talked to me."

Peter hid a wince. "I’m not crazy," she said hurriedly. "I promise, it really did."

"We know you’re not, honey," Chris said softly. "We believe you. Can you tell me where you were, before tonight?" His concerned gaze drifted to her bare feet. All the way up her legs, she was bloody and bruised, as if she’d run all the way from Texas to get here.

“No.” Her voice trembled. “I don’t remember.”

“What do you remember?” Peter asked.

“Just being scared. Mama died and I was all alone,” she gasped out. Tears rolled out of her big blue eyes, damn near breaking Peter’s heart. He gave in, reach over and tugged her into his lap. Chris and Talia watched, tense. The girl just curled into him and sobbed into his neck. He held her while she cried, rubbing a gentle hand along her back.

Absently, he registered Chris get up to call his wife, Victoria. Peter heard a shrill ‘she did what?’ as Chris explained the night’s events. He listened as Chris convinced her to prepare the spare bedrooms, that the Hales would be staying with them for the night. Chris called one of his cousins, a deputy at the sheriff’s office to explain the cover story- a gas leak starting in the basement that had destroyed most of the house. His listened as Talia comforted her kids, ignoring their questions about the strange girl crying on Uncle Peter. Through it all, he tracked the spark’s heartbeat, her breathing, until she was calm again.

When she was all cried out, leaning against his chest and sniffing, Peter tugged gently on a curl. “Better?” She nodded, exhausted. He eyed Chris, pulling his SUV around for them to climb into. “How about we go somewhere safe, huh? With a bed? And a shower?”

She was quiet for a long moment. Peter thought he’d fall over in relief when she finally whispered an “okay.”

He stood with her still in his grip. She kept her face tucked into his neck as he walked over. Chris met them at the passenger side door. He brushed her hair out of her face with a soft smile. “Hey, kiddo. We missed an important step here, didn’t we?” She blinked at him, confused. “You saved our lives tonight, and we don’t even know your name.”

She smiled, just the tiniest curve of her lips. “My name is Darcy. Darcy Lewis.”

~*~

She said nothing else for the rest of the night. Darcy clung to the man that held her, feeling safer than she had in her entire life. The man- Peter- smelled like smoke and blood. She didn’t care. She was pretty sure she smelled worse.

Peter tried to set her in the backseat but she refused to let go. He shrugged and slid into the front with her in his lap. The other man, Chris, frowned but didn’t argue. He kept glancing over at Peter as he drove, as if to reassure himself that Peter was really there. The rest of the Hales sat in the backseat. Cora curled up in her father’s lap and the other two pressed themselves against Talia. The ride passed in silence.

Chris pulled up to a big house, where a scary-looking woman stood in the doorway. She wore her red hair short and watched them approach with a severe expression that made Darcy nervous. “It’s okay,” Peter told her. “That’s Chris’s wife.” Darcy furrowed her brow. But she thought… Peter sighed. “It’s a long story.”
“The important thing is that she is offering her home for us to stay in tonight,” Talia said smoothly. She nudged her children out of the car. “It is the safest option for us until we can assess the damage.” She exchanged nods with Victoria, who spoke lowly to her.

“Kate’s dead?"

Talia inclined her head. “She is.”

“Gerard is going to declare war over this,” Victoria hissed as her husband approached. She noticed Darcy suddenly as Peter joined them at the front door. Darcy bit back a whimper as Victoria narrowed her eyes. “Who is that?”

“I’ll take care of them, Victoria. Go back to bed,” Chris said tightly. She glared at him and opened her mouth to argue. Chris motioned to the top of the stairs, where a young girl with dark hair stood uncertainly.

“Mom?”

Victoria stared at Chris for a moment longer and then stalked upstairs to herd her daughter away. Chris watched her go, shoulders tight.

“You don’t trust her?” Talia asked, so quietly Darcy almost missed it.

“I’m not taking any more chances tonight,” Chris replied, equally soft. “She harbors some… negative feelings towards magic and its users.”

“Just that?” Laura muttered under her breath. Andrew kicked her in the ankle and Darcy felt Peter’s shoulders twitch.

“Come on,” Chris said. “Spare bedrooms are down the hall. Talia, the room on the left has a bed big enough to fit you all. I assume you won’t want to be apart.”

Talia’s eyes glowed red in the dark hallway. “Thank you.” Darcy thought it odd that such a strange sight didn’t scare her. Talia herded her children into the room, hands brushing over their heads.

Chris turned to Peter. “There’s an adjoining room over here.”

“I remember,” Peter murmured, brushing by him to the room. Darcy saw Chris’s cheeks flush as they passed him. Peter set Darcy on the navy blue comforter and crouched in front of her. “Darcy? Can I take a look at all these scratches on you? I want to make sure you’re okay.” Darcy sniffed once and wiped at her eyes. “Honey, I’m not going to do anything unless you’re okay with it. It might hurt, but- hold on, what am I saying? We’re werewolves. Talia, could you come in here?” Peter flashed a reassuring grin at Darcy.

The Alpha strode into the room, hair wet from the shower. She quickly assessed the situation and
walked over to offer Darcy her hand. Darcy hesitantly accepted it. “Have you ever met a werewolf before, Darcy?” She smiled gently when Darcy shook her head. “Well, werewolves can do special things. We can hear and smell better than humans, and a few of us can even shift all the way to wolves.”

Darcy’s eyes widened in surprise. Actual wolves? Talia squeezed her hand. “And, with enough training, we can even take away someone’s pain. I can show you, if you’d like. You’ve got some pretty big splinters in your feet and I don’t want it to hurt you. Would that be alright with you?” Darcy nodded, staring in fascination as the veins in Talia’s hand turned black. Darcy felt floaty. She barely noticed Peter working on her feet, too focused on the strange magic in front of her, magic she could see.

“All done!” Peter declared. Talia let the draining flow to a stop but kept Darcy’s hand in her own. “Want a bath, kiddo?” Peter asked. Darcy looked at the dirt and blood on her skin and wrinkled her nose. “I’ll take that as a yes. One sec.” He accepted Chris’s hand up and disappeared into the bathroom.

Talia brushed a strand of hair out of Darcy’s eyes. “Darcy, I know you don’t want to talk about this, and that’s absolutely okay. I just need to know if there’s anyone who will be looking for you. Family? Your father?” Darcy shook her head, staring at their joined hands. Talia had long fingers, deceptively delicate for the strength that lie beneath her skin. “No one? Okay,” Talia sighed. “I’m sorry, sweetheart.” She tugged Darcy over into a tight hug. Darcy melted into it, tucking her head under Talia’s chin and closing her eyes.

“Bath’s ready!” Peter called a moment later. Something heavy thumped to the ground. “Shit.”

“Idiot,” Talia muttered affectionately. Darcy giggled quietly, letting the other woman half-carry her into the bathroom. Peter set a fluffy towel on the counter and winked at Darcy on his way out the door. “Are you going to be okay in here?” Talia asked. “I can stay if you want.” Darcy shook her head. “Alright. I’ll be just in the other room. All you have to do is whisper if you need anything.” She stepped out, letting the door close behind her.

Darcy had to refill the tub twice more to get clean, unsure of where all the dirt and blood and grime had come from. She didn’t remember. Darcy tried not to think about that any more. She stepped gingerly out of the tub and dried off quickly. Someone had set pajama pants and a t-shirt on the counter, along with underwear and socks. Darcy wondered if they belonged to the girl upstairs. She shuffled gingerly into the bedroom after dressing.

Chris and Peter sat side-by-side on the edge of the bed. Chris’s face was in his hands, Peter speaking lowly to him. He stopped when Darcy reached the doorway. “Hey, hon. Feel better? C’mon, let’s get you to bed.” They helped her climb into bed, Peter dragging the covers up to her chin. She grabbed his hand when he turned to leave, suddenly scared to be left alone.

“I’ll be right outside, okay? I just have to talk to Chris and Talia for a second, and then I’ll come sleep right there on that couch. I promise.” She held his gaze. Satisfied that he’d keep his word, she curled into a ball and closed her eyes. Peter dragged a hand over her hair and eased out the door.

Her mother hadn’t had much time to teach Darcy to control her spark. Their lives were dominated by Kate Argent, and flashing around too much power would get you caught sooner rather than later. What she did teach Darcy, though, was how to stay hidden. How to bury the spark so deep it was barely an ember. Or, when necessary, how to listen to those around you, to feel their intentions. It saved them twice this year alone, when Mama heard a boy whisper to his dad that he’d seen the lady in Room 204 use magic. And again when Darcy was practicing and overheard a man laughing to his friends as they approached them in an alley, saying and intending things so horrible Darcy had
thrown up right then and there. Mama had drawn something on her arm with one of Darcy’s pink markers and then choked the air from their lungs. Sometimes humans are more monstrous than the creatures of the dark, Darcy. Remember that,’ Mama had said before dragging her past their bodies, head high.

Darcy used that little bit of spark again tonight, reaching out towards the hallway where Peter stood with Chris and the Hale adults. They were gentle, and had made her feel safe. But Mama taught her better than that. ‘Trust no one,’ she’d said. ‘Tell no one what you are, and never believe someone that only wants to help. People always want something, Darcy. Don’t forget that.’ She tucked in tighter under the covers and let her magic bring their words to her.

“How are the kids?” Peter asked Talia lowly. He glanced at Darcy’s door, ensuring it was closed and her breathing was even.

“Terrified. But alive.” Talia answered. She leaned into the arm Andrew wrapped around her shoulders. “Darcy?”

“Resting. Hopefully sleeping. She’s had a shitty time of it.” Peter rubbed at his face. Talia frowned at his tone, hearing something underneath the exhaustion.

“Something worse than probably witnessing her mother’s murder?” She asked.

Peter grimaced. “If I’m right, then definitely worse.” He met their eyes and sighed. “I’ve done a lot of research on sparks. And from what I saw tonight, Darcy’s own spark wasn’t the prominent power she used.”

“What does that mean?” Chris asked. He eyed the hallway behind them warily.

“They’re both upstairs,” Peter assured him. He turned to his sister. “Tonight, Darcy told Kate that her mother used all of her own power to keep Darcy hidden, and that her mother’s power became her power when she died. And there was a difference- you felt it-“ Talia nodded “when she killed those hunters and when she put the fire out.” Comprehension lit in Talia’s face. “I’m afraid that her mother’s spark forced Darcy to hunt Kate down.”

There was a sick silence. “Like possession?” Andrew asked, horrified.

Peter shrugged. “Something like that. If her mother’s spark was with Darcy when she died, and Darcy inherited her mother’s gift as well, she could have very easily been pulled under. A full grown spark who’s wielder was brutally murdered passing on to her untrained daughter? If her mother sought revenge, Darcy wouldn’t have been able to fight it.”

“Could explain why she doesn’t remember much. If she was possessed,” Chris said. “And why she was beat all to hell. With a full spark pushing her like that, Darcy’s own wellbeing wouldn’t be up to her anymore.”

“Fucking hell,” Talia sighed.

“What are we going to do?” Andrew asked.

Peter bristled. “She has no one else. Nowhere to go. And she’s been violated by magic beyond our understanding.”

“Refuge is one thing,” Chris said. “Offering safe harbor to a young spark, that’s just the right thing to do. But taking her in? Making her pack? You could start a civil war. Another civil war.”
“That’s a lot of power and influence in one pack,” Andrew agreed. “It will scare people, make them paranoid. Especially local packs.”

“There’s a reason sparks don’t join werewolf packs anymore.” Chris ran a hand through his hair. Peter straightened abruptly.

“You think we don’t know that?” Peter growled. “You think we don’t remember the stories about packs ripping each other to shreds to claim ownership over that power? Or how the Fae got involved, declaring sparks an enemy to the Courts for stealing their power?”

Chris rested a hand on Peter’s shoulder, heedless of Peter’s beta-gold eyes and claws. “No one’s saying we kick her out, Peter. Just… We have to be very careful how we go about this. We can’t afford to start a war right now.”

“Deaton could get papers together for her. Say her mother was some long-lost relative that left Darcy to us when she died,” Andrew suggested.

“Too risky. If anyone finds out we lied, it would look like we made it up to get a spark in our pack.” Talia argued. “But Deaton…”

“Too close enough that a case could be made,” Talia said.

“A case for what?” Chris asked. He looked between them.

“We could say Deaton is training her, teaching her control. Druids are meticulous about control and balance… Decades ago, sparks were considered mediators for supernatural affairs. A supernatural police force, if you will. But they were hunted down by the Fae and werewolf packs. Most were either killed or went into hiding. If Darcy trains with Deaton, word would get out. She’ll have a target on her back.” He glanced at her door.

“Not if she was allied with the oldest werewolf family in living memory. And the oldest hunting family known,” Talia countered. “Her official title would be just that- ally.”

“And her unofficial?” Chris asked.

“Family,” Talia said. “She single handedly saved the lives of the Hale pack. Of course we’d open our home to her. She has nowhere else to stay while training with the Hale emissary.”

“How convenient for us,” Andrew said dryly. “And when they call bullshit?”

“They’re welcome to discuss their concerns with me,” Talia said sweetly.

“No one’s stupid enough to do that,” Andrew agreed.

Chris huffed a laugh. “Gerard’s in the wind. I guess that means I’m stepping up as head of the family until Allison is old enough.” The Argent matriarch ruled the family's hunters. When Chris’s mother died, Gerard took over until Kate was old enough to lead. Now, though… Victoria married into the family, and the- admittedly archaic- family hunting laws permitted only those in the Argent bloodline to rule. That left him. Chris wasn’t convinced this was such a great idea, judging by his sister and father’s reign of terror. He could only pray that Allison didn’t inherit their blind hate.

“So we have your support?” Peter asked intently. “You’ll stand by us when someone tries to come for her?”
Chris stared at him, stunned. “Of course I will,” he murmured. “How could you doubt that?”

Peter frowned at Darcy’s door again. He shook his head and met Chris’s eyes. “The Argent name goes a long way. But this could cause some problems with other hunters, down the road.”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it,” Chris sighed. “For now, all that matters is that everyone’s safe. Is Deaton on his way back?”

“He felt the disruption of the nemeton,” Talia said. “He left for home immediately. Kate planned this well, with my emissary out of town.” Chris looked away. “We’ll reassess in the morning. The house may be salvageable. Chris.” He turned to her. “Thank you. I won’t forget what you did tonight.”

Talia and Andrew slipped into their room, leaving Chris and Peter in the dim hall.

They stood quietly together, until Chris moved towards Peter. He rested a hand on the back of the other man’s neck and touched his forehead to Peter’s. “She almost killed you tonight,” he rasped. He closed his eyes, savoring the feel of Peter, warm and breathing in front of him. Peter’s arm slipped around his waist.

“She was going to shoot you, too,” he said. “I can’t believe you defied Gerard so blatantly.”

Chris scowled. “I knew something was off. I just never thought… For god’s sake, we have a Code. We’ve had a truce with your family for years.”

“The wolfsbane would’ve killed Talia and me if you hadn’t come for us.” Peter brushed his lips across Chris’s mouth. He kept it soft, gentle, but Chris surged against him. The kiss turned desperate, urgency in their every breath. Chris groaned as his tongue slid against Peter’s, pressing him against the wall and sliding his hands up Peter’s borrowed shirt. Peter gave as good as he got, tugging on Chris’s hair and dragging a hand down to grab Chris’s ass.

Peter broke away first, panting as Chris dragged his tongue down Peter’s neck. He grinned at Talia’s low voice from across the hall, ordering him to get a room, preferably far away from her. Darcy stirred, though, and Peter knew they couldn’t do this here, not now. And definitely not with Chris’s wife, waiting for him to come upstairs so she could demand answers.

He tugged on Chris’s hair again, peeling the man away from his jaw. “I know,” Chris sighed. He wrapped himself around Peter for a long time, breathing into his neck. “Go get some rest,” Chris said finally. He stepped back, fingers trailing as if he couldn’t bear to let go. “I love you,” Chris murmured. Peter watched him walk down the hallway until he could no longer see him. Until he could only listen as Chris returned to his wife upstairs, leaving Peter standing alone in the dark.

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Darcy lay awake in the shadowy room, keeping her breathing steady like Mama had taught her. She pretended to sleep when Peter checked on her, not moving as he collapsed on the couch across the room. Darcy waited until he dropped into sleep and then rolled to her back. She stared at the ceiling, weighing the conversation she’d heard.

She had a lot to think about.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Fair warning- there's a looooot of word building in this chapter. Info on magic, and Fae, and supernatural politics. I maybe got a little carried away with the world building, so there will probably be a lot of supernatural creatures and politics in this story.
Also, just a general note: This story is going to be the first of a series. The first story will be Darcy and the Hales, with the rest of the Teen Wolf characters coming in soon! Later parts (2 and on, I think) will start the MCU crossover, starting with Jane and Thor.

Those of you that left comments and kudos- you're the only reason I had the confidence to keep writing, and I love you all.

Oh won’t you hold my hand
‘cause I don’t want to walk on my own

anymore don’t you understand.

- Jess Glynne, *Hold My Hand*

~*~

It was times like these that made Darcy wonder whether staying with the Hales had been the right choice. She’d only had this thought in passing, of course, but too often she had to fight the urge to run, to disappear, before the Hales realized she was far more trouble than she was worth.

“So,” Laura panted from her place on the forest floor. “That went well.”

Darcy copied Derek’s incredulous stare. He was carefully inspecting a wound on her forearm, courtesy of a dirty claw from the nomadic werewolves that drifted through Beacon Hills. ‘Just passing by,’ they’d said, eyeing Darcy curiously. The peace lasted all of eight hours.

Darcy had been out with Laura and Derek, checking the ward lines. Talia and Peter took the north side with Deaton, leaving the kids to the southern boundaries. They were nearly home when Deaton’s wards broke and the pack swarmed the three of them.

Part of Darcy’s intensive spark training, via Peter and Deaton, included diplomacy. Sure, she could talk her way into and out of regular trouble any day, but diplomacy required tact… something she was still learning. ‘And it showed,’ Darcy thought ruefully. “I am a spark under Hale pack protection” quickly devolved into “no I will not come quietly, jackass.”

A brief scuffle later and the pack bolted. Laura would probably boast it was due to her own particularly vicious fighting, but even Darcy could hear Talia and Peter racing through the woods towards them.
“I think this will need a couple stitches, Darce,” Derek said. He stood with a gentle tap to her otter tattoo, swirling anxiously near the wound. She was too tired to protest. “Mom’s gonna be pissed.”

Talia crashed through the brush then, a massive black wolf with furious red eyes. She glanced over both of her kids and padded over to Darcy as Peter, shifted into beta form, continued past them. “I’m okay,” Darcy sighed. Talia sniffed at her neck, growled at the blood on her arm, and huffed at Laura. Laura waved a hand, “got it, Mom,” and heaved herself to her feet with a dramatic groan. Her t-shirt was coated with blood and her new jeans were ripped to shreds.

They all turned as a howl echoed through the trees. Peter, by the sound of it. In the year and a half that passed since that fateful night, Darcy learned to identify the howls of her new family. Talia bolted towards the sound. Darcy looked worriedly at Derek as he helped her up. “Is he okay?”

“Yeah, he just caught up to them,” Laura said, grimacing at her shirt. She tugged it up and off, revealing smooth, unmarred skin painted with still-wet blood. “Hey, my bra made it!” She beamed down at the sports bra.

“Oh, thank god the bra’s okay,” Derek grumbled. Darcy giggled, a little hysterically. Both ‘wolves wore wounds from the fight, Derek moreso than Laura. She was as fast as a snake and twice as mean, something the other pack quickly discovered. Derek was still growing into his too-long limbs, gawky and uncertain. He’d taken the brunt of the fight. One of Derek’s wounds- a deep set of three claw marks on his forearm- healed before Darcy’s eyes as they limped back home.

They stumbled back to the house to meet a concerned Andrew. “Darcy needs stitches again,” Laura sing-sunged. Deaton, standing on the porch beside Andrew, heaved a long sigh and went inside to get his kit.

“It wasn’t my fault,” Darcy said defensively. “Laura missed.”

“I did not miss,” Laura snapped. “I wasn’t even aiming for that guy.”

“She missed,” Derek said. He helped Darcy inside, leaving Laura outside squawking in outrage. Derek led her to a kitchen chair and pulled two water bottles out from the fridge. Darcy took one gratefully. Cora bounded out of her hiding place on the stairs and into the kitchen. Her dark hair swung wildly and she was covered in lines from what smelled like scented markers.

“Was there another fight? Did you win? How many did you kill?” Cora smacked impatiently at Derek when he didn’t answer.

“Ouch, quit!” He swatted at her with a growl. Cora dodged his swipe with a giggle. Darcy sulked in the chair while Derek chased his little sister around the room. She hated stitches.

Deaton, the Hale’s emissary and Beacon Hill’s local veterinarian, set his kit down on the table. “Stitches again, Miss Lewis?” He asked pleasantly. Darcy scowled as he dabbed peroxide on the wound. “It seems we have some work to do on your diplomatic skills.”

“I tried!” She protested. “They just laughed and kept saying creepy things.”

“They just laughed and kept saying creepy things.”

“Then I suppose we work on your fighting skills, darling.” Peter breezed in with a cheery grin. Blood stained his chin and all down his front.

“Ugh.” Darcy slumped over. Peter sat beside her, resting a bloody hand on her own to drain the stinging ache from her body. She only felt the discomforting tug and slide of the suture. “I hate training. Werewolves are cheaters.”
“Rude,” Laura said, collapsing into a chair with four slices of cold pizza.

“Can’t Chris train me? He’s human, he understands normal limitations,” Darcy pleaded without thinking. Peter’s face blanked. Laura choked on her pizza. Darcy winced and stared down at the table. “Sorry, I forgot,” she mumbled.

“No, you’re right,” Peter cleared his throat. “I’ll ask him.”

“No, you don’t have to, I can-“

“You are right to bring it up,” Deaton interjected before she could work herself to tears. They’d spent the last year drawing her out of her shell, bit by bit. She’d been tense and silent, drifting along like a ghost for months. No one wanted her to backslide, not when she’d come so far. “The Hales are all wolves, Miss Lewis. None of them have an… accurate idea of non-wolf limits. For your safety, we’ll consider all options.”

Peter squeezed her arm with a reassuring smile. Darcy returned it with a weak one of her own. She knew Chris was a sore subject. He’d held up his end of the Argent alliance, both with the Hales and Darcy. But Peter left one afternoon, grim and resigned, only to come back an hour later. Talia took one look at his pale face and shifted, snapping at his heels to herd him out the door. They returned before the sun rose, but only just.

“Love isn’t always enough,” Peter said when she tentatively asked weeks later. “Now, read this book and write me a summary. You have a lot of schoolwork to catch up on.”

Laura, who—according to Derek—only used her powers for evil, eavesdropped on Peter and Andrew one evening and shared her findings with them, hushed in the dark. “Peter said he couldn’t keep doing it,” she whispered. “Being the ‘dirty little secret.’ Even though everyone totally knows they’re in love. But Chris doesn’t want to disrupt Allison’s life, so he won’t leave Victoria.”

“But he loves Peter,” Darcy insisted.

“It’s not enough. He’s got a family to take care of, plus the whole Argent business now that Kate’s dead.”

Darcy and Derek both winced. Laura eyed Derek for a moment in confusion. Even Darcy, unable to scent emotions, noticed Derek’s drawn expression. Footsteps on the stairs had them all leaping for beds and their concern was tabled for another time.

“Finished,” Deaton said. “Only a couple stitches. You know the drill, Miss Lewis. Keep them clean and dry, and no scratching at them.”

“Yeah,” she sighed.

“I will see you tomorrow morning, then. Ten o’clock.” He left with a nod to the room.

Peter lifted his hand and left with a ruffle of Darcy’s hair. She stayed slumped over the table, woozy from the pain drain. Laura stomped away to shower, snarling at Derek when he bolted up the stairs ahead of her.

A finger tapped her uninjured arm. Darcy peeked through her hair to see Cora standing by the table, beaming a gap-toothed grin. “Movie? I’ll let you pick.”

“Mulan?”
Cora considered for a moment. “Deal.” She darted to the den, fumbling with the dvd. Darcy heaved herself up and shuffled after her. She was waylaid by Andrew, then Talia, both who fussed over her wound and wrapped her in a rib-cracking hug.

Derek leapt down the stairs and tossed her a t-shirt and sweatpants. “Go change, Darce, you’re covered in dirt.” He started dismantling the couch, tossing pillows and blankets to the ground.

She stepped into the bathroom and grimaced at her reflection. Dirty clothes went in the bin beside the laundry room on her way out. She settled in the nest on the den floor, tucked between Cora and Derek. Laura appeared minutes later, sprawling across them all and dropping off to sleep. Darcy followed soon after, warm and safe.

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Any hope she’d had of sleeping until 10 went up in smoke at her custom 6 a.m. wake up call. Peter dragged her out of bed, grinning when she snarled at him. “Come on, little wolf,” he laughed.

“Training awaits.”

She eyed him warily. He sighed. “I have set my personal drama aside for the time being. But only because I love you. Which you should really appreciate more, considering,” he said, dodging her swipe with ease.

“Because normally he’s all about the drama,” Derek agreed from the doorway. He smiled at Darcy’s cranky expression. “C’mon, Darce. We’re running to meet Chris.”

“All of us?” She asked, not looking at Peter. She stumbled to the bathroom she shared with Cora, grabbing clothes off the floor as she went.

“Yes, darling,” Peter said. “You get an escort until we’re sure it’s safe again.”

“Yippee,” Darcy muttered. She gave up on brushing her hair and put it into a tangled bun on top of her head. Derek waited patiently by the door while she hunted for her shoes. She’d become accustomed to his quiet, easy company. The first few months, Derek sat with her for hours in silence. Never pressuring her to speak or join in the chaos that was his family- just steady, quiet support. Laura, loud and brash, dragged her into movie or game nights. Cora offered her expertise in all things Disney. And slowly, carefully, the Hales gathered her into the family.

Talia reached out to her ‘contacts’ (“Mom, stop being so vague, you can just say Deaton.”) and days later, Darcy was officially fostered by the Hales. Talia also filed a birth certificate for her; Darcy’s mother had given birth in a backwoods vet’s office and had refused to file one. There would be no record of her little girl for the hunters to trace, she’d made sure of it.

Darcy was homeschooled for the remainder of the school year, catching up on years of schoolwork that her mother had been unable to teach her. Peter pulled her aside for lessons on the supernatural world, teaching her about the other things that went bump in the night and their intricate politics. Nights with Andrew were her among her favorite, though. He taught her to cook, to learn the simple joy in making something for her new family.

Mornings were spent training, whether that meant jogging (“It’s important to stay in shape, Darcy.” “Yeah, since you’ll be running for your life a lot.”) or learning hand-to-hand with werewolves who were naturally faster and more graceful than she could ever hope to be (“did you just trip over your own feet? Again?”).

Peter handed her a banana while she stretched outside. The morning was still cool, the sun slow to
rise. Darcy looked forward to cooler weather; the summer had been sweltering. She never could stop the flash of memories on the hot summer days- the suffocating heat of a fire, gunshots in the night, broken bodies littering the ground. The cold would help, she told herself. Darcy wished she believed it.

Their run was brief, only a couple miles. They met Chris on neutral ground, deep in the preserve. He greeted Darcy with a smile, eyes drifting to Peter. Peter looked away.

Chris refocused on her. “Good morning, Darcy. Ready to get started?” Derek stayed close as Peter drifted back, into the cover of the trees. “Derek has agreed to be our practice dummy today. Now, let’s review what you already know.”

Chris worked with her for two hours, guiding her gently through basic defensive maneuvers. Derek let her practice on him with good humor as she practiced her hits and kicks.

“Laura refused to come, said the pining would drive her to homicide,” Derek told her softly as they cooled down. Chris and Peter discussed Darcy’s training in stilted, awkward conversation a few feet away. Derek grimaced at whatever emotions he could scent from the men. “She pulled seniority, otherwise she’d be all about showing you how to beat me up.” He rolled his eyes.

“I didn’t mean to cause trouble,” Darcy said quietly. Peter was quiet, closed off. Whatever occurred between the two men hurt him deeply. Darcy supposed being someone’s second choice, kept as a secret, would certainly do so.

“It’s okay, Darce. You’re doing much better with Chris than you did with us. We really don’t know what your limits are, to be honest. We’ve been ‘wolves all our lives,” Derek reassured her, pulling her to her feet. “Now, c’mon, we have to get you to Deaton’s.”

Darcy groaned but followed Derek and Peter back to the house, waving a goodbye to Chris.

Deaton was always unflappable and patient, but Darcy often wondered whether Druid magic was too different from spark magic to make him an effective teacher. Also, she was super tired of meditation.

“Focus, Miss Lewis.”

Darcy huffed and closed her eyes again. The kittens in the cage across the room meowed piteously. She cracked an eye open.

“Yes.”

“Hasn’t it been thirty minutes yet?”

“Are we including the time you were watching the kittens instead?” Deaton asked with a passive smile. He studied the x-rays on the wall.

“… Yes?”

“All right, I’ll give you a break today. But only today. Meditation is a crucial aspect of your training, Miss Lewis. Without it, you’ll have a very difficult time controlling your power.”

“But.. kittens.” She inched her way across the room.

Deaton sighed. “Well, you might as well help me give them their vaccinations.” Darcy cuddled and soothed the kittens during their exams and shots. Deaton graciously allowed her extra time to play
with them before herding her to his desk.

“Today, you’re going to start learning about runes.”

“What are runes?” Darcy asked curiously. She squinted at the strange symbols on the page before her. “Looks like Elvish to me.”

Deaton huffed a laugh. “No, it’s definitely not Elvish. Do you remember the wards I showed you, on the Hale property?” Darcy nodded. He’d walked her through the property one afternoon, quietly pointing out symbols engraved on the trees surrounding the Hale house.

“Those were protective wards, designed to provide a measure of defense against those who would intend to harm the Hales. These symbols act as an anchor for the magic, of sorts. Each one means something different, and when used correctly, a magic user can focus their power on something permanent through the rune.”

“Like what?” Darcy asked.

Deaton pointed to a rune on the page. “This one, for example, would provide a brief shield of your power when activated.” Darcy stared, awed. The rune looked like an arrowhead, open on the left bottom corner, hovering over three horizontal lines. “It is one of the most difficult to create and hold, as it requires a great deal of raw energy to form.” He pointed to another rune. “You can see that this one is much more complicated than the one I just showed you.”

Darcy studied the new rune. Three triangles, lines extending from the outer two sides. Four layers of dotted horizontal lines underneath, resting atop what looked like an asterisk. A half-circle connected the two taller triangles, covering the third smaller one in the center. One fletched line extended from the center, a diamond resting at the top. Three lines branched out from either side of the center line’s base, extending like rays of sunlight. Each marking was precise, delicate, and perfectly drawn.

“This is the one on the trees by the Hale house,” Darcy realized.

Deaton smiled. “You are correct. This rune is used as a protective ward, but it is very difficult to get right.”

“How come the wards broke yesterday?” Darcy asked.

Deaton grimaced. “If they know what to look for, anyone can disrupt a rune. The pack yesterday, for example, likely knew what markings to find and merely swiped a claw across the rune to destroy it. They can’t create their own, as werewolves and not magic users, but they can educate themselves enough to be a nuisance. Now, protective wards such as this one take a great deal of energy to maintain, if you were attempting to hold them on your own.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is not exactly how it works, but for the sake of the explanation, imagine a protective dome over the Hale house. Now, every person who approaches that dome will be assessed by the rune channeling the magic. Are their intentions detrimental to any of the people the rune is designed to protect? If so, the protective circle will do one of two things. One, it will simply refuse them access beyond that point. Or, if the person is unaware of the supernatural, it will simply confuse the attacker. Suddenly, they will forget their reasons for being there, or why they are in the woods when they most certainly have critical errands to run across town. Now, the distinction for the second part to function has to be worked into the rune very carefully.”

“How come?” Darcy asked, peering up at him.
“If done incorrectly, the rune could backfire in a number of ways. The creator will become confused or unable to reach the very place they’ve protected. Or the rune will become aggressive and wipe the unaware attacker’s memory to varied extents. It depends on the power put into it, and how skilled the caster is.”

“Oh,” Darcy said. She glanced nervously at the rune.

Deaton smiled at her concern. “Don’t worry, we’ll be starting with the easy stuff. Such as this one, which will improve your ability to heal.”

Darcy stared at him in surprise. “Really?”

“Temporarily, I’m afraid. More for use when needed in individual events.”

“So not like werewolf healing?” She asked, disappointed. How wonderful it would be to heal like the Hales did. Cora had been baffled when she’d witnessed Darcy’s paper cut take days to heal.

“No, though the concept is similar. Just expediting the natural healing process. The one we’ll be learning today is for minor injuries. In the case that you have a fatal wound, you’ll need to use a more complicated rune. Using this one will only seal the surface of the injury, nothing deeper. For today, it will suffice.” He set a blank notebook in front of her. “I’m going to draw this one for you. I want you to practice it, as many times as you need before you feel comfortable with it.”

“What if it activates?” Darcy asked nervously.

“It takes a great deal of focus to activate a rune. Your intentions have to be concentrated on what you want to happen, and then you send it through the rune. Even if you managed to activate this one from the page, nothing would happen. This rune in particular must be drawn on the body it is intended to heal.”

“So they’re just like a guide for the magic,” Darcy said, feeling a little better now that she knew she wouldn’t accidentally blow up the vet’s office.

“Exactly. They act as a channel when you wish to do something specific with your magic.”

“Can anybody can use them?” She watched carefully as he drew the small rune.

Deaton shook his head, handing her the pen. “No. Only those with magic. Druids, to an extent. Druids connect to the earth, but we don’t have the raw magic that sparks do. Most of my power comes from the nemeton. The nemeton is invested in the land it is on, in keeping the land stable and those within it safe. As Emissary, my motives are the same. The nemeton fuels the wards I place around this town.”

“I remember,” Darcy murmured. She stared sightlessly at the table. Deaton’s pen paused for a brief moment before continuing.

“There are other runes you’ll find useful,” Deaton said. He slid the sleeve of his shirt up a few inches to reveal tiny runes inked into his brown skin. Darcy peered at the delicate lines.

“What are those for?” She asked curiously.

Deaton pointed to one inside his wrist. It looked almost like an eye to Darcy, with cascading lines swooping low to end on an arrow point. “This one obscures my heartbeat from those that can hear it.”
“Obscure?” Darcy asked. Her cheeks warmed. She still had a lot of catching up to do from those missed years of school, no matter how many books and dictionaries Peter shoved at her.

“It works as camouflage to hide my heartbeat,” Deaton said. Darcy’s eyes widened. “I’m sure you’re aware by now that the Hales can hear your heartbeat; they use it to determine if someone is lying, or scared.”

“Yeah, I know all about that,” Darcy grumbled. She’d resolved to never play Go Fish with dirty, cheating werewolves ever again. Deaton covered a smile. She refocused. “So they can’t hear it at all?”

“That’s correct,” Deaton said. “The rune next to it, with the same shape except the arrowhead is further up the line here, see?” Darcy nodded. “This one makes it so they can’t track me by scent, either.”

“Wow,” Darcy breathed. “So you’re, like, invisible to them?”

“Invisible to their extra senses, I suppose. They can still hear me making noise in a room—” he tapped the pen on the table to demonstrate—“and see me, of course.”

“Can you make it so they can’t hear you walk?” Darcy thought of all the Hide and Seek games she was going to win.

“Perhaps muffling your own movements is possible, but in terms of becoming completely silent, no. For instance, if you were walking in the forest and wanted to be entirely silent, you’d have to mark each step with runes to cover the sound. You’d need to direct the magic at each leaf you step on, each tree you brush against. That would quickly become exhausting and you’d likely pass out within ten steps.”

Darcy’s shoulders sagged. Deaton eyed her with a small smile. “Now, draw this rune a hundred times and then another hour of meditation.” Darcy dropped her head to the table with a groan.

~*~

“I hate homework!” Darcy threw her binder on the Hale’s kitchen table and watched as her papers slipped out of it and fluttered to the ground.

“Hello, dear, so nice to see you, too,” Peter said as he breezed past her to the door. She glowered after him and dropped heavily into the chair Derek absently nudged over to her. He was bent over his own homework, working meticulously through a page of math problems.

“I mean it, I’m sick of it! Math homework, reading homework, science homework, fighting homework, and now magic homework! I just- Gah!” Darcy jumped when Cora appeared behind her without a sound.

“With great power comes great responsibility,” Cora said solemnly. She promptly kicked Derek’s bookbag over and darted away. Derek stared after her, insulted and bewildered. They both blinked at the resounding crash from upstairs.

Laura swanned into the kitchen. “She’s been like this all day. I don’t know if I’m proud or afraid.” She cocked her head to the side. “Uh oh, she’s broken into Mom’s office.”

“Cora Annette Hale! That is mahogany, don’t you dare!” The three of them snickered at the answering growl and Talia’s exasperated sigh. She stomped through the kitchen a moment later, a squirming Cora thrown over her shoulder. “We’re going for a run before she tears the house apart.”
“Ooh, me too!” Laura scrambled after them. After a minute’s deliberation, Derek followed. Darcy was left alone in the kitchen, the room suddenly too quiet. She turned to watch out the window as they shifted into beta form and took off, herding a rampaging Cora through the woods. The abrupt silence cut through her like a knife and she scowled at the floor, littered with pages of runes. Runes that were swimming on the page now, beckoning, a lure of using that endless, surging power. Power that could do anything she wished, good or bad, if only she let it-

“Baby werewolves,” Andrew sighed from beside her. Darcy gasped and whirled, nearly falling off the chair. Andrew steadied her with a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Sorry, Darcy. I tried to make some noise coming in but you were pretty out of it. You feeling alright?” He asked, brushing a giant hand over her hair. Darcy nodded, not meeting his eyes. She’d come so close to letting it back out. God only knew what would happen then, with her surrounded by runes waiting to be activated. It couldn’t be too bad, she supposed, as they both bent to pick up the pages. All of the runes were defensive. Spark magic, Deaton explained during the lesson, was too volatile to be used with offensive runes, if such things even existed. Which they didn’t, according to Deaton.

“I heard the homework declaration,” Andrew said. He stacked the papers carefully back in her binder and studied her for a moment. “How about you take a break from all this and we can go make some root beer floats?” Darcy brightened. She trailed after Andrew to the fridge, collecting the giant cups from the cabinet. He accepted them from her and started dumping vanilla ice cream into the bottom. Darcy dug out the root beer, side-stepping a smashed remote on the ground. Andrew glanced over with a grin. “Cora’s reign of destruction began about eight hours ago. Nothing was safe.”

“Baby werewolves?” Darcy asked, hopping onto a barstool. Andrew let out a booming laugh, handing her one of the cups and a straw. He leaned on the counter across from her and Darcy spotted a faded marker lines covering his arms where someone, undoubtedly Cora, had used him as her personal coloring book.

“Baby werewolves,” he commiserated. “Almost as bad as teenage werewolves.”

Darcy cocked her head. “Derek’s not so bad.”

“Derek’s an old soul,” Andrew said, eyes crinkling at the corners. “You’re lucky you never witnessed one of Laura’s howling fits over not being allowed to go to a party on a full moon.”

Darcy swung her feet and sipped at her float. “I don’t think Cora is going to like that, either.”

“Yes, Cora is going to be a handful. Laura was, too, of course, and tried to sneak out plenty. But it’s hard to sneak past an Alpha werewolf.” Andrew grinned at Darcy’s glum, “Yeah, I know.”

“Cora might just be devious enough to do it, though. If faced with a locked door, Laura would kick it down, Derek would just knock, and Cora would pick the lock.” He shook his head and tipped the rest of his float into his mouth. “She’s sneaky.”

“When she’s not also kicking down doors,” Darcy said with a pointed look at the dent in the pantry door. Baby werewolves were bad enough, but a hungry baby werewolf? Darcy would rather not deal with that ever again, thank you very much.

Andrew chuckled. “Very true. Now, how about you show me what Deaton’s been teaching you. Those look interesting,” he said, tipping his head at her binder.

Darcy sighed. “It doesn’t matter.” She swirled her straw around.
“What doesn’t matter?”

“The runes. They’re cool—really cool, but they take mountains of control before you can even heal a scratch.”

“And you don’t think you have enough?” Andrew guessed. He chopped up an apple from the fridge and set it in front of her. He filled a glass with water and sat down beside her, swapping the drinks.

“No,” Darcy said. She nibbled on an apple, quiet for so long Andrew wondered if she’d shut down again. He casually nudged the apple slices a little closer to her under the guise of setting the peanut butter down. She was still too skinny, too quiet and prone to disappearing into her own head at times. He worried. Fretted, Talia teased, though she too watched the girl closely.

“It’s just…” Darcy stabbed an apple slice at the peanut butter and went quiet again. Andrew waited patiently and was rewarded when she finally blurted, “I think I’m too afraid to be a spark.” Her lower lip trembled and she hunched her shoulders in defensively. “I don’t want to do it again,” she sniffed. He didn’t have to ask what “it” meant. He’d never forget the sound of Kate Argent screaming until her heart gave out. Even though the bitch had deserved it.

Darcy looked up at him with her big blue eyes brimming with tears. “I lost control and went crazy and killed people.” Andrew pulled her into his lap and wrapped her in a tight hug. From what Peter described to them, it sounded like she’d never really had control in the first place. But how could he explain that to this little girl that he loved like his own daughters? How could he tell Darcy that her mother’s magic had used her, possessed her with no regard for her daughter’s safety or sanity?

He settled for rubbing a hand along her back and pressing a kiss to her hair. “Kiddo, I don’t believe for a second that you wanted to do any of that.”

“But if I can’t control it like I’m supposed to, I can’t do magic,” Darcy whispered. Andrew frowned. Surely she didn’t think… “And if I can’t do magic, then I won’t be a spark and no one would want me anymore.” Andrew wondered if Talia could feel his heart breaking into tiny little pieces from miles away in the preserve. He thought she could, knew it for sure when the link between them went taut. He tried to send reassurance down that connection so she wouldn’t come bursting through the door thinking someone was dead.

“Darcy, there’s not a thing on this earth that could make us stop loving you. Any of us. If you decide you never want to do magic again, then we’ll throw all the runes away and that will be that. I know you may be a little confused about things, because there are some crazy politics at play here.” He rested his cheek on her head when she finally relaxed into him. “In the supernatural world, everyone’s afraid of one group having too much power. Werewolf packs especially. It’s dangerous, for one pack to have too much power. They can turn on others, bring attention to the secrets that humans can’t know, and generally upset the balance of the world.”

“That’s why sparks can’t join a pack,” Darcy said. She tucked herself into his chest, gripping his shirt tightly. Andrew wondered how they’d missed this. This quiet insecurity that his family, his pack, only took her in for power.

“That’s right. Because the last time they did, war broke out. Entire packs were killed over the right to a spark’s loyalty. You see, before that, sparks were mediators.”

“Mediators?” Darcy asked hesitantly.

“They negotiated when packs, or any supernaturals, really, had any sort of disputes. Arguments,” he
corrected. Darcy was still self-conscious of her limited vocabulary. Her mother, it seemed, had
thankfully made time to teach Darcy to read and write. But without those formative years in a social
school setting, Darcy fell a little behind. Peter was doing his damnedest to give her bright mind all
the fuel it wanted, but she was still at the beginning of her learning curve. “So, people respected the
sparks. They had power, of course, but they didn’t use it for personal gain. Mostly.” He remembered
the stories of the sparks losing their minds, seeking revenge for their friends and families killed in the
pack wars. “They used it to create peace, to establish a justice system of sorts. But after the packs
broke out fighting, the Fae took notice.”

Darcy shivered. She’d listened, wide eyed and heart racing, in Peter’s lessons on the Fae.
Dangerous, lethal creatures who preyed on humans and even other supernaturals. They lived in a
world parallel to earth and could pass through gates to lurk in the shadows of the human world. Their
whole world, Peter had said with intense fascination, was an imitation of the human race. Learning
human movements, thoughts, and societies. Studying them, mimicking them, and then using what
they’d learned to hunt them. They copied human bodies and did beautiful, horrible things to them.
Let their magic corrupt the physical forms they plagiarized, using their radical beauty as a lure for
their prey.

“The Fae Courts declared war on sparks, claiming the magic sparks possessed was stolen from their
world. As you know,” Andrew jostled Darcy gently, “Sparks are very powerful. And when fully
trained, there’s only a handful of things that can kill one. The Unseelie Court bred monsters for the
single purpose of hunting down a spark. They’re perhaps the most terrifying creature in either world
the Ak’ma.”

“Demon,” Darcy whispered. Her hands trembled. The word was Korean, in origin, named by the
first and only spark who’d survived an attack from one. A young man from Seoul, convinced he was
being hunted, escaped a bizarre and violent assault on his way to his mentor’s refuge. He sent a
warning to his network of other sparks around the world, and then disappeared weeks later without a
trace.

Lore said these demons devoured the power from your very bones, sipping on it for weeks while the
spark remained paralyzed from venom on their tongues. All that was left of the sparks were dried
husks of a body.

Peter spoke the word Ak’ma and Darcy had known. She’d known exactly what it meant, saw a flash
of large, lidless eyes and slit nostrils, fangs the length of her forearm, and a forked tongue dripping
with venomous saliva. A monster with long arms and claws and a lean body capable of running for
days at a time. She didn’t sleep for a week until Andrew and Talia had finally herded her upstairs to
sleep in the safety of their room, Talia shifted fully into her Alpha form, which was twice the size of
a normal wolf. Their quiet assurance, the promise of safety, consoled her enough to venture back to
her own room days later.

“Yes, demons. Sparks were being killed left and right, hunted by monsters so terrifying the rest of the
supernatural world stopped their in-fighting entirely and refocused their attention on killing the
Ak’ma. The ones that weren’t killed were driven back to the Fae realm, where I hope to hell they
stay,” Andrew said vehemently. He’d seen one, as a teenager, just a glimpse, as it dragged a
screaming druid through a Fae gate. It was enough to haunt his dreams even now.

“Me too,” Darcy mumbled.

“So it’s important that the world sees you’re allied with powerful families. That you’re already strong
and smart and determined, with or without your magic. Because then they’ll think twice about
coming after you, or us. We’ve shown them that we won’t cross that line, we won’t make you pack
and start down that bloody road again, but you’re sure as hell family, Darce. And maybe the other sparks, wherever they are, will feel safe enough to come out of hiding one day.”

“Do you think the sparks will ever be mediators again?” Darcy asked. Andrew smiled- no hesitation over the new word she’d just learned, and a curiosity that brought a little light back into her eyes.

“I believe they will. I believe you will, if that’s what you want. You could say forget the magic, I’m going to be the most normal, boring tour guide there ever was.” Darcy giggled into his shirt. “Talia would never forgive you, of course. She hates tour guides, something about her serious problem with being told what to do and where to go.”

“She is the authority.” Darcy parroted words she’d heard from her foster mother about ten times this week alone. Derek told her that Alphas had a superiority complex, shooting Laura- the future Hale Alpha- a pointed look.

“She is,” Andrew agreed with a smile. “And you, Darcy, are the strongest person I’ve ever met, and you’ve got a heart of gold. Hate and fear from others won’t keep you from doing what you think is right. I believe in you, no matter what. We all do.” She peered over his shoulder when he sighed, head cocked towards the yard. The others returned, Cora slumped onto her mother’s back as Laura and Derek tried their hardest to wrestle Peter to the ground. It involved a lot of snarling and blood. Andrew sighed heavily. “The real question is, do you want to be a part of this house of lunatics?”

Darcy couldn’t help her grin when a flailing leg bumped Cora, startling her awake. Cora gleefully hurled herself into the fray and pained yelps filled the air. Talia sat and watched proudly as her little ankle biter won the fight with a few well-placed bites and kicks. “Yeah. Yeah, I do.”

“Good thing, kid, because you’re ours now.” It was what she needed to hear, to let go of the little part of her still waiting for the other shoe to drop. The Hales tumbled through the door, none of them even a little breathless from their ten mile run. Werewolves, honestly.

“You’re mine, too,” she said and beamed at her family.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

It was Darcy’s first day of high school and she already hated everyone.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 3 is up! It’s just a little shorter than the other two, so I might update chapter 4 sooner than next Friday... Depends on how much I get done this weekend.

No, no,

Wherever I go

Trouble seems to follow

- Fall Out Boy, *Save Rock and Roll*

It was Darcy’s first day of high school and she already hated everyone. Oh, she’d walked in with her usual optimism and cheer- only to pass by a group of junior boys that leered at her chest. Puberty hit Darcy like a ton of bricks over the summer, much to her dismay, and she was a little ahead of the curve based off the other girls her age. She’d already hidden in the bathroom once this morning to hyperventilate in a disgusting bathroom stall.

Laura- beautiful, brash, terrifying Laura- graduated last year and left for college. Cora was at home, likely terrorizing the adults- she’d be homeschooled until middle school, provided she could control her shift by then. Derek beat her to the high school by two hours for basketball practice and she didn’t know where to find him. The stares from other students were overwhelming. Darcy felt her cheeks go hot, her hands tremble, as she fought her way to the office.

“Hale foster kid-”

“-homeschooled?”

“Check out that rack-”

Darcy shoved her way through the first door she saw, desperate for an escape before she blew all the fuses in the damn building. She slammed the door behind her and collapsed against it, breathing hard. She felt the otter on her skin twirl anxiously, a comforting brand of the power running through her veins. Darcy glanced up and froze. “Um. Hi?”

The other girl in the room raised a brow. “Something chasing you?” She rested against the hood of a red Mustang in what appeared to be the school’s shop classroom. It was empty save for the two of them.
“Uh, no, nothing chasing me. Just… people. I couldn’t-” she waved a hand at the door.

The girl cracked a tiny smile, though it only lasted a second. Darcy took in her small stature and the don’t-look-at-me vibes she was putting off. Darcy thought the girl was just timid until the other girl cocked her head to the side and studied her. Darcy had a second to consider just how eerily similar it was to Laura’s ‘I’m deciding how I’m going to hurt you’ look before another door across the room opened and a woman bustled out.

“Mija, I have your meds locked in my office and already let the front office know- oh! Hello. Can I help you?” The Latina woman was effortlessly graceful, dressed in loose grey work pants and a dark blue t-shirt. Darcy blinked at the woman’s beautiful face and tried not to stare at the scar running from temple to jaw on the right side of her face.

“Oh, no I was just, uh. Hiding?” Darcy winced. “It’s my first day and I couldn’t find my brother, so I just got a little overwhelmed. I’m Darcy, by the way, Darcy Lewis.” She noticed the other girl wave her hands as Darcy spoke. It took her an embarrassingly long time to realize the woman must be hard of hearing, and the girl was signing to her.

The woman smiled warmly. “You’re welcome to hide in here any time. Erica does often.” She motioned to the girl, Erica, who gave Darcy a cautious nod. “My name is Sophia Reyes, I’m the school’s shop teacher. You can call me Sophia. Do you need help finding the office? I know first days can be stressful.”

“I- yes. Yes, please, that would be great.” Erica signed for her again and Darcy hoped she wasn’t going to offend anyone when she said, “I’m sorry, I can’t sign. Or at least not anything but the alphabet.”

Sophia waved a hand in dismissal. “Don’t worry, hardly anyone can. I’m only about 75% deaf, and I’m pretty good at lip reading so I get by just fine. You’re just a little too far away, and Erica helps me out when she can. Now, my niece here-” she tugged gently on Erica’s blonde ponytail- “can take you to the office to find your schedule and then you two can get to class. The bell is going to ring soon, so hurry!” Sophia nudged Erica gently until the girl sighed and grabbed her bookbag. Darcy waved at Sophia and scurried after Erica, who drifted through the halls with an echo of her aunt’s grace.

“I’m going to kill Derek,” Darcy muttered as she dodged a swinging locker door. Erica glanced back at her. “Derek Hale?”

“Yeah, you know him? Or where he is so I can smack him for leaving me alone this morning?” Darcy asked, surprised when that got a huff of laughter from Erica.

“Everyone knows the Hales,” Erica explained, turning onto another busy hallway. “You must be the foster sister?”

“Yeah,” Darcy said. “Is that my official title now or something?”

“Better than ‘Seizure Girl’,” Erica shrugged. She paused to let a herd of football players pass by and darted through a break in the crowd to another hallway.

Darcy scowled as she fought her way through. “They call you that? What the hell?”

She caught up to Erica in time to hear a quiet “Hi, Boyd.” When she turned to see who Erica greeted, though, she only saw a quick-moving shuffle of strangers. Erica stopped in front of the door labeled ‘Office.’ “This is the office, just go in and ask Mary for a copy of your schedule. And it
looks like your brother finally found you, so I’m going to first period. See you later.” She stepped into the crowd with a half-hearted wave.

“Thank you!” Darcy called after her and turned in time to see Derek stumble through a line of students, eyes panicked and hair in disarray.

“Darcy! Thank God. Coach had us run extra suicides so we ran late and then I couldn’t find you, where the hell have you been? Ugh, please don’t tell mom I lost you before the school day started or she’ll make me run more suicides.” He nudged her through the office door, glowering at the senior boy who stopped to stare at Darcy’s chest.

“I could smack you, Derek Hale,” Darcy hissed.

“I said I was sorry!” Derek said. He aimed a disarming smile at the woman seated at the desk. “Hi, Mrs. Mary. Can I get a copy of my sister’s schedule? It’s her first day.”

The woman beamed back at him. “Of course, Derek! Give me just a moment and I’ll pull it from her file. Lewis, isn’t it?” Darcy nodded. Mary strode into the file room, muttering to herself.

“Who knew you were such a suck-up?” Darcy wondered. Derek growled at her under his breath. She snickered, unconcerned.

“Here you go, honey. A copy for you to hang onto. Now, Derek, don’t you leave this sweet girl alone to find her classes,” Mary said.

Derek blinked innocently at her. “I would love to show Darcy to her classes, but mine are on the other end of the school. I’m not sure I’ll have the time, Mrs. Mary.”

“Oh, we can’t have that! Let me just write you a note!” Darcy gaped at Derek while Mary wrote him a pass. “Here you go! Oh, there’s the bell! Better hurry!”

Derek dragged Darcy out the door, waving over his shoulder. “Thanks, Mary!”

“You’re so full of shit,” Darcy said as Derek strode smugly down the hall. “Why, Mrs. Mary, I can’t show my poor orphaned foster sister to her classes without being late myself!” She swooned sideways into him. “If only I had a hall pass!” Darcy sighed dramatically, staring wistfully down the hall.

Derek grinned at her antics and bumped her back upright. “Mary and I are bros.”

Darcy scoffed at him. “Sure, like you want that pass to use for only honorable things, not skipping class to go read in the library. I’ve got your number, buddy.”

“I’m the good child,” Derek said. “Laura spent a lot of time in the office for trying to fight literally every teenage boy in the school for being ‘disgusting pervs.’ So I spent a lot of time waiting with her after school while Mom went rounds with the principal.”

“I might be following in her footsteps,” Darcy muttered, thinking of those leering stares.

Derek glanced over at her. “Why? What happened?” Darcy waved a dismissive hand. She didn’t need him fighting her battles for her. Darcy learned a lot from Chris in the past few months. She was fully capable of defending herself, Chris made sure of it. Not to mention the tricks Laura had taught her.

“Don’t worry about it. I can handle it.”
“I know you can,” Derek said earnestly. Darcy smiled to herself. “But sometimes it’s good to have a
little backup.” He nudged her carefully. “Here you go, first class of the day. Good luck Darce. I’ll
find you before lunch.” He waited until she slipped in the door, the bell ringing as it swung shut. She
was faced with a classroom of curious stares. Already the whispers were starting. Great.

The morning dragged on. She didn’t know anyone in her classes, and the Chemistry professor heard
“Hale foster kid” and apparently hated her on sight. Darcy was seething from Harris’s smug disdain
as she followed the crowd to the lunchroom. She went through the line with the others and then
stood uncertainly, looking for Derek. He wasn’t in the room. She scanned the room again. There.
Erica sat at a table in the corner of the lunchroom, empty save for her and a broad-shouldered boy
with brown skin and the steadiest presence she’d ever felt.

Cursing Derek under her breath, Darcy strode over to the table and slipped into the seat beside Erica.
She looked across the table at the boy. “Hi, I’m Darcy.” Erica stared at her in surprise.

The boy looked up from his book and nodded at her. “Boyd.” He went back to reading. Erica was
still eyeing her like she’d lost her mind. “What are you doing?” Erica asked. Darcy looked up from
her lunch, noting the looks they were getting. “Why aren’t you sitting with Derek?” Darcy wondered
why everyone at this school treated the Hales like a strange combination of royalty and pariahs.

Darcy shrugged, cheeks heating. “Maybe I want to sit with you guys.” Derek chose that moment to
stumble into the room. Erica said nothing, just raised a skeptical brow.

“Darcy! I swear, I’m not doing this on purpose, Harris is a total dick.” Derek collapsed into the seat
beside Boyd. “He took my hall pass!”

“The one you weaseled out of Mrs. Mary?” Darcy asked archly. Erica snorted. Boyd kept reading
The Hobbit. “Besides, it’s fine. I’m sitting with my friends.” She ignored the disbelieving looks on
Erica and Boyd’s faces.

“No! Get your own. And while you’re at it, go sit with your frat boy buddies over there,” Darcy
sneered. That group was particularly vocal when leering at her—though they were very careful to do
so out of Derek’s hearing range.

Derek gave her a shit-eating grin. “No way, I’m under orders to keep track of you on your first day.
Besides,” he said, glancing over, “Boyd has great taste in books.” Boyd looked mildly surprised to
hear this. Derek marched off to the lunch line after being smacked away from Darcy’s tray again.

“Loser,” she grumbled under her breath. Derek flipped her a bird from halfway across the room,
somehow managing to avoid the gaze of all four teachers in the room. Werewolves were cheaters.
One day, Darcy was going to write a book on all the ways how.

She was delighted to find that shop class was listed as her final period. Darcy stepped out of her
English class and turned down the hall towards the shop room. She frowned at the commotion ahead
of her, a large crowd jostling and jeering. Darcy fought her way to the front and froze.

Erica lay on the ground, seizing. Darcy darted forward, reaching for her right as the seizure stopped.
She gently helped Erica roll onto her side and glanced up to see one of the lacrosse team players
laughing and filming the event on his phone. The lights in the hallway flickered with her fury.

“Hey, asshole! Turn it off!” Darcy snarled. The kid just leveled a cocky grin at her. “What is wrong
“Hey!” The boy shoved her back a few steps. “That was my fucking phone!”

“Yeah? Well, I told you to turn it off. You shoulda listened instead of being a piece of shit,” Darcy retorted. She watched his face contort in fury and embarrassment. He pushed at her again. Darcy was ready for it this time. She grabbed an outstretched arm and ducked under it, slamming her elbow into his jaw. His head snapped back. Darcy kept moving until she was behind him, his arm wrenched viciously behind his back. While he was still reeling from the hit, she spun and swiped his legs out from under him. He dropped like a stone, groaning on the floor.

One of his friends stepped forward like he might defend the kid gripping his face on the ground. Darcy felt a solid presence at her back. The kid promptly changed his mind. She glanced back to see Boyd behind her, staring at the kid with an even expression.

“All right, break it up! What’s going on here?” To Darcy’s dismay, Harris pushed his way out of the crowd. He took in the scene with hardly a glance and smirked at Darcy.

“It seems the Hale tradition continues. You, to the office.” He pointed at Darcy, then down the hall. She turned to check on Erica first. Boyd was already helping her up, his tall form shielding her from the worst of the stares.

Boyd nodded at Darcy. “I’ll get her to her aunt.” Erica wouldn’t meet her eyes. Darcy frowned and took a step forward.

“Now, Miss Hale.”

Darcy scowled and picked up her bookbag. “My last name is Lewis.”

“But you’re still a Hale, aren’t you?” Harris sneered. The crowd slowly dispersed as the late bell rang.

“Only sort of,” Darcy muttered. She stomped past him, frustration building at the unfairness of it all. Harris let the stupid kid go to the nurse with a sympathetic pat on the back. Darcy clenched her fists and fought her power rising to the surface.

Darcy seethed in the front office chairs as Harris spoke with the principal. She wondered if Laura had blown up his lab or something. She’d done nothing to warrant his hatred. Darcy looked up when the word ‘suspension’ echoed through the principal’s closed office door. She went back to staring miserably at her shoes.

“Darce.” She jumped as Derek slid into the seat next to her. “You ok?” She shrugged. “I heard you beat the shit out of Jacobs.” She shrugged again, this time with a hint of a smile. It faded when Harris’s voice rose again through the closed door.

“Don’t worry,” Derek said, nudging her. “He’s about to be in a world of hurt.”

Darcy opened her mouth to ask why when Talia strode through the office door on a warpath. Peter trailed her, sending a wink their way. Talia stopped in front of Darcy, sliding a hand over the spark’s hair. “Are you alright?” Darcy leaned into the touch and nodded. Talia didn’t seem mad.

Peter leaned against the wall and grinned. “My baby is growing up so fast, already picking fights with boys twice her size.” He sniffed dramatically as Darcy and Derek rolled their eyes. “Let’s go
get some ice cream to celebrate. After Talia neuters that useless excuse of a human being in there, of course.”

Talia growled and spun around to do exactly that. Darcy watched with wide eyes as she flung open the door, Peter casually following as if he had nothing better to do today than watch his sister verbally eviscerate a grown man. He gently shut the door behind them, though not before Darcy saw Harris blanch at the sight of her foster mother.

“See?” Derek said. “Mom’s gonna squash him like a bug, probably make the principal cry, and we’ll get ice cream out of this whole thing.” He leaned back with a grin. “And Jacobs got what was coming for him. Laura’s gonna be so mad she missed it.”

“Is there like a bat signal for ‘Darcy’s causing trouble again?’” Darcy asked. She eyed the principal’s office warily. It was eerily quiet in there now.

“No, but there should be.” Derek punched him on the shoulder. “Ouch, be nice!” He rubbed his shoulder. “I called Mom when I heard about it. She and Peter were already in town, so they headed over.”

Darcy sighed. “I didn’t mean to cause trouble. But he was filming Erica’s seizure and laughing! I don’t regret it, but Harris was talking about suspension. On my first day.”

Derek slid an arm over her shoulder. She let him tug her into a reassuring hug. “Trust me, he’s going to be too afraid to even look at you after Mom’s done with him. You did the right thing. And Chris is going to be so proud. Jacobs really is twice your size.”

Talia strode out of the office. “C’mon, you two.” She didn’t wait for them to obey. Peter grabbed Darcy’s bookbag and herded them after her. Darcy had to jog to keep up with Talia’s pace. All of the Hales were six feet tall, or close to it. It left Darcy perpetually running to keep up with their long legs.

“Am I going to be suspended?” She asked, peering up at Talia anxiously.

Talia snorted. “Absolutely not. Harris will issue an apology for his behavior within 24 hours and you will resume classes as usual. Not today though.” She smiled down at the young Spark. “We really are getting ice cream.” Darcy blinked in surprise. Peter wrapped his arm over her shoulders and pressed a kiss to her hair.

“You’re not in trouble, darling. We’re proud of you.” He led her to the Camaro. Darcy often wondered if werewolves were drawn to cars as sleek and dangerous-looking as they were.

“But I beat up a human,” she protested. Derek pushed her into the backseat when she hesitated too long beside the car. Talia sat patiently in the driver’s seat.

Peter rolled his eyes. “You beat up a bully. Big difference. And there’s no permanent damage, except to his reputation, maybe.”

“But.”

“What, do you want to be in trouble? Fine, you get only two scoops instead of three. I hope you’ve learned your lesson,” Peter said. “Now buckle up, you only have an hour until supernatural school.”

Darcy was still pondering her actions at Deaton’s later. She stared at the Latin phrases Deaton instructed her to learn this week (in case of demonic possession, because of course that was something she’d have to worry about). She watched as Deaton checked a rambunctious puppy’s
“Hey, Deaton?”

“Yes, Miss Lewis?”

“If someone were doing a bad thing, someone human, and I stopped them, does it mean I’m abusing my power?” She chewed on her lip, watching Deaton’s ever-neutral expression.

“Did you stop them with your spark?” Deaton asked calmly. The puppy lunged desperately for the food Deaton offered him. Darcy shook her head. “Ah. This is about the altercation today.”

Darcy wrinkled her nose. “That’s a nice way of putting it.”

Deaton closed the cage door and offered her a small smile. “You confronted him and defended yourself when it became violent. You didn’t lose control, or hurt him with magic, though both of those things could have happened very easily.”

Darcy stared at the table. She saw a dirty alley, heard mocking laughter, felt Mama’s iron grip around her wrist. Darcy remembered walking past their bodies, seeing their dead eyes staring up at the sky. Sometimes humans are more monstrous than the creatures of the dark, Darcy. Remember that. A tremor went through her hands. She tucked them into her lap and squeezed her fingers together until it hurt. The pain brought her back to the present, back to Deaton’s concerned face.

“Miss Lewis?”

She was silent for a long moment. “My mom killed humans. They were going to hurt us, and she just…” Darcy blew out a slow breath. “She pulled the air from their lungs and choked them to death. For what they wanted to do to us—to me.”

“I’m very sorry you had to experience that, Darcy.” Deaton gently pulled the page of runes she’d been copying away from her fidgeting hands. “But what you did today is not the same thing.”

“I don’t… I don’t want to be like her,” Darcy admitted. She bit her lip and stared at the floor. “She did everything to keep me hidden and safe but… she hurt a lot of people. And she did it for me.”

Those early years were a long, terrifying haze of running from Kate Argent. Mama taught Darcy a lot of things, but Darcy’s time with the Hales had shown her that not everyone was out to get you. Sometimes people were good. Mama didn’t believe that, not after whatever hardships she’d endured.

Darcy didn’t want to be angry. She wanted to believe in people.

“It’s okay to feel this way, Darcy. Your mother was in a very difficult position. She was running from people that wanted to kill her for who she was, and you were just a child. You were caught up in a twisted game of politics from the day you were born. And your mother had the best intentions, but the way she went about protecting you wasn’t necessarily the best option.”

“I didn’t even have a birth certificate until I came to the Hales,” Darcy said dejectedly. Why that bothered her so much, she didn’t know. Maybe it was because without it, she didn’t exist to anyone but her mother and Kate Argent. “And the one I have now doesn’t even have both parents on it.”

Deaton studied her. “Do you know who your father is?” He asked carefully.

Darcy shook her head. “Mama never said anything about him. She’d just say ‘maybe one day’ when I asked. But she never told me. I don’t think she even told him, whoever he was.”
“Does that bother you?”

Darcy thought about it. “Sometimes. He probably doesn’t even know I exist. And I have the Hales now, but… I’m family. Not pack.” She saw Deaton’s mouth thin. “I get why, I really do. They can’t make me pack because it would upset the balance and possibly start a war,” she recited. “Does being a spark mean I can never have a real family?”

“I think what family means is up to you,” Deaton said after a thoughtful pause. “The Hales love you very much. Do you think the distinction between family and pack matters enough to affect your relationship with them?”

“No, but… I don’t know if anyone can ever just accept me. Me. Not just the spark. I’m more than that,” Darcy insisted. “But that’s all anyone ever cares about.” Her shoulders dropped. Deaton watched her. They were silent a long moment before she rubbed her eyes. “Never mind. What’s that?”

Deaton looked where she pointed. Jars of black ash lined the exam table. “Ah. That was part of our lesson today.” He stood and brought a jar over. “This is mountain ash.”

“Mountain ash? The stuff werewolves can’t touch?” Darcy peered closer, eyes bright.

“Not just werewolves. Creatures of the supernatural variety cannot cross a line of mountain ash. It’s made from the rowan tree and can create a protective barrier should you need it. All it takes is a little faith and an iron will.” He smiled amiably at Darcy’s sceptical face. “Take this jar home with you and practice. Now, I believe your ride is here.”

Andrew called out for her a moment later. Eyeing Deaton suspiciously, Darcy packed her things and slipped outside. She’d never met someone so infuriatingly vague and mysterious. Andrew dropped her off at the edge of the preserve where Chris waited. She waved to her foster dad and trailed Chris into the woods.

“I hear you had an eventful day,” Chris said casually. He pointed to a mark on the tree beside him and Darcy nodded. The wards were holding strong. They’d added this routine to their lessons two months ago. Chris said it was important to maintain a strong boundary for security reasons. Darcy thought he just wanted an excuse to be closer to Peter.

Yeah,” was all she said. She was tired of talking about it. Chris seemed to understand, because the rest of the walk was spent in silence. They reached the area beside the creek where their last few lessons had been not long after.

“Today, we’re doing something a little different.” Chris picked up the two staffs lying on the ground. They were tall and slender, made of a strong, sleek wood. He handed one to her. “These are made from rowan trees. It’s a good weapon for a spark to have, and one I think you’re best suited for.”

Darcy gripped the staff tightly and feverently agreed. This felt right in her hands.

“Now, to start, you’re just going to get comfortable with it. Find the balance of the staff. Keep your grip firm but not tight. You want some movement with it, like a natural extension of yourself. That’s it.” Darcy followed his instructions. The staff was heavier than expected, a sturdy weight that felt unbreakable in her hands.

“Remember, always keep a solid stance. A staff is no good if you’re unsteady. Good. We’ll work on a few blocks today, but I want you to keep this close when you’re at home. Get used to handling it,” Chris instructed. “It’s yours now.”
Darcy took the staff home with her after the lesson. She didn’t want to let it go, even for a second. For once, fighting came naturally to her. Chris didn’t despair for their future even once today, which was no small feat.

He waited in the treeline until Darcy reached the back door. She waved goodbye and watched him disappear into the woods. She walked inside and noticed Peter near the window, head cocked as he likely listened to Chris’s heartbeat until the other man was too far away.

All this pining was going to drive her insane.

According to Laura, Chris and Victoria had been friends for years before Gerard forced an arranged marriage. It brought the Argents an alliance with Victoria’s family— a smaller hunting family, but a vicious group of them. Victoria had always known about Chris and Peter, even helped them avoid discovery from time to time. But mutual bitterness at their situation— essentially held hostage by Gerard—ruined whatever friendship once existed. And now with Allison ensnared in the turmoil, things were more strained than ever.

Gerard disappeared after Kate’s death. There was no trace of where he’d gone, no rumors or sightings. It gave the Argents quite a bit of apprehension. The threat he posed was still there, always hovering over their heads. If the stories were true, Gerard was worse than Kate. Darcy hoped she never had to meet him.

Peter broke away from the window and eyed her. “What a nice stick you have there.”

“All the better to hit you with,” Darcy retorted.

Peter laughed and ruffled her hair. “Good lesson?” He very carefully did not touch the staff, wrinkling his nose when it drifted too close to him.

“Yes, for once. I like fighting with this,” Darcy said with an appreciative look at the weapon. “It feels right. Like I actually know what I’m doing.” She weighed the staff in her hands. “Maybe now I can hold my own when something non-human attacks.” She was so tired of stitches. And she still lacked the control to use the healing runes. The last time she’d tried, the lightbulbs in Deaton’s office exploded. Deaton said it was something about not directing her power through the rune, but there was a well of magic in her so deep she couldn’t fathom only skimming the top of it. It sucked her into its depths before she knew what was happening.

The spark wanted to be used. But Darcy was too afraid. She remembered the last time she lost control. Kate Argent’s screams still echoed in her head every night. There was just too much of the power for her to manage.

“You can practice fighting werewolves after dinner, darling.” Darcy brightened. She’d never know her true capabilities with the new weapon until she went up against supernaturals, with their speed and strength. How convenient that she lived with a house full of them.

Darcy set her staff down and washed her hands to go help Andrew with dinner. He smiled as she took over the vegetable chopping, pressing a kiss to her hair as he passed her on his way to the fridge.

Peter lifted a massive tome from the kitchen table. “Quiz time, Darce.”

“Hit me,” she said.

“Hmm, let’s start with… bunyip.”
Darcy frowned at the carrots she was chopping. “Um.. Water monster? From Aboriginal legends,” she said, gaining confidence. “It’s believed to bring disease and requires calm water to live. It usually doesn’t bother humans unless their food source- fish- is interrupted. They can drag a human into the water and drown them if angry enough.”

“Very good,” Peter said. “Wendigo.”

“Ugh, gross. Those are cannibalistic monsters. They grow with each kill they consume- ew- and are never satisfied. They’re super terrifying to look at and also disgusting. And very hard to kill.” Darcy finished with a nod. Andrew chuckled beside her.

“That’s all the important bits of that one, wouldn’t you say?” Andrew asked.

Peter nodded. “Yes, and I truly hope you never come across one.”

“Tell me about it,” Darcy muttered. Peter perused the book for his next pop quiz question. Darcy chewed on her lip uncertainly. “Peter?”

“Mnhm.”

“How does the bite work?”

Peter lifted his head up to squint at her. “The bite?”

“To turn a human?” Andrew clarified. Darcy nodded. Peter and Andrew exchanged a glance. “Well, to start, the bite is never guaranteed to take. It’s a 50/50 chance.”

“What if it doesn’t take?” Darcy had a feeling she already knew the answer.

“They turn or they die,” Peter said grimly. “Only an Alpha can turn someone, by biting them or sometimes even scratching them deep enough.”

Darcy mulled it over for a long moment. “And if the human is sick? What then?”

Peter studied her. “That is something we still don’t know for certain. Often times, the illness or disability is healed when the human is turned. Sometimes not, though. I knew of a blind man turned that never regained his sight. Having a werewolf nose and hearing certainly made his life easier, though.”

“So there’s no way to know if the bite will take? Or if it will cure an illness?”

“No. That’s the chance they take, I suppose.” Peter waited to see if she’d ask anything further, or give him any insight to what she was thinking. Darcy was quiet, though.

“Alright, next question...”
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I split the last chapter into two parts because it was getting too big, so here's the second part! This is literally just Darcy growing into her power and I loved writing it. It's a major turning point for her, which is very exciting for plot reasons :)

All you have is your fire
And the place you need to reach
Don’t you ever tame your demons
But always keep ‘em on a leash

- Hozier, Arsonist’s Lullabye

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Darcy worriedly scanned the lunchroom for Erica. She was nowhere to be seen. Boyd sat alone at their usual table, now speeding his way through the *Eragon* series. Darcy waved distractedly to Derek, sitting with the other sophomores, on her way over to Boyd. She sat with a frustrated huff. Boyd eyed her impassively.

“She’s still not back,” Darcy fretted. “I thought Sophia said she’d be back this week.”

“It’s Tuesday.”

Yeah, I know! And she missed all last week, too.” Darcy could hardly concentrate the entire week with Erica gone. She kept seeing her friend seizing on the ground and feeling completely helpless.

Sophia wrapped her in a tight hug the day after the fight. Darcy’s last class of the day was shop, the only one she had with Erica. Or would have, when Erica came back to school. Darcy stayed late after school on the rare days she didn’t have afternoon lessons with Deaton. Sophia graciously let her hang around the shop room, and even showed Darcy a few of her personal projects.

At Darcy’s request, Sophia also started teaching her ASL. She was infinitely patient with Darcy’s fumbling and an absolute genius with machines. Darcy idolized her.

“Don’t look so worried, mija. Erica is fine,” Sophia said. She nudged Darcy gently. “She’ll be back soon. Now, come help me with this.” Darcy obediently followed her to Sophia’s project table.

“A microwave?” Darcy asked skeptically. She copied Sophia’s movements as the other woman taught her the sign for it.

Sophia smiled. “The last one standing in the teacher’s lounge. The school won’t buy a new one and the other teachers are becoming quite desperate. I’ve received three different bribes this morning to fix it.” She motioned to a stack of chocolates on her desk.
“Is it hard to fix?” Darcy asked. She peered in the open panel. Sophia laughed.

“No at all. I just wanted to let you work on this with me, so you could learn. And the bribes are getting more extravagant as the days go by.” She winked at Darcy. Darcy grinned back.

“Now, the problem with the microwave is that the touchpad doesn’t work.” Sophia signed as she spoke, which they both agreed would help Darcy learn faster. Darcy watched carefully and repeated any signs she wasn’t familiar with. It was slow-going at first, but she’d always been a fast learner.

“This is usually one of two problems. The first is an issue with the membrane switch.” Sophia pointed to the flat, thin ribbon sticking out the side of the touchpad. “It’s made up of soft touch electrical switches. When you press a key on the touchpad, the surface of the key comes into contact with the corresponding soft touch switch. It sends the electrical signal to the control board.” Sophia traced the path. Darcy watched, fascinated, as Sophia talked her through it. She let Darcy fiddle with the control board and study the inner workings of the machine before guiding her through the fix.

“There! All finished,” Sophia said. “Well done, Darcy.” She stood with a grimace, rubbing at her right thigh. Darcy frowned, recognizing the frequent movement. Sophia’s hands always reached for her thigh after sitting or crouching for long periods.

“Are you ok?” Darcy asked. She signed it when Sophia glanced back at her. Sophia patted her shoulder.

“I’m alright. This happens. I’m sure you’ve noticed this,” Sophia said, tapping the scar on her face. Darcy shrugged awkwardly. She didn’t really see it anymore. It didn’t detract from Sophia in the slightest, and Darcy was usually staring at the woman’s hands anyway. “I was in a car crash about 6 years ago. That’s how I lost most of my hearing, and my leg.”

Darcy blinked at her, dumbfounded. Sophia burst out laughing. “You didn’t notice?” Darcy shook her head. Sophia pulled up her pants leg to mid-calf, revealing a prosthetic. “My lower leg was crushed in the accident. It had to be amputated below the knee, see?”

“I had no idea,” Darcy said.

Sophia let the pants fall back down to her boots. “I honestly don’t even notice it sometimes. Others-” she motioned to the rain falling outside “moreso.” A knock on the door caught Darcy’s attention. Sophia followed her gaze to the doorway, where Chris stood.

“Hey, Darce. Talia said you’d need a ride home.” To Darcy’s surprise, Chris signed a greeting to Sophia. Sophia signed back with a smile. Darcy hugged Sophia goodbye and trotted along behind Chris.

“You know Sophia?”

“I do. She’s the best mechanic in town. I take my cars to her when I have a problem.” Chris held the door open for her to slip through. “Everyone knows Rodney overcharges, not to mention he’s incompetent.” Darcy met the town mechanic only once but agreed with the sentiment. Laura had nearly gutted him for the marks he left on the Camaro.

They darted through the rain to Chris’s SUV. Chris waited until she was buckled to pull out of the lot. “I thought we’d practice a little with your staff today. You’ve been doing so well, we might as well add some opponents into the mix.”

“Opponents?” Darcy asked. Chris turned off the main road towards the Hale house.
“The Hales have agreed to help you practice this afternoon. I want you to have as much experience fighting supernaturals as we can manage. That way you’re prepared for the worst.”

Darcy wrinkled her nose at him. “Has anyone ever told you that you’re a very cynical person?”

Chris laughed. “Only every day.” He parked in the Hale driveway, where Derek and Andrew stood in jogging shorts, shirts discarded on the porch. The rain was coming down hard. Darcy felt a flutter of nerves as Chris led her to the porch. “Go change, Darce. And bring your staff down.”

She ran upstairs, throwing leggings and a black t-shirt over her two sports bras. Darcy didn’t bother with shoes, having already seen the mud pit that was the backyard. Her hair went into a tight braid. She snatched up her staff and darted down the stairs, meeting Talia and Cora at the door. Her foster mother sent her a wolfish grin. “Ready?”

“I guess so.” Darcy tugged at her shirt hem.

Talia tapped her on the nose. “Chin up, love. You’re stronger than you know.” Bolstered, Darcy straightened her back and strode outside.

Chris was watching Derek and Andrew wrestle in the mud, arms crossed. He didn’t seem to notice the rain pouring down his face. She walked over to him, blinking the rain from her eyes. He smiled down at her. “Alright, kiddo. Go get warmed up. We’ll start with our basic blocks and strikes, but I want you to watch them.” He nodded at her family, sparring in the yard. “Learn their fighting styles, their tells. Anything that will help you later.”

Darcy stretched in the warm rain, watching the friendly combat. Talia was unflinchingly brutal, quick and without flair. Andrew fought with a complicated style. Half the time she couldn’t tell what he was doing until the other person was twisted up like a pretzel. Derek play-fought with Cora, letting her work off some of that infinite energy. Peter drifted through the trees at some point and joined the adults in a very violent game of tag.

Chris handed Darcy her staff once she was finished, leading her off to the side to review. He’d lost his jacket at some point, down to jeans and a tight black t-shirt. “What are some things you need to be aware of?” Chris asked, snapping the staff up in a block. Darcy copied him.

“Um, environment? The footing is going to be slick with all that mud.” Chris nodded. “Visibility, with the rain. It’ll be harder to see them coming.”

“Good. We’ll start slow, okay? One-on-one. Peter will pair off with you first.”

The rain was loud and they were 30 feet away, but Peter turned towards them. Talia sent him face-first into the mud, leaping away to send Andrew to the ground as well. Darcy hid her laughter as Peter regally swiped the mud off his face and stalked over to them.

“Ready?” He gave her a wicked grin, too-sharp teeth showing.

Chris rolled his eyes and nudged Darcy. “He drops his left shoulder before he attacks.” Peter scowled at the hunter. “Remember to keep your stance as solid as you can. The mud will make it hard, but not impossible. You’ve got this, Darcy.”

Darcy faced off with Peter, breathing even and slow. He circled around her, eyes bright and teasing. Darcy waited, waited until he threw an arm out, testing her reflexes. She didn’t think, just reacted. Darcy smacked his arm aside with the staff and twisted to hit him in the side in one smooth motion. Peter stumbled back a step, surprised. He grinned at her equal astonishment.
“Don’t look so shocked, darling. It’s less impressive if you’re surprised, too.” He dodged her next strike with inhuman grace. Darcy blinked the rain from her eyes and readjusted her stance. Peter struck then, coming high. She threw the staff up, raised horizontally above her head to block the hit. She saw the follow-up coming. The staff stopped his foot from connecting with her side. Darcy drove the butt of her staff forward, nailing Peter in the chest.

“You’ve been practicing,” Chris said from the sidelines, impressed. Talia and Andrew applauded from across the yard, Derek and Cora hollering encouragement. Darcy blushed but couldn’t stop the grin from spreading across her face. Chris stepped up beside her, his own staff raised. “Let’s change the game a little, huh?” He motioned Andrew and Derek over. Darcy raised a judgmental brow at them. They were covered in mud.

“You and me against these three. They’ll be pulling their strikes so no one gets maimed—” Chris said with a stern look at the werewolves “—and we’ll be careful not to let the rowan wood touch them for too long.”

Darcy readied herself, shoulder-to-shoulder with Chris. He was a reassuring warmth at her side. The other three spread out. Andrew struck first, aiming a kick at Chris. Chris blocked it smoothly, leveraging his staff under the ‘wolf’s leg until Andrew was unbalanced enough to fall back. Darcy blocked Derek’s swipe, aimed a strike at Peter’s knee that was blocked.

“Keep your breathing even. Don’t get overwhelmed,” Chris murmured. He blocked a hit aimed at her. Darcy spun to intercept a strike from behind and stayed back-to-back with Chris. The attacks sped up. Darcy lost track of it all, moving from strike to block to dodge faster than her mind could keep up. She surrendered, let her instincts guide her in the poor visibility. Chris moved in sync with her, never missing a beat.

At some point Darcy realized that she was grinning. She’d never felt this way before, strong and sure and capable. A glance up told her the others were enjoying this, too. Chris laughed outright as he sent Peter tumbling to the ground, only to be tackled by Derek. Andrew dodged Darcy’s swipe and tossed her over his shoulder. She dropped her staff and shrieked as he spun them around. Cora came to Darcy’s defense, wrapping herself around her father’s legs with a growl. He let Darcy slip out of his hold as he fell. She tumbled into the mud and flailed her way back to her feet. The others lay panting on the ground, soaked to the bone and grinning at the sky. Talia appeared beside her and wrapped an arm over her shoulders.

“I’m proud of you,” she told Darcy. Darcy leaned into her and smiled.

~*~

“You’re back!”

Erica looked up in surprise as Darcy bounded into the shop room. ”Yeah.” She was pale and subdued in a large sweater and jeans. “Heard you defended my honor,” Erica smirked.

Darcy blushed. “He’s an ass.”

“He is,” Erica agreed. She stood and eyed Darcy for a moment. Darcy seemed to pass the girl’s thorough assessment, because Erica gifted her with an honest smile. “Thanks for that.”

Darcy looped her arm through Erica’s. “Anytime.” Erica laughed and led the way.

Throughout the day, Darcy noticed the looks sent her way. They’d changed from the usual leering stares to something with a little more respect. She kept her head high and ignored them all. Maybe
now she wouldn’t get as many creepy come-ons.

Erica met her in shop, the only class they shared. She and Darcy both signed the other student’s questions to Sophia when necessary. Erica showed her a few more relevant signs and they sequestered a corner of the room to fiddle with the old car engine.

Boyd joined them after the bell rang. He sprawled out and pulled a book from his bag, occasionally inserting dry comments that sent them both into hysterics. Sophia smiled at them from across the room, tinkering with a teacher’s projector that sparked ominously in Darcy’s class earlier. Darcy basked in the normal of it all. Until she noticed the time. Darcy dropped the crankshaft she was holding.

“Oh, shit!” She leapt up. “I’m late!”

“Late for what?” Erica asked, bewildered. Boyd raised a brow at her.

Darcy waved to Sophia. “So late! Bye, see you tomorrow!” She darted from the room, hearing Erica’s affectionate “weirdo” behind her. She skidded to a stop beside the Camaro idling outside.

“Oh, so you remembered? Please, I don’t wish to inconvenience you. I can come back.” Darcy rolled the window down and blinked at her.

“Oh, so you remembered? Please, I don’t wish to inconvenience you. I can come back.” Darcy rolled her eyes at him and climbed inside the car.

“Drama queen.”

Peter poked her in the side. “Rude. You’re lucky Deaton’s a patient man.”

“I was with my friends, if you must know.” Darcy glowed a little at the word. Friends. She had actual, normal, friends of the non-werewolf variety. Friends that knew nothing about Darcy being magic.

“Oh? And who might these friends be?”

“Erica and Boyd,” Darcy said as she pulled her complex runes homework out of her bag and skimmed over it to review. Deaton was ruthless when grading her runes homework. Last month, the paper was returned with so much red ink she thought he’d spilled paint on it. Sunday’s homework looked like maybe just a little blood had been splattered across it. Which, knowing her life, was entirely likely. Deaton only sighed heavily whenever she asked, though.

“Erica Reyes? Sophia’s niece?” Peter asked casually.

Darcy glanced at him before turning back to the pages. “Hmm? Oh, yeah. That’s where I was, in Sophia’s classroom. She lets me stay after class.”

“Erica has epilepsy, doesn’t she? That’s who you were defending last week?” Peter pulled up to the vet’s office.

“Yeah, she came back today. Her new medication is giving her some trouble. That’s why she had a seizure last week. They’re still working out the right combination.” Darcy stuffed the pages back in her bag. “Gotta go, see you at home!” She pressed a kiss to his cheek, not noticing his thoughtful expression in her haste.

“Sorry, sorry!” Darcy burst through the swinging door to the back room.

Deaton was entirely unruffled at her abrupt entrance. “Good afternoon, Miss Lewis.” He watched
her throw her things into their usual place and slide into a seat, smiling up at him as if she wasn’t thirty minutes late.

He handed her a sheet with a single rune on it. “I see you have some bruises from your sparring lessons.” He nodded to one on her upper arm that she knew was covered by her sweater. “Today, you’re going to heal them.”

Darcy blanched. “But…”

Deaton nodded. “You’ve been unsuccessful so far. Yes. But I’ve determined that this is a mental block, Miss Lewis, not a shortcoming regarding you or your power.” He handed her a marker. She stared at it for a long moment. Her heart was racing. “The rune, Miss Lewis.”

She swallowed hard but obeyed, drawing the symbol she could identify with her eyes closed on her forearm. She could draw nearly all the straightforward runes from memory now. Darcy was excellent with theoretical magic. Actual magic, however… She eyed the scorch marks adorning the ceiling.

“Close your eyes. Slow your breathing and think guiding your magic through the rune. Calm your heartbeat first, nice and even.” Darcy matched her breathing to a four-beat count. In four, hold four. Out four, hold four. She slipped into a calmer state almost without realizing, relaxing into the familiar exercise.

“You need an iron will. You control the magic, not the other way around. It’s a part of you, Darcy, and it wants to be utilized. It’s time you stop being afraid of it.” Deaton sounded as serious as she’d ever heard him.

Darcy hesitantly reached for the threads of her power. As always, it greedily clutched back at her, eager and restless. She flinched. Deaton quietly spoke. “This power belongs to you, Darcy. You have to accept it, or you’ll never have any control.”

She clenched her fists. The threads tightened around her. Darcy imagined them pulling her down, down, down, into a never-ending well of her power. She felt helpless in its grasp. Darcy didn’t know how long she fell, losing track of time in the abyss. She just continued to fall through the golden swirl of her magic.

After what could have been hours, days, weeks, she drifted to a stop. The power felt gentle now, twining around her like a delighted cat. Look, it seemed to say. Look what you’ve been hiding from. She let the contentment eclipse the fear and felt it turn into wonder. The magic seemed endless, like usual, but this time that didn’t scare her. It didn’t want to take over or use her. It was, like Deaton said, very much a part of her. One she’d been afraid of for far too long. Darcy opened her eyes and smiled.

She sent a small drop of power to the rune drawn on her forearm. Darcy gasped when it lit with a golden light. She felt impossibly warm and squeaked when her bruises itched.

Deaton was smiling when she looked up at him in shock. “Well done, Darcy.”

She felt like a thousand pounds had lifted from her shoulders. Darcy hadn’t realized what a strain it was, keeping her power at bay. She sent a mental apology to the threads of magic still twisting around her and eagerly turned to the pages of runes she’d practiced drawing for years.

“What about this one? The shield one?” She asked. Deaton waved a graceful hand, permission to test what she’d spent so long learning. Darcy drew the rune on her palm. Visualizing, Deaton taught her, was a crucial part to this type of magic. If you don’t know what you want, the magic will take on a
life of its own. Darcy’s vision of the shield was a large force field of her power, stopping anything that tried to harm her.

She finished the rune and stood. Darcy backed a few steps away and sent a small thread of power to the rune. The magic rushed from her body and out through the rune on her palm. Darcy laughed in delight. A wall of power separated Darcy and Deaton, golden and shimmering and the most solid thing she’d ever seen.

“Try to shrink it,” Deaton said from the other side of the room. “Make it smaller, to cover just you. It will take whatever shape you wish it to.”

Darcy reached for the magic again. She frowned, worried that it wouldn’t want to shrink. But it twisted at her first hesitant touch, responding to the picture she had in her head. The shield reformed, now fitting her like a second skin. It felt… familiar.

Darcy heard an echo of gunshots. She felt the heat of a summer night, bolstered by the fire raging through the house in the woods. Her power surged in response to her fear. The magic forming the shield hummed urgently. This… this was familiar. She’d formed a shield like this one the night that… Darcy heard screaming. So much screaming. Men begging, pleading. Her power surged with the sound of the woman’s scream.

And then she heard nothing at all.

She awoke to Deaton’s face swimming above her. “What…” She looked around. The room was intact, easing her fears of another violent outburst.

“I believe you had a flashback, Miss Lewis, or something like it.” He helped her stand on unsteady legs. “Your magic attempted to shield your mind from the memories, whether it was intentional or not.” Darcy touched careful fingers to the lump on the back of her head. Her eyes widened when they came away wet with blood. “Your own shield seems to have knocked you unconscious.”

Darcy stared at him. “Are you saying I literally knocked myself out?” God, she’d never live this one down.

Deaton, for his part, didn’t laugh. “Your magic responded to your desire for protection. Since it was in reference to your own memories, the rune for the physical shield backfired and… ah. Yes, it knocked you out. I’m afraid I was too far away to prevent your fall.”

“‘S ok.” Darcy staggered to the chair. “I can heal it.” She did just that, tapping the healing rune she’d drawn earlier. It lit up again and the throbbing in Darcy’s head eased.

“I’m glad to see this hasn’t set you back with your spark again,” Deaton said cautiously.

“No, I… I don’t think I can go back to not using it,” she sighed. Darcy leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes. She reached for her power again, smiling when it flooded her with warmth. The otter inked on her skin twirled its way up her spine. “It feels like it’s alive.”

“It is very much so.” Darcy’s eyes flew open and she stared at the vet. Seeing her face, he continued. “Your magic connects you with the bioelectricity of everything around you. The spark lets you control it, use it. But it’s still the energy from the life all around us.”

“I mean, I knew it had to come from somewhere,” Darcy said.

Deaton nodded. “The more magic you have, the more you can control those threads of bioelectricity. Sparks have tremendous power, hence their strength.”
“And a spark’s tattoos? The animals?” Darcy asked. It had always been a part of her, like her eyes or heart. She’d never thought twice about its existence, until realizing that no one else had one.

Deaton shrugged. “No one knows for certain. Many believe that’s a secret sparks share only amongst themselves. I personally believe it is a manifestation of a spark’s power, one they’re born with. Which might explain why it moves and reacts.” He nodded to where Darcy’s fingers trailed over the otter, now stretched out along her arm.

“Huh.” She watched it thoughtfully.

“I believe we’ve accomplished enough today, Miss Lewis. Practice using the runes, when you can, and leave your homework on the desk. Peter is waiting outside for you.” Deaton folded his hands together and smiled at her narrowed eyes.

“One day, I’ll figure out how you do that,” Darcy said as she set her stack of papers on the desk. She picked her bag up and turned to go. Darcy hesitated in the doorway. “Hey Deaton?”

He turned, brows raised.

“Thanks.”

“Of course, Miss Lewis.”

Darcy beamed at him and darted to the door. She skidded to a stop at the main entrance, a thought occurring to her. After a few careful strokes of her pen, she slipped outside and stalked up to where Peter stood beside the car.

His back was turned towards her as he stared intently at something down the street. Darcy smiled. “Boo!” Peter yelped and spun around, eyes flashing.

Darcy laughed hysterically at his stunned expression. “Darcy? I didn’t hear you… Wait.” He cocked his head. “I still can’t hear you.” She thrust her arm out, beaming. Peter studied the runes on her arm.

“You’re using your spark again?” Darcy nodded. Peter laughed in delight and picked her up in a hug. He twirled her around.

“I’m so proud of you, Darcy.” Peter set her down and looked at her arm again. “Fascinating. Does it drain your power? Does it affect you?”

Darcy shook her head. “It doesn’t feel like its taking any magic for this, really. Just like a tiny little thread to fuel it.”

“A raindrop in a hurricane,” Peter murmured. His eyes gleamed.

“Sure, whatever,” Darcy shrugged. “The important thing is I can win Hide and Seek now.”

Peter sighed in amusement. “Of course it is. Let’s go shock and alarm the rest of the family, darling.” Darcy bounded happily after him.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

SO sorry to take so long with this.. But the longer wait means this chapter is nearly 10,000 words, so here ya go!

Warning: the graphic/canonical violence tagged will apply to this chapter.

The good news? So does the BAMF Darcy tag

There’s a moment

In your bones when

When the fire takes over

- *Unstoppable*, ATLAS

~*~

“Darcy, would you come in here a moment?” Talia called as she darted by, chasing Cora through the house. Darcy skidded to a stop and peered dubiously into Talia’s office. Andrew, Peter, and Deaton sat around the enormous mahogany desk with serious expressions.

Talia nudged her gently through the door and closed it. “It’s nothing bad, Darcy. Just a couple of things that we need to discuss with you. Privately,” Talia called, eyeing the door. There was a thump and a giggle from outside, followed by scampering feet as Cora ran off.

Darcy sat next to Andrew, trying not to fidget. Talia returned to her chair and smiled at Darcy. “You’ve been doing very well with your training lately. Deaton has brought up a good point, one we’ll get to in a moment. First, I wanted to ask you how your friend Erica was doing.”

Confusion overshadowed her nerves. “Um… Ok? She’s doing ok. I guess. Well…” She looked around the room, baffled. “Her medications aren’t working like they’re supposed to, so she’s having problems with unpredictable seizures.” Clarity hit her like a bolt of lightning. “Oh. Oh! Is this about…”

Talia nodded and leaned forward. “We’ve talked it over and have agreed to offer the bite to Erica. I’ve also heard some of the reports from her hospital visits.” She smiled at Darcy’s suspicious stare. “Being a werewolf has its perks, occasionally. The point is, Erica isn’t getting any better. She has a life-long illness that Deaton and I agree could be cured with the bite.”

“And she is a good candidate for the bite,” Peter interjected. “She’s strong, emotionally. She hasn’t let this illness slow her down or overtake her life. Those are good traits that will help the transformation.”

Hope lit inside Darcy’s chest. Darcy hated seeing Erica overshadowed by her illness, hated to watch her friend suffer. “So I can talk to her about all this?” She asked eagerly. Darcy quickly realized the difficulty of having friends that she had to hide so much from. “And what about Boyd?”
Talia frowned. “What about Boyd?”

Darcy hesitated, but her instincts were firm. “Boyd is one of my best friends. I can’t leave him in the dark about this, not if Erica’s going to be in on the secret. He’d feel excluded.” She scowled. It sounded so childish, but Darcy knew it would damage their friendship irreparably if he was left out of this.

Talia and the others exchanged glances. She nodded slowly. “It is possible for us to expand. He can take the bite if he wants to, but either way, the Hale pack has room to grow.”

There was a pang in Darcy’s chest. She cleared her throat and asked Deaton, “Didn’t you tell me hunters monitor werewolves to make sure they aren’t turning people?”

Deaton inclined his head. “I did. However, the Hales are a well-respected, powerful, and centuries-old family. They are able to turn people because Talia is powerful enough to control newly turned werewolves with little effort. Hunters are also aware of the Hale’s… discretion.”

Because sharing the secret of those creatures that go bump in the night was punishable by death. Secrecy was their greatest ally.

“So when can we tell them?” Darcy asked.

Peter, lounging in his chair, smiled at her. “Talia and Andrew will approach their families to discuss this. You and I have other plans.”

“We do?”

“There’s another pack in the next county over,” Andrew told her. “One we are closely allied with. You may have heard us discuss their Alpha, Satomi, before.” Darcy nodded. She’d heard brief references and stories of the female Alpha with a spine of steel.

“Satomi has expressed an interest in meeting you,” Talia said. Her expression remained as neutral as Deaton’s. Darcy reflected her foster mother’s composure. She straightened in her chair and folded her hands in her lap.

“You’ll have to start building relationships with other packs. Start a network, so no one can accuse us of trying to hide you away,” Peter drawled. Darcy furrowed her brow.

“How do I do that?”

“Offer your assistance with their disputes or concerns. You’re certainly capable of setting up wards that packs would pay fortunes to have.” Deaton smiled at her wide eyes. “And you’re a spark. That means you can tie the energy required for the wards into their land or pack. Druids are forced to use a nemeton or the earth’s magic to fuel these wards, but you aren’t hindered by this. Packs will pay a great deal for security from threats that you can help them avoid.”

“They pay me?” Darcy wrinkled her nose.

“If you want.” Talia shrugged. “You have a trust fund, of course, but if you wish to be paid for these jobs, packs certainly will. Some sparks used to do it that way. Others traded favors.”

“How do I do that?” Darcy asked, interested.

“Favors, alliances, you name it. Many packs aren’t big or stable enough to have an emissary. Oftentimes a high-ranking wolf is appointed to negotiate on behalf of their pack. So you can see why
a spark warding their land would be invaluable to them,” Peter explained. “Sparks would offer their
sic services in return for a favor in the future. There would be conditions, of course, and long
negotiations to come to an agreement, but it was a very effective way to network. To gain allies.”

“Allies? For just me?” She shifted in her seat, unsure.

“Yes. It’s very important that you are seen as an ally to the Hales, not as operating on behalf of the
pack. You’re a separate entity, one beginning a connection with packs and supernaturals all across
the country. The world, eventually,” Talia said.

“The world?” Darcy squeaked.

“Yes. Travel is a big part of being a spark. There are people all over the world who need your help.”
Talia smiled at Darcy’s expression. “Satomi will only be the beginning.”

“And she’s an excellent Alpha to be allied with. Her pack is a couple towns over. They’re close,
stable, and not harboring any secret desire to kidnap a spark,” Peter said seriously. Darcy rolled her
eyes at him.

“When do we go?” She asked.

Peter’s eyes sharpened. “Soon. Your fall break starts tomorrow. We leave in the morning.” Darcy
swallowed hard but nodded in agreement. She wished Derek were here with his quiet, unrelenting
support. He was away, though, traveling with the school’s basketball team.

“And we will meet with Erica’s family,” Andrew said. “Boyd you can introduce to this after Erica
makes her decision.” He ruffled Darcy’s hair and stood. “It’s been entirely too quiet out there. I think
I’ll go track down my daughter.” He stepped out of the office, leaving the door open.

“Times are changing,” Peter murmured with a sinister tone. Talia smacked the back of his head on
her way out the door. Deaton followed, masterfully hiding his amusement as Peter snarled and darted
after her. The empty room was oddly heavy without them.

Darcy was quiet. She felt it, too. A sense that they had all been teetering on a knife’s edge for a while
now. She wondered what would finally send them over.

~*~

“Now, remember, don’t be fooled. Satomi’s the sharpest wolf I’ve ever met, as sneaky as-”

“You?” Darcy asked. She raised her brow at Peter’s answering smirk.

“Well, I certainly like to think so.” He turned the car off the highway.

“Ugh, stop talking.” The more he said, the worse she felt. Darcy was almost 15 years old. She didn’t
know how to handle alliances and treaties. Peter’s hundreds of lessons on the subject were swirling
around in her head in one giant, jumbled mess.

“You’ll be fine, Darce. I’ll be with you every step of the way,” Peter said as he pulled into a long,
winding driveway. Darcy tapped the runes on the inside of her forearm. They lit with golden warmth
before fading away. Her scent and heartbeat effectively hidden from keen werewolf ears and noses,
Darcy settled into the seat with her eyes closed and took slow, measured breaths. She’d never admit
this to him, but Deaton’s lessons in meditation did more for her control than she’d ever imagined.

“Ready?” Peter asked softly. Darcy opened her eyes right as the pack house came into view. It was
large and sprawling, nestled at the edge of the woods much like the Hale house. A short Asian woman stepped outside the house to stand between the front columns, patiently waiting as Peter parked behind the other cars in the driveway.

Darcy took one last, careful breath before sliding out of the car. Peter met her at the front of the car and swiped a reassuring hand down her back. Satomi waited, dark eyes trained on Darcy as they approached.

“Satomi, so nice to see you again,” Peter said. He bowed his head respectfully.

“Don’t sass me, boy.” Darcy fought a smile. It disappeared when Satomi turned to her. “Well met, spark.”

“Well met, Alpha,” Darcy responded. She tried not to look as nervous as she felt.

“We have a great deal to discuss,” Satomi told her with a friendly smile. “Let’s take a walk, shall we?” She stepped closer to Darcy, motioning towards the forest. Darcy turned. Peter moved to follow.

Satomi pinned him in place with a look. “It’s time your little bird learned to fly. Let her.” Peter scowled but obeyed after a nod from Darcy.

Satomi patted Darcy on the arm. “Now, help an old woman on a walk through the woods.” Darcy side-eyed her in disbelief as the other woman rested her hand on Darcy’s forearm. Satomi just sent her a sly smile and a wink. She waited until they were out of Peter’s earshot, ambling through the bright forest.

“I’ve wanted to meet you for a very long time, Miss Hale.”

Darcy looked away. “Lewis,” she corrected firmly. “My last name is Lewis.”

Satomi hummed but said nothing.

“Did you want to meet me because of what happened with Kate Argent?” She’d learned from Deaton that that night had been felt for miles by other magic users. Druids, he’d explained, possessed an earth magic that connected them to the land and, if present, a nemeton. A spark connecting with a nemeton was something like stabbing a metal fork directly into an electrical outlet. Only, this outlet connected land and magic for thousands of miles.

Subtlety had never been Darcy’s strong point.

Satomi sighed. “No. Though I suppose that event has haunted you for quite some time.” Darcy’s shoulders slumped. Satomi patted her arm as they strolled along the well-worn path. Flower buds scattered through the grass and pines, awaiting some unseen signal to transform.

“Magic is a beautiful, deadly creature. People fear the unknown, and very few grasp the concept of magic in its entirety. You are a creature of magic. So few understand what you are, what you are capable of.”

“Myself included,” Darcy grumbled.

Satomi laughed. “Welcome to the life of a spark. It certainly is not an easy path.” As Satomi stepped confidently through the woods, Darcy wondered if hand on her arm was to keep her from falling on her face. She’d probably heard the training stories already. Werewolves were a bunch of gossips.
"You have come very far in such a short time," Satomi continued. "So many are interested to see who you will turn out to be."

Darcy grimaced. "No pressure, right?"

"Your life has been shaped by a number of strong, intelligent men and women from all kinds of backgrounds. Hunters, ‘wolves, humans, sparks."

"Spark," Darcy corrected. "The only other spark I’ve only known was my mother."

Satomi shook her head. "Oh, no. When you ended the reign of a homicidal tyrant with one of the most powerful names in supernatural history, people took notice. No one had taken a stand like that in years, too aware of the Argent reputation," she said gravely. "Your actions that night gave many of us hope that things could be the way they used to be- when sparks were free to roam without being hunted down."

Darcy considered that for a moment. She felt as though Satomi was feeding her bits of information, just to see whether she’d put it together. "Have other sparks come to Beacon Hills? After I came?"

"Word gets around," Satomi said. "There’s a network all around the world, and sparks are very much attuned to it. They especially want to know what you’ll come to be."

Darcy thought of the world they lived in, of the uncertain future she faced. "Will they help? If I ask?"

"That remains to be seen. Some will, I’m sure. Especially those that knew your mother. Others will take some convincing."

"People always want something," Darcy murmured.

"Of course they do. But that isn’t always a bad thing," Satomi said.

Darcy eyed her, surprised. "What do you mean?"

"Some just want hope. They want a future, the promise of a friend, the strength of an ally." Satomi led her past a small, serene creek. Birds chirped above their heads.

“And what do you want?” Darcy felt brave enough to ask.

Satomi studied Darcy’s face closely for a moment. "Oh, a little of all that, I suppose."

Darcy thought for a moment. "I don’t know how much hope I can offer, but I can promise a friendship."

Satomi squeezed her arm. "The hope is there, too, Darcy. It’s a part of the friendship, and it’s one of the greatest gifts you can give."

“Not the alliance with a powerful spark,” Darcy said wryly. She was surprised when Satomi shook her head.

“No. What matters isn’t the magic, it’s who you are without it. And you, Darcy Lewis, you are smart, brave, and honest.” She tapped the runes hidden beneath Darcy’s sleeve on her opposite arm. "This is an interesting rune, don’t you think? Very clever, to hide the sound of a heartbeat."

But not the heartbeat itself, Darcy realized. She stared, stunned, at Satomi’s hand resting on her arm, so close to Darcy’s pulse. It didn’t matter that the rune hid the sound of her heartbeat. Satomi had been reading her physical reactions all along, and Darcy never once recognized the ploy.
“Perceptions are an important tool, I’ve always said,” Satomi told her.

Darcy couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled out of her. “Peter told me you were sneaky.”

“Being quick and clever has saved me more times than I can count.” She gave Darcy’s arm a friendly pat. They wandered quietly for a few minutes. Darcy found herself finally relaxing in the other woman’s company.

She found herself mulling over everything Satomi shared with her, both with words and body language. “Alpha Satomi, did you know my mom?” She knew she’d guessed correctly when Satomi grinned at her.

“I did. She is the spark responsible for warding my pack’s home.”

Darcy sucked in a breath. “Did you trade her for it?” She asked hesitantly.

Satomi squeezed her hand, no doubt guessing Darcy’s thoughts. “She was at MIT during that time,” Satomi said. “Your mother requested a monetary payment for the wards. It paid most of her college tuition, I believe. Had I known the threat she faced, and her child, I would have helped her, alliance or no.”

Darcy recalled a soft hoodie with MIT across the chest. Remembered worn sleeves and a fraying hem. She imagined her mother at 20 years old, trading her magic for a college tuition. She saw a woman with hope and faith in her future. Darcy wished the image were a memory. Her mother had been terrified and exhausted since the first day Darcy could remember her face.

“I never really got the chance to know her,” Darcy whispered. She swiped at her eyes. “By the time I was old enough to remember, she was just afraid all the time.” Because Anna Lewis stumbled across Kate Argent in Boston when Darcy was only three years old. She’d escaped that night, barely, and they remained on the run until the day Kate caught up to them.

“I only knew her for a short time,” Satomi told her. “A summer, while she warded my territory and stayed in our home while working. She had a bright laugh and was one of the most brilliant individuals I have ever met. You have her eyes.” Darcy sniffed. “I regret that you have suffered so much in your young life. I fear more challenges still face you.” She stopped and turned to Darcy. “I would like to offer the support of the Ito pack, so you know you will never face these trials alone.”

‘People always want something,’ Darcy thought again.

But she didn’t think Satomi wanted to hurt or manipulate her. The woman was sly, but she was straightforward with Darcy in a way that few were. Darcy met Satomi’s gaze. What did Satomi want, then? Darcy though hard, mind spinning. Satomi waited patiently as Darcy studied her.

Finally, Darcy offered her hand. Satomi grasped her forearm. Darcy returned the gesture, wrapping her fingers around the hard muscle of Satomi’s arm. She stood tall, shoulders back and head high.

“Alpha Satomi, I accept your offer of an alliance. I will hold no single allegiance above another and will abide by the Code. I swear to uphold these truths in all that I do.” It wasn’t quite what Peter coached her to say, but Darcy could see the approval on Satomi’s face.

“Sentinel Lewis—” Darcy started in shock at the traditional honorary title—“I welcome you as friend and ally. I swear to honor this agreement for as long as our alliance holds.” She released Darcy’s arm.

Darcy took a deep breath. The air felt different, thick and anticipatory. She felt eyes upon her, but her
spark didn’t react to anyone nearby.

“Excellent,” Satomi said with a satisfied nod. “Brace yourself, Darcy. Once word gets out that a spark is active again, you’ll never see the end of meeting requests. I would suggest running these requests by the Hales, myself, or Deaton before accepting any. Even with your selected guards, these meetings can go sideways very quickly.”

“Guards?” Darcy asked. She followed Satomi back towards the pack house.

“You are not quite fully trained,” Satomi explained. “After the Fae created those demonic nightmares, sparks stopped traveling alone. It became too dangerous, and their allies didn’t want to risk the spark’s life, either. They often sent along a ‘wolf or Druid to act as a guard for the spark while traveling. Before they went into hiding, anyway. Packs quickly became too possessive of sparks to cooperate with each other,” she tsked. Satomi leapt over a fallen tree with unnatural grace. “Selfish bastards, all of them.” Darcy stumbled along behind her.

“Their selfishness brought the spark’s downfall. Many of the smaller packs severed alliances when the Fae grew angry about the sparks’ power. They couldn’t risk the Fae targeting them, too. And so instead of facing the threat together and protecting our friends and allies, the packs crumbled. By the time we stopped fighting each other over the sparks, half of them had been dragged off by the Ak’ma and tortured to death.” Darcy shivered at the name. Her eyes darted between the shadows in the forest and she stepped a little closer to Satomi.

“Those demons are the most horrifying creature I’ve ever laid eyes on,” Satomi told her. “I hope to the gods you never meet one.”

“The Fae hate sparks. One day they’ll send one after me,” Darcy said. She’d made her peace with that. Better to know what was coming.

But that didn’t mean she wasn’t afraid.

“Then you train, and you train hard. You have the family to support you, and I am only the first of your allies. We’re going to do things right this time. This new generation of sparks will be the strongest the world has ever seen. When you find them, and you will, remember the strength of a united front.” Satomi led them through the trees, the pack house in sight.

“I will,” Darcy murmured. She felt the threads of fate tightening around her, a certainty she’d never experienced before. One day, Darcy would find the others. She’d make them strong again. And she would never leave anyone behind, no matter the cost.

“How the mother hen frets,” Satomi teased as they approached the house. Peter, pacing along the sidewalk, whirled around. He scowled at the Alpha.

“I wasn’t fretting.” Despite his words, Peter studied Darcy closely to ensure she was alright.

“Looks like fretting to me,” Darcy said. She shared a grin with Satomi.

“Oh, great, you’re friends now. Because that’s not terrifying at all.” Peter relaxed against the car, arms crossed. His eyes were pleased. “I take it the discussion went well?”

“You don’t get to keep her all to yourself anymore, if that’s what you mean. There’s so much I have to teach her,” Satomi said.

“Get in line.” Peter jerked his chin at Darcy. “C’mon, kid, I have to go pick up Laura from the airport. She’s home for the weekend. New York City is weeping in relief.”
I dare you to say that to her face,” Darcy told him. Satomi chuckled and turned to Darcy.

“I’m honored to call you a friend and ally, Darcy Lewis. We’ll meet again soon.” It wasn’t a suggestion, Darcy knew. As allies, she would have to work to maintain the relationship with the pack and Alpha.

“Soon,” Darcy agreed. She waved and let Peter herd her into the car.

“I’m proud of you,” Peter said when they were close to home. “Satomi likes you. She’s an excellent judge of character and a hard woman to win over, but you gained her respect all on your own.”

“Thanks,” Darcy mumbled. She smiled out the window. “You were right. She’s sneaky.”

Peter laughed. “The wiliest Alpha that ever lived. Take notes, Darce. She’s a good one to learn from. Now, get out before I’m late to pick up Laura.” He playfully pushed at her until she obeyed, stepping out of the car. He sped off, leaving her in front of the house.

Darcy shook her head and turned to collect the shreds of clothing in the yard, likely from Talia’s abrupt shift or another of Cora’s tantrums. “And they wonder why the town has so many rumors about them,” Darcy muttered. She eyed the tiny teeth marks in the remains of a sweatshirt. Yep. Definitely Cora.

Movement caught her eye and she turned to see Chris’s black SUV cruising down the driveway. Darcy waved and waited for him to park. She wondered idly if he’d planned his arrival. Chris greeted her with a hug. “I hear the talk with Satomi went well.”

“How- I’ve been home for like, 20 minutes!” Darcy protested.

“That long?” Chris asked, cryptic as ever. He motioned towards the deck. They sat in the ridiculously comfortable chairs.

“You’re the worst,” Darcy sighed. He just smiled, resting his elbows on his knees. Darcy tossed the shred’s on the table. Chris blinked down at them and very obviously decided not to ask.

“Darcy.”

She sat up, the smile slipping off her face. “What? What is it?”

“I wanted to talk to you about something. Something I want you to think about before you give me an answer. Okay?” His gaze was intense. Darcy nodded.

“There have been reports from Santa Cruz. People disappearing at night, a few found ripped to pieces days or weeks later. Most still haven’t been found. Police have no leads, no suspects.” Chris rubbed his chin. “I have a few.”

“You’re going to go track it down? And you want to know if I’ll come, too?” Darcy guessed. It wasn’t hard to see where this was leading.

Chris nodded. “Yes.”

“Why now?”

“Because I think you’re ready. There’s nothing more for you to learn at this point, not until you face a real-world situation like this. Sparks used to participate in hunts like these. One day, you might be expected to also. I want you to be prepared for any possibility.” Chris sat back and sighed. “I don’t
like exposing you to these things, but this is something I can’t leave you unprepared for. And I want you to understand why what I do is necessary. Hunts started for a reason, Darcy. There are things out there that prey on innocent people and no one else is going to stop them.”

He gave her time to think, not once pressuring her into an answer.

“Who’s going with you?” She finally asked.

“Will Blake, from the sheriff’s office.”

“Your cousin, right?” Darcy met him briefly a couple weeks ago, when Chris met up with Blake to discuss sketchy hunting cover-ups.

“Yes.”

“I’ll go with you,” Darcy said, just as a shifted Talia emerged from the trees. Andrew followed a second later, carrying a sleeping Cora. Andrew winked at Darcy as he walked by them. Talia shifted back to human, wholly unconcerned with her nudity.

Chris very carefully kept his eyes on the Alpha's suspicious face as she approached. Talia’s eyes, still Alpha red, darted between them. “Am I interrupting?”

Darcy shuffled around in the giant bin behind her chair and offered her foster mother one of Andrew’s shirts. Talia kept her eyes on Chris as she buttoned up the flannel.

Chris didn’t back down. “I’m going to Santa Cruz.”

Talia nodded once in understanding. She stepped behind Darcy’s seat, trailing a hand down her hair. Darcy wondered if all the scent-marking from her foster family meant she smelled permanently of wolf. “And you want to take Darcy with you?”

Chris seemed to brace himself. “Yes, I do. It’s time, Talia. We can’t keep her sheltered forever.”

“I want to go,” Darcy said. She looked up at the Alpha. “I want to help.”

Talia frowned. “You’re taking Blake?” Chris nodded. “And you think the three of you will be enough?”

“Yes. Darcy’s strong enough to deal with anything we might come across, and Blake and I have the experience to back her up.”

Talia was silent for a long moment before answering. “You check in every 12 hours, or I come after you. The second you think you might need help, you call and wait for me to get there. You take your staff with you and keep a marker on you at all times. And for the love of God, don’t tell Peter,” Talia ordered.

Darcy tugged a marker out of her pocket and wiggled it at Talia. “Always armed,” she said. Talia smiled down at her reluctantly. Worry still creased lines around her eyes.

“Go pack, Darce. We need to leave tonight,” Chris told her. He eyed Talia cautiously. “You know I’ll keep her safe.”

Darcy lost Talia’s answer as she darted upstairs. Andrew slouched in her doorway as she whirled around her room, throwing clothes and magical theory books into a duffle she’d stolen from Derek.

“You’re sure about this?” He asked.
“I’m sure.” Darcy’s talk with Satomi woke something inside of her. A desire to live up to the legends, to be worthy of the Sentinel title. Satomi’s absolute faith in Darcy, despite hardly knowing her, bolstered her confidence. For so long she’d doubted herself, her powers, her strength. For too long.

“Okay. We support your decision, Darce. We’ll just worry until you’re home safe.” Andrew wrapped her in a tight hug. “Be careful.”

“I will.”

Blake met them at the edge of town. He was tall and well-muscled, with dirty blond hair and blue eyes. Darcy almost didn’t recognize him without his deputy’s uniform. “Darcy.” He nodded to her. Blake leaned in to eye the overflowing backseat. Darcy had shoved her staff in the car with her duffle and Chris’s three bags. “I’ll just follow you,” he said to Chris.

The drive was about four hours long. Chris let Darcy pick the music and tolerated her singing. “This is what you get for bringing a teenage girl along,” she told him as she replayed her Disney playlist for the third time in a row. Chris only sighed.

The motel was just on the right side of shady. Darcy didn’t care- she’d slept in much worse. Chris booked her a room adjoining with one for him and Blake to share. Blake picked them up burgers on his way into town. They sat around the lopsided table in their room, studying reports.

“Look, see this?” Blake pointed to the timeline they’d constructed from newspaper clippings and rumors he’d picked up at the restaurant. Darcy squinted at it. “See how the disappearances started more spread out, over months and weeks?”

She nodded. “Then it changes to every few days, and now to one disappearance almost every day.” Blake nodded and handed her the ketchup.

“What does that tell you?”

“That it’s hungry? Or maybe it’s getting more confident?” Darcy guessed. They still didn’t know what they were dealing with- Chris studied the autopsy reports across the table. He refused to let her see the crime scene photos.

Blake nodded. “Exactly. You’re a natural,” he said, nudging her. Darcy smiled shyly down at the table. She cocked her head, the smile fading.

“The disappearances are all over town, though. And the bodies that are discovered are found randomly. How are you supposed to track it?” Darcy asked. She studied the map pinned to the table with a pair of knives. They’d marked the location of every victim’s last known location in black and where the few bodies were found in red.

“We have to find the link,” Chris said. He leaned over and tapped a black dot. “The link between victims, or the link between where they’d been when they were taken.”

“What about the bodies?” Blake asked.

Chris shook his head. “No defensive wounds, from what the coroner could determine. It’s like they stayed completely still while this thing ripped them to pieces. No drugs or poisons detected in the bloodstream, nothing else to suggest it was a chemical effect.”

“So… what? What makes people freeze like that?” Darcy asked. She was already reaching for her bestiary. It was massive, filled with notes from her lessons with Deaton and Peter. She’d made Derek
draw the pictures for every creature in it.

Darcy flipped through the book, frowning. What had the ability to freeze humans in place? Better yet, what possessed the claws necessary to tear a person apart? Her book had a depressing amount of possibilities.

Chris continued flipping through the autopsy reports while Blake updated their map with ‘possible’ kills. Darcy eyed the bag at Chris’s feet, filled with guns.

“I know you guys are arms dealers and all, but isn’t that overkill?” She pointed to the bag. Chris glanced down at it and smiled at her.

“I know it looks like overkill, but there’s no telling if this thing will go down easy. I like to be prepared.”

“You should see what I’ve got in my bag,” Blake said. “Stark’s weapons are a class of their own.”

“Tony Stark?” Darcy asked, confused.

“Oh, yeah. If you ever need serious firepower, find yourself a Stark weapon.”

“I thought his government contract made him agree to only sell that stuff to them.” Darcy’s government teacher had Opinions about weapons manufacturing. And Stark Industries was a titan of the weapon manufacturing world.

Blake smirked at Chris. “We’re Argents. Our family has... connections.”

Uncertain, Darcy glanced to Chris. He didn’t look at her, just sent Blake a warning glare. Blake rolled his eyes and turned back to the map.

Darcy’s eyes started to droop an hour later. She startled when Chris’s hand touched her shoulder. “Go get some sleep, Darce. We’ll go out tomorrow and see what else we can find.” She shuffled off to her room, closing the door with a wave goodnight to them both.

The following morning, she woke early. Darcy meditated until she heard the men stirring next door. She dressed in jeans and a long sleeved t-shirt to ward of the chilly breeze. Her well-worn running shoes rested beside the door; she tugged them on and tapped on the adjoining door. It swung open to reveal a sharp-eyed Chris. Their bathroom door was closed and Darcy could hear the shower running.

“Let’s go get breakfast and ride around, hm?” Chris instructed her to slide her staff into the backseat again. She tapped the marker in her pocket when he raised an eyebrow in question.

She stared out the window. The city was packed with people, milling around in the cool morning air. How different it was here, she mused. So many deaths, so many people slipping through the cracks of the city. No one seemed aware that even now, they were being stalked, selected as the monster’s next victim. Someone else out there would die soon, if Darcy and Chris weren’t fast enough to catch it first.

“I’m ready. What’s Blake going to do?” She asked as Chris started the car.

“He’s going to meet with some of his connections in the city. See if we can’t get any more information to go on.”

“Other hunters?” Darcy asked. Surely others would come to find the source of all the death.
“Some, yes. Others are just people who… know things.”

“You are so cryptic. It makes me want to smack you sometimes,” Darcy sighed.

Chris laughed. “You sound like Allison.”

Darcy bit her lip. Allison, Chris’s daughter. The dark-headed girl, studying them with curious eyes that night. “How come Allison isn’t on this hunt, too?” She dared ask.

Chris glanced at her in surprise. He flexed his fingers on the wheel. “Victoria and I… We’ve agreed to keep Allison out of this life as best we can, for as long as we can. It’s not safe for her to be involved.”

“Because she’s human?” Darcy asked.

“Yes. But we also want her to have a chance at a life outside of this.” He motioned outside, where crowds drifted along the sidewalks. Where, somewhere, death lurked.

“She hates me,” Darcy blurted. She blinked. The words just slipped out of her mouth. She hadn’t even realized that she’d been thinking of their last meeting, when Darcy stopped by the Argent house one afternoon to return a copy of the Argent bestiary Chris loaned her. Victoria, she’d ensured, was at work. But Allison was home sick that day from the private school she went to outside of Beacon Hills. Darcy couldn’t forget the resentment burning in the other girl’s gaze.

She wondered if Allison hated her because her father shared this secret world with Darcy, and Allison was kept firmly outside. Darcy couldn’t imagine having a parent treat another girl as a daughter, training and teaching her all the things that were Allison’s birthright.

“Allison doesn’t hate you, Darcy. She just… she doesn’t know what she doesn’t know. She only sees the pieces of this life; it hasn’t come together for her yet,” Chris said.

“But don’t you want her prepared for this life, when she does find out?”

“She’s still young. I don’t want to be teaching her to kill at this age. Besides, she’s a gymnast on her school team. And a nationally ranked archer already. Those will be the foundation of her training later, should she choose it.”

Darcy was silent as Chris went through the drive-through and ordered them breakfast. Allison’s resentment made sense. It just didn’t sit well with her.

Chris had her pull out a copy of the map they’d drawn. “We’ll drive through these places first, see if there’s anything the others missed.”

Darcy was glad for her running shoes around hour three of the lamest Santa Cruz tour in history. She studied the map, absentmindedly following Chris’s back as he walked the scene of the latest disappearance. Darcy stumbled over a manhole cover and scowled. “Chris, nothing looks like the other locations. People disappeared all over this city at random, and end up dead in the woods.” She turned to glare at the Santa Cruz mountains in the distance. “And there’s no way we can check every place the victims were found in that hot mess.”

“I know it’s frustrating, Darce. But there’s always something connecting deaths like this. We just don’t see it yet,” he said. Chris’s phone rang. He snapped it to his ear. “Argent.” He listened for a moment. Darcy wondered if there was a rune for listening in on conversations. Her stupid werewolves did it all the time. She squinted at his face when it stilled. “Where? Alright.” He glanced over at Darcy. “We’ll check the last known location. You take the crime scene.”
He hung up. The grim line of his mouth told her what she wanted to know. “Another one?”

He nodded and ushered her to the car. “The victim was a young woman. She left the bar late last night after her shift and never made it home. Hikers found her body an hour ago.” Chris drove back towards a busy part of town, an area they’d passed earlier that morning. He parked on the street and pointed to a flickering neon sign. “That’s the bar. The Boar’s Head.”

Darcy kept close to him, twirling her marker nervously between her fingers. Chris stepped into the shadows of the alley behind the bar. He studied it from the mouth of the alley first. “Nothing. You?” She shook her head. “Alright. Let’s walk it. Look for anything unusual, anything that could give us a clue to how this monster is taking its victims.”

The alley was quiet as a tomb. Darcy could still hear the crowd bustling by behind her, but her focus was on the trash littering the ground, the heavy solemnity to the air. She winced when her foot rattled the sewer grate, the sound like a gunshot. Finding nothing, Darcy stepped back and watched the crowd as Chris continued his exploration.

Chris checked his phone. “Nothing from Blake yet.” He gave a tired sigh. Darcy handed him the map at his request. He set it on the dumpster lid and scanned it. Darcy wrinkled her nose at him. Her eyes fell to the trash at her feet again. Food, wrappers, papers. Couldn’t people clean up after themselves? Her gaze swept over the sewer grate and she frowned. Darcy looked at the scuff mark on the toe of her shoe from where she’d tripped earlier.

She drifted closer to the grate. Darcy peered in. She noted the dark abyss below, the quiet alleyway, the faint trickling of water. Darcy touched the grate carefully with a foot. It wobbled, loose in its place.

“Chris.”

Maybe it was the tone of her voice. Maybe it was the sound of the wobbling metal. But Chris was at her side at once, staring. “You tripped over one of these at the other site,” he said. She nodded. Chris crouched down and tugged at the grate. It slid easily away, revealing the dark descent to the sewage tunnels beneath the city.

“This could explain how it’s getting to people all over the city,” Darcy said. “And these tunnels could lead anywhere.”

“The Summit Tunnel,” Chris said. He rubbed a hand over his hair. “Blake mentioned them earlier. The body was found near the entrance at the foot of the mountains.” His phone beeped. “Shit. Another missing person’s report was just filed with the police.”

“But it just took someone last night,” Darcy whispered. She stared at the opening.

Chris stood. “Well, we can’t exactly go wandering around down there to find it. Let’s go back to the hotel, do some research. This was a hell of a catch, Darcy.”

The night passed like the previous one. Blake still hadn’t returned by the time Darcy discovered the articles on the Summit Tunnel. Chris paid the delivery man and dropped a pizza on the table.

“What’d you find?”

“They were known as the Wrights Tunnel, after the property owner. It was constructed as part of the South Pacific Coast Rail Road in the 1870s, designed to connect Santa Cruz to Alameda,” Darcy reported. She scanned down the page. “Long story short, the construction went sideways. They used Chinese laborers for the digging so they wouldn’t have to pay much. Dicks,” she grumbled.
“Methane gas was built up, though, and most of them left after passing out from inhaling it and the fires it started. They made it 2,700 feet inside the mountain before one of the blasts ignited a massive pocket of gas. 32 people died from that explosion and the one following it.” Darcy waved off the slice of pizza Chris offered. “Eventually, they managed to complete the tunnel. It’s believed that the tunnel is cursed, due to those deaths and the ones following in a freak train accident. In 1942, the US Army sent demolition teams and closed all of the tunnel entrances.”

Darcy frowned at the laptop screen. “The sewer tunnels wouldn’t connect to this tunnel in the mountain, though, would it?”

“Likely not. Unless, of course, this monster made its own,” Chris answered. He glanced at his silent phone again. “Pull up the pictures we took of the kidnapping sites. Let’s see if there are sewer entrances at those, too.”

Half an hour later, they had marked each site with the location of a sewer grate. Darcy watched as Chris reached for his phone and growled when no notifications from Blake showed.

“Where was he last?” She asked. Chris showed her the last text from Blake. ‘Going 2 check tunnel. Will keep u posted.’ She looked at the timestamp.

“That was hours ago,” she said quietly. Dread pumped through her veins. Darcy met Chris’s eyes, seeing the same trepidation she felt reflected back at her.

“I’m going to look for him. You stay here in case he comes back,” Chris said. He moved to his bag and began arming himself. Weapons disappeared under his jacket, knives slipped into heavy combat boots. The line of his shoulders drew tight.

“No way! You are not going by yourself- we don’t even know what this thing is!” Darcy argued. She shoved her feet in her shoes, pulling her hair up and out of her face.

“Darcy, I am not taking you with me. It’s way too dangerous.”

She shoved an extra marker in her back pocket, snatching up her staff resting by the door. The power in her veins surged, rising to the threat. Darcy knew her eyes were threaded with the gold of her Spark when she turned to face Chris. “I can take care of myself. You’ve taught me all you can. You have to let me choose my own fights sooner or later.”

Chris stared at her for a long moment. Finally, he blew out a long breath. “Talia’s going to rip my spine out for this.” Darcy said nothing. “Fine. Fine! Let’s go.”

The SUV engine roared as they sped to the outskirts of town. The mountain loomed over them in the dark of the night. Her otter tattoo twisted anxiously around her wrist. Darcy gripped her staff and her pen, thinking hard. “I had it narrowed down to a couple things, I think. Just based off the tunnel thing and the kills.”

Chris glanced at her. “Any of those things require something specific to kill it?”

Darcy chewed on her lip. “I… No. No, I don’t think so.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” he muttered. The car skidded to a stop at the edge of the woods. Chris glanced down at the map. “Here. The tunnel entrance is this way.”

They trekked through the dark woods. Darcy scribbled a shield rune on her palm. She had a sick feeling in her stomach that it would be necessary. She nearly collided with Chris’s back when he suddenly stopped. Darcy stepped aside and stared at the black emptiness yawning ahead of them.
“There’s something very wrong with this place,” Darcy whispered. She adjusted her grip on the staff and swallowed hard.

“Stay close to me,” Chris said quietly. He pulled a gun out from under his jacket and started into the tunnel. The light from Chris’s flashlight was consumed by the absolute dark of the tunnel. It smelled like smoke and death between the damp walls.

They walked until the tunnel abruptly ended. Darcy studied the wall of earth brought down by the demolition crews when the tunnel was closed off. It was solid, impenetrable.

“Over here,” Chris whispered. He stood beside a small hole dug into the crease of the tunnel walls. Darcy inched over, heart racing. “I’ll go first. Wait for my okay.”

Darcy nodded. She watched him disappear into the dark. The air was dank. The tunnel entrance looked miles away now. She swore she could hear voices moaning in pain and fear.

Darcy nearly leapt out of her skin when Chris rasped the go-ahead. Hands trembling, Darcy crouched and felt her way through the small tunnel. It curved to the right, an arch that seemed to lead past the wall blasted down years ago. Chris’s hand stopped her, so close to the exit. He held a finger to his lips, eyes urgent.

Darcy peered past him and had to swallow a scream. In the eerie light of the abandoned tunnel before them, Darcy could see a twisted mass of bodies scattered throughout the cave. Bodies were thrown across the bones of the victims before them, gruesome and shredded. The stench of decay maded her gag silently, a hand pressed tightly over her mouth.

Chris tapped her arm softly and nodded across the tunnel. Darcy stifled a gasp. Blake was on the ground, not moving. Darcy watched his chest intently, relieved when his rib cage expanded with a shallow breath.

A crunch, followed by a wet tearing, had both Chris and Darcy freezing in place. Chris leaned out as slowly as he could, peering past the tunnel wall. Darcy could see a twisted mass of bodies scattered throughout the cave. Bodies were thrown across the bones of the victims before them, gruesome and shredded. The stench of decay maded her gag silently, a hand pressed tightly over her mouth.

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A crunch, followed by a wet tearing, had both Chris and Darcy freezing in place. Chris leaned out as slowly as he could, peering past the tunnel wall. Darcy could see the disgust and horror in his eyes. She took a deep breath and followed his gaze.

The creature crouched over another body, about halfway down the section of the tunnel that they could see. Large, taloned hands held the ribcage open as it feasted on the victim before it. To Darcy’s horror, she could see the lungs expand. The man was frozen in place, unmoving but for his breathing.

“He’s still alive,” she breathed. For now, anyway. Chris shifted his shoulders, just the slightest bit, and stilled when a small rock bounced off the tunnel wall and fell to the bones below. Darcy sucked in a breath as the creature’s head snapped up. It rose to its full height, sliding out of the shadows.

Its upper body was that of a human, though its skin was colored a sickly green. Snake eyes bore into the dark corners of the cavern, searching for the intruders. Darcy thought the hissing was coming from its fanged mouth, only to realize that the monster’s hair was not hair at all. The thick ropes falling from its head were *snakes*, writhing and hissing angrily. The monster’s midriff tapered into the thick, massive snake’s tail that was its lower body. It slid effortlessly over the bones of its prey, moving faster than Darcy thought possible.

“Get to Blake,” Chris said, and stepped into the tunnel. He raised his gun and fired, aiming for its head. The monster shrieked in rage. The mountain seemed to tremble around them. Darcy clattered over the bones and bodies, deliberately not looking down as Chris continued to fire.
“Darcy!” Chris shouted. She glanced over in time to see the hand, four venom-tipped claws reaching for her. Darcy reached for her spark and threw it into the rune on her palm. The monster rebounded off the shield with an enraged scream. It glowered and whirled around to spring across the room towards Chris, crossing the wide tunnel in a single leap.

Chris ducked to the side. He reloaded in the time it took the monster to turn again. The bullets didn’t slow it down. The monster reached him with a snarl. It whirled to dodge the knife that appeared in his hand. As it turned, the tail struck him hard across the chest. Chris was thrown into the wall. He slid to the ground with a groan, reaching for the gun that had fallen from his grip. The monster approached, talons outstretched. Chris glanced up and met its eyes. Darcy watched in horror as he seemed to freeze in place, unable to move. And suddenly, Darcy knew what they faced.

“Hey!” Darcy shouted. It turned its head, snake eyes gleaming in the dim light. Darcy spun her staff and let the spark shine through her eyes. “I know what you are.” Her voice echoed deep into the tunnel. The monster turned to face her, hissing. “Gorgon.” Darcy said as it slid its lethal body across the cavern. “Chris, bronze!”

The monster opened its mouth in a horrific grin. Its body coiled, ready to spring. Darcy waited, ready for the attack. Chris seemed to shake off the paralysis, reaching into his jacket again. The gorgon leapt for her. Had she not trained with werewolves that moved faster than any human alive, Darcy never would have been able to land the strike to the monster’s throat. Her staff slammed into the gorgon’s neck. It was thrown backwards, landing in a heap of bones.

Darcy followed through, hoping to give Chris time to find a better weapon. One that could cut this thing’s head off. She smacked aside reaching claws, ducking under its next swipe. Darcy felt her spark simmer in her eyes. She’d met this thing’s gaze once already, and it hadn’t affected her. Her spark wouldn’t let the gorgon’s sick magic hold her in place.

Darcy cried out as talons sliced her thigh. She staggered back, throwing up a shield. It hummed between them. Spark and monster faced each other across the shimmering veil of magic. Breathing hard, Darcy returned the gorgon’s challenging grin. Her spark burned under her skin. She’d never felt so awake.

“You’re going to have to do better than that,” she told it. Darcy dropped the shield. They both lunged, trading blows, snarling at each other. She was bleeding, limping, and exhausted, but bit by bit, Darcy drove the gorgon back. Back to the wall of the tunnel, where she’d crawled through. Back to the dark corners of the cavern.

Darcy waited until the gorgon was within his range before throwing another shield up. The gorgon’s strike glanced off of the raw power. It staggered back.

Chris struck, his knife halfway severing the gorgon’s neck with one blow. Darcy grimaced as the monster screamed in fury and pain, yellow-green blood spraying the surface of her shield. It slid down, smoking ominously. Chris drove the knife the rest of the way through the gorgon’s neck.

The head fell to the ground, rolling aside in the pile of bones. The snake hair went limp with one final hiss. Darcy waited until the body slumped over, lifeless, to drop the shield.

“Holy shit.” She staggered. Chris, arm wrapped gingerly around his ribs, limped over to her.

“Are you okay?” They chorused. Darcy laughed. Chris seemed concerned by the hysterical tinge to it. She shook her head at him. “I’ll be fine. What about you? Your ribs, are they broken?”
He winced when she poked at them. “Ouch, yes they’re broken.” He swatted her hand away. “C’mon, let’s check on Blake.”

They stepped carefully over to where Blake still lay. He had a deep wound on his head, which bled freely onto the ground. “Blake,” Chris rasped. He nudged the other man with his shoe. “Blake.”

His eyes opened, blurred with pain. “Gorgon,” he slurred.

“Yeah, we worked that one out for ourselves,” Chris muttered. Darcy snorted. “It’s dead. Get up, we need to get out of here.”

They helped Blake up as best they could and staggered to the small tunnel they’d crawled through. Chris stared at the hole with a grimace. “Hang on,” Darcy said. She pulled her marker out and quickly sketched a complicated healing rune on Chris’s hand. Drawing on the near-bottomless well of her magic, Darcy tapped the rune. They all watched as the rune glowed with the warm gold of her spark.

Seconds later, Chris took a deep breath and straightened. He rubbed his side in relief. “Thanks, Darce.”

She turned towards Blake. He quickly stepped back, shaking his head. “No. I’m fine.”

Darcy stared at him. “You’re bleeding all over this nightmare cave, dude.” Even as she watched, blood trickled down the side of his neck.

Blake waved her off. “Take care of yourself. This is going to be a reminder to watch where I’m going.”

“If you say so,” Darcy muttered. She drew a rune on the back of her hand, opposite the shield mark. Her spark flooded through it, sewing up the deep gouges on her thigh. She felt the light tickle of the smaller scratches and aches heal, too.

“What happened?” Chris asked Blake. He motioned for Darcy to go first through the small escape tunnel. Darcy listened intently as Blake described finding the Summit Tunnel, exploring the inside. He hadn’t seen the small opening until the Gorgon had slithered through it and grabbed him, pulling his feet out from under him.

“I was damn lucky that it was still feeding on the guy it caught earlier.” Blake’s voice echoed through the narrow space. Darcy crawled out of it, standing aside to wait for them. Chris emerged next. Blake pulled himself out last, wincing as he stood. “And that you two figured it out.”

“Thank Darcy,” Chris said as they made it to the Summit Tunnel mouth. “She’s the one that worked out how it was taking its victims.” Darcy couldn't help but glance back at the tunnel. It seemed to swallow all the light left in the forest, its yawning mouth menacing in the silent woods. She was glad to leave it behind.

Chris drove them back to the motel, shaking his head when Blake asked to stop for his car. “Not with that head wound.” He declined Darcy’s offer to heal it again.

“I can’t believe I was unconscious that whole fight,” Blake grumbled. He’d stumbled into the room and thrown himself on his bed. Darcy wrinkled her nose at him. He smelled like the rotting graveyard he’d been lying in.

Chris rolled his eyes. “Darcy had it covered.” He sent her an approving smile. “Your first hunt and you took on a Gorgon alone.”
“Yeah, it’s not like I’ll have nightmares forever about that place,” Darcy said. She shivered.

“We’ll head out first thing tomorrow,” Chris promised. “You’ll be safe at home again in no time.”

“Good. I have homework,” Darcy said. She still had two days of fall break left to do it, but Darcy was the Queen of Procrastination. Laura made her a crown and everything.

“Fuck’s sake,” Blake muttered, arm thrown over his eyes. Darcy glanced at him, frowning. Chris just shook his head when she looked to him. She shrugged and went to shower.

Her body was exhausted and she dropped into sleep the second her head hit her pillow. Her mind, though, replayed every horrific image of the tunnel. Darcy gave up the third time she jerked awake and added a few notes on her personal experience to the Gorgon section in the bestiary.

They dropped Blake at his car on their way out of town. He trailed them, honking his horn when they reached Beacon Hills and Chris turned towards the Hale house. Darcy eyed Chris as they neared the house. He tapped his fingers on the wheel. Peter would be back by now. He’d have learned where Darcy was, and who she was with.

“I’m proud of you, Darcy,” Chris finally said. He turned onto the Hale’s long, winding driveway. “You handled yourself better than most seasoned hunters I know, and this one wasn’t easy.”

“Honestly, I’m more concerned with Peter’s reaction,” she muttered. Chris winced. He said nothing more, only stepped out of the car as the door opened. Peter leaned against the porch rails, face emotionless.

“I take it your hunt was successful?” He asked smoothly.

“Oh, boy,” Darcy said quietly. She tugged her bag out of the car, gripping her staff tightly.

“It was,” Chris said, just as neutral. “It was a Gorgon responsible for the Santa Cruz murders.”

“You took her with you to face a Gorgon? And you didn’t think to discuss it with me first?” Peter asked sharply, straightening.

Chris rolled his shoulders. “She’s been preparing for this for years. We’ve been preparing her for this. She’s a spark, Peter. This is going to be her life one day. I know what’s out there- we both do. And I’m going to make sure there’s nothing she can’t handle, no situation she can’t get herself out of.”

Darcy wondered if it had always been this way, all the way back to the first spark. If being born a spark meant you were born with a target on your back, a price on your head.

She also wondered when these two idiots would stop using her as a buffer and sort their shit out already.

“Ugh, all this UST is going to make me puke,” Laura said from the doorway. Peter and Chris blanched.

Darcy squealed in delight and leaped up the steps to throw herself at her sister. “Laura!”

Laura laughed. “Hey, Trouble.” She wrapped Darcy in a tight hug, rubbing her cheek on Darcy’s hair.

“Quit it, weirdo.” Darcy squirmed.
“It’s not my fault, you don’t smell like me anymore,” Laura complained.

“I don’t even know where to start with that,” Darcy told her, rolling her eyes.

Laura let her go but kept an arm over Darcy’s shoulders. “C’mon, Darce, let’s go catch up while those two talk about their feelings,” Laura called over her shoulders. Darcy laughed and let her sister lead her into the house.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

SO excited for this and the following chapters, because now my Teen Wolf faves come in. And boy do I have plans for them.

I'll try to update Friday, if I can get this beast of chapter 7 finished. It's outlined and half-written, just already out of control length-wise.

Thank you for all your comments and kudos <3

They won't tell you fairytales
of how girls can be dangerous and still win.
They will only tell you stories
where girls are sweet and kind
and reject all sin.
I guess to them
it's a terrifying thought,
a red riding hood who knew exactly what she was doing
when she invited the wild in.
- Nikita Gill, Girls of the Wild

~*~

"I can't believe I'm saying this, but I wish I was going with you," Erica said. She sprawled across Darcy's bed and sulked. Darcy, standing half-naked in her closet, ripped a shirt from its hanger and tried it on. "Ugh!" She tugged it off and dropped it to the floor.

Erica just sighed heavily until Darcy finally turned to her. "You're only 6 months into your year off," Darcy pointed out. Erica finished her tests early their freshman year. She'd accepted the bite in early April and took to being a werewolf faster than any of them could believe. The Hales adored Erica and her unabashed joy in everything she did. She was awestruck with every new thing her body could do. The first full day she'd gone without a seizure, after hours of running and leaping and climbing, Erica sat down on the ground and wept. Relief, joy, it didn't matter. She was finally free of her illness.

Darcy smiled at her friend. "Besides, school is boring." She was taking a few AP classes this year with Boyd. And it was boring, mostly because she rarely felt challenged by her classes. The highlight of Darcy's day was her independent study at the end of the school day. Sophia was equally
thrilled to have an apprentice and Darcy was learning in leaps and bounds.

"Yeah, but I miss out on all the good stuff," Erica groaned.

"You mean the gossip?" Darcy asked dryly, eyeing her hips in the mirror. She threw another shirt to the ground in frustration. Erica rolled her eyes.

"Duh."

"It's only October." Darcy shrugged on the shirt Erica held out. "Not much has happened. There's a party next weekend at some freshman girl's house, two lacrosse players got into it over a girl and started a fight in the parking lot, and some guy crashed his bicycle into the Whittemore kid's Porsche, which caused a meltdown of epic proportions."

"Darcy! So much has happened, how could you not tell me these things!" Erica tossed her hands up. "You know I live on the drama."

"Yeah, it's why you get along so well with Peter."

Even Darcy could hear Peter's offended "Excuse me" from upstairs. She grinned at Erica. "I promise to keep you updated on all the drama at school. Now help me beat Derek to the Camaro; I called shotgun last night and he pretended he couldn't hear me."

One (brief) scuffle later, Darcy sat triumphantly in the passenger's seat. Andrew only shook his head at the sight of Derek pinned to the dirt by a beaming Erica and slid into the driver's seat. "I still don't see why I can't drive," Derek grumbled from the backseat after an undignified struggle. "I have my license!"

"Take that one up with your mother," Andrew said.

"Good luck with that," Darcy told Derek. "She loves this car too much to let you drive it."

"Laura drove it!" He protested.

"Laura loves it more than Talia does," Darcy countered. "Plus, I think Talia just got tired of Laura hotwiring it and sneaking out." Andrew's quiet chuckle confirmed her suspicions.

Derek tried to trip her on their way into the school. Darcy stuck her tongue out at him and promptly ran into Boyd. He ignored her flailing, instead scanning the parking lot. "Did you guys hear?"

"Hear what?" Derek asked distractedly, barely dodging Darcy's kick to his shins.

"My mom was called out last night. Some hikers found a body in the woods," Boyd told them. Darcy traded a glance with Derek. "It was cut in half."

Darcy grimaced. "Gross."

"They only found the bottom half of the body. It sounded like your kind of thing," Boyd said. He motioned awkwardly at Derek.

Boyd took the werewolf news with his usual nonchalance. "You aren't surprised?" Darcy asked when he'd only nodded at her. Boyd just shrugged. "Makes more sense than a cult. That's what my neighbors think the Hales are."

Laura loved that bit of information.
"What all did you hear?" Derek asked Boyd as they moved towards the school's entrance. Darcy trailed them, listening to the buzz of voices around them. She caught tidbits of information from kids whispering about the murder, likely all false. She watched their faces, wondering how they could all seem so excited about someone being murdered.

Her attention caught on a lanky boy with whiskey-brown eyes whose gaze followed Derek up the steps and into the school. She'd seen him before- noticed in brief moments like these how the boy seemed to watch Derek whenever their paths crossed.

The kid seemed to realize Darcy was watching him and flushed a dark red. He flailed around, colliding with his dark-headed friend beside him.

Curious, laughing to herself, Darcy jogged up the steps to follow her brother. She made a mental note to keep an eye on this kid and his apparent fascination with Derek.

Boyd had no other news, other than the police department's plan to scour the woods today for the other half of the body. Derek ran off to his first period art class; Darcy and Boyd made their way to AP Calculus. They sat at the front of the class, next to the beautiful redheaded girl who spared them a disdainful look. Lydia Martin, Darcy recalled. Only a freshman, but in nearly all of Darcy's AP classes. She hid all her returned test grades from the curious eyes around her, but Darcy had spotted the bolded '100' on Lydia's last Calc test.

She wondered what Lydia was hiding from.

Darcy managed to send Erica a text at lunch. 'Body found in woods?? What do adults say?'

Erica's response came 20 seconds later. 'talia w/ deaton now. A & P whispering about hunters b4 i came inside.'

Troubled, Darcy lifted her head and stared across the lunchroom at Derek. He was drawing at the table with his basketball teammates, not paying them any attention. 'Derek," Darcy said under her breath. "Subtle," Boyd muttered.

As Derek approached their table, Darcy noticed the same boy from earlier tracking his path across the lunchroom. She frowned. The look on his face was less infatuated and more searching. He looked away after a nudge from his friend.

"What is it?" Derek asked her lowly. She showed him Erica's text. "They haven't said anything about this."

Darcy nodded, grim.

"What does that mean?" Boyd asked, finally looking up from his book. He studied their faces. "Is there a reason they should've known about the body first?"

Darcy shrugged. "If it happened within our wards, I would have known. But I don't have the entire preserve warded- the more land, the harder to maintain the wards, and the more complicated they have to be. But the preserve still falls under Hale territory," she explained. "People being cut in half on Hale land could be someone trying to send a message." She sent a brief inquiry to Satomi and slid her phone back in her pocket, aware of Harris eyeing her suspiciously from the teacher's table.

Satomi didn't respond until Darcy was walking into Sophia's classroom. She stopped just inside the door and read the text, checking over her shoulder in case someone got too nosy.
Darcy- You are right to be concerned. I will send someone over with more information for you this afternoon. Do not go anywhere alone.’

Troubled, Darcy spent the class absentmindedly tinkering with her personal project- rebuilding the engine for the Mustang sitting in pieces in Sophia’s classroom. The class passed quickly and it was finally the last period of the day- Darcy’s independent study with Sophia.

Sophia already coached her through the next few steps of rebuilding, though Darcy seemed to instinctively know most of it. Sophia planned for the next week’s lessons at her desk nearby. They worked together peacefully, Darcy lost in the wonders of her engine and Sophia glowering at her paperwork.

A loud buzzing noise jerked Darcy back to the present near the end of the school day. She looked up, squinting at the garage door off to the back wall of the shop class. Sophia noticed the sudden movement and signed ‘what is it?’. Darcy frowned and signed back her best guess. ‘Motorcycle?’

To her surprise, Sophia lit up. She darted to the door’s control panel and pressed the red switch to open it. The door slid open to reveal a tall, curvy woman with a black motorcycle rumbling behind her. Her hand hovered over the small button beside the door, a switch that, when pressed, would gently flash the lights in the room to alert Sophia.

She tugged her helmet off, grinning. Darcy blinked, then blushed, when the woman grabbed Sophia and kissed her deeply. Sophia peeled herself away after a long few moments, hands flying excitedly. The other woman laughed and responded, her hands moving almost as fast as Sophia’s. She turned to Darcy and smiled.

Darcy’s eyes narrowed. “You look familiar,” she said. The woman approached, dark hair falling to her lower back, and held out her hand.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Darcy.” Darcy shook her hand, letting her spark rise to the surface. She studied the woman. Not a werewolf, at least. The woman smiled at her knowingly. “My name is Maya Ito.”

Darcy brightened. “Satomi’s daughter?” Satomi spoke of her human daughter often, the pride always evident in her voice.

Maya nodded. “She sent me with some information to give you.” Maya reached into her leather jacket, pulling out a thick file. “Mom said it was time we meet anyway.”

“She told me you were traveling on pack business,” Darcy said. “But she wouldn’t tell me why.”

Maya smiled as she reached over to tangle her fingers in Sophia’s. “Mom’s a suspicious one. A friend and I visited a couple local packs to see what they knew.”

“Knew about what?” Darcy asked. The body?

“Just some rumors Mom heard,” Maya shrugged. “My friend, Braeden, she left to go track down a couple leads.”

Sophia scowled at her girlfriend. “Alone?”

Maya pressed Sophia’s fingers to her lips. Darcy’s cheeks felt warm watching them, seeing the obvious adoration between the two.

“She’ll be okay, Soph. Braeden’s tough.” Maya jerked her chin at the file in Darcy’s hands. “That
has relevant information about the deaths around Beacon Hills.”

“Deaths? As in more than one?” Darcy asked. She opened the file and flipped through it urgently. “What… there were others killed this way?” She hurriedly passed over the photos of the bodies. “Holy shit. This goes back months.” She looked up at Maya, eyes wide.

Maya’s mouth tightened. “I know. We have a few ideas, but nothing concrete. Mom thinks its something worse that just an overzealous hunter.”

“As in.. something worse is coming to Beacon Hills?” Darcy asked quietly.

“That’s what she thinks. And we both know my mother is rarely wrong.”

Somber, Darcy read through the neat handwritten notes Satomi had sent her. She was distantly aware of Maya and Sophia murmuring to each other near the decrepit car. Sophia, it turned out, already knew about the supernatural side of the world. Maya introduced her to the Ito pack years ago. Sophia was smart and intuitive enough to keep silent about what she learned. Later, she told Darcy that the risk of death was the only thing that stopped her from asking Satomi to give her niece the bite.

Darcy was pulled from the notes when Chris arrived in the garage opening. Maya was aware of him immediately, faster even than Darcy. Her fingers slid towards her boot, propped on a bench, until Chris stepped out of the glare of sunlight. She relaxed but let her hand linger near her boot.

“Maya. It’s nice to see you again,” Chris said evenly, signing a hello to Sophia. He glanced at Maya’s hand and raised a brow. “It is nice to see you again, right?”

Maya rolled her dark eyes at him and let her hand drop. “Yeah, yeah. I’m just a little twitchy after being on the road so long.” Sophia rested a hand on Maya’s knee.

“Heard you ran into some trouble with the McAllisters.” Chris tipped his head back at the motorcycle. “And that you borrowed a bike or two of theirs. After setting their bar on fire.” Darcy gaped at her.

Maya leaned back, smirking. “They had it coming.”

“I’m sure they did,” Chris said. He looked like he was resisting a smile. “I’m familiar with the head of their family. He’s a dangerous man to cross.”

“He knows where to find me.” Maya’s smile was knife-edged, lethal.

Chris nodded slowly, studying Darcy’s engine. “I’d be interested to hear, should he try.” Darcy felt as though there were two different conversations happening at the same time. Sophia tracked the conversation, shooting Darcy a brief, unreadable look at Chris’s words.

“I appreciate your support,” Maya drawled, arms crossed. She was smiling, though, and her eyes were friendly again.

Darcy stepped over to Chris; they had more training this afternoon. He ruffled her hair and nodded to Maya. “You can count on it,” he told her seriously, ignoring Darcy when she swatted at him.

Maya studied Chris and Darcy, recognized their familiarity, their affection for each other. She finally smiled at Darcy. “It was very nice to meet you, Darcy. Now that I’m home again I might crash your study dates more often.” She nudged Sophia playfully.

Darcy waved goodbye, letting Chris steer her outside. “How do you know Maya?”
Chris waited until they were in the car to answer. “Maya’s father was killed by an omega when she was a teenager. She became a mercenary to hunt supernaturals that were feral or uncontrolled.” Chris drove them towards the Hale house. “I’ve been on a few hunts with her.”

“And?” Darcy asked eagerly.

“And she’s terrifying,” Chris said. “She has no fear, she’s the most level-headed fighter I’ve ever seen, and her memory is damn near photogenic. I couldn’t name a better hunter.”

“Do you think that McAllister guy will come after her?” Darcy touched a finger to her otter tattoo. It twirled around on her skin, free of its confinement now that she was out of school. Magic tattoos weren’t exactly inconspicuous.

“If he’s stupid enough to come after Satomi’s daughter on her own land, or the Hales’, then he deserves exactly what she’ll do to him.” Chris slowed the car as Erica appeared, sprinting alongside them with a wild grin. He only sighed as she rebounded off a tree and onto the car’s roof.

“Werewolves.” Darcy rolled her eyes.

Peter appeared, a flash of movement outside of Chris’s window. Chris ignored the obnoxious grin Peter sent them and tapped lightly on the sunroof. The car slowed enough for Erica to spring off the top and tackle Peter to the ground. Darcy whooped, laughing as she turned in her seat to watch them. Chris was fighting back a smile as he stopped the car, dragging a bag out of the backseat. Darcy followed him to the backyard, hearing Erica and Peter darting through the woods behind them.

"Alright." Chris dumped the bag on the ground and slid the zipper back. Darcy eyed him warily when he pulled out a pair of handcuffs. "Let's get started."

"I have questions," Darcy told him.

"Do me a favor and never speak to me again." Peter's voice was muffled.

Chris rolled his eyes, though the tips of his ears were pink. "No comments from the peanut gallery." He handed her the cuffs. "You’re going to learn to get out of these, without your magic."

"Because you can't always rely on your spark. One day, you may need to know how to get out of these, and I don't want you to be unable to if you can't access your magic," Chris told her. She wondered if he read doomsday conspiracies in his free time.

"You know, paranoia is not an attractive quality."

"Neither is helplessness." Chris crossed his arms and stared her down.

"Ugh. Fine. But you'll be sorry when I'm as twitchy and cranky as you one day," Darcy said.

Chris pulled out a lockpick, presenting it to her. "Not if it means you're alive."
"And morbid. I forgot to say morbid," she said thoughtfully. Chris snapped the handcuffs on her wrists in one quick motion.

He smiled at her outraged expression. "No more talking until you're free of those."

Of course she didn't exactly obey the ‘no talking’ rule, but she did redirect her focus to the metal wrapped around her wrists. Darcy practiced over and over, learning the mechanics of the lock. Chris already taught her to pick door locks, so it was relatively easy for her to connect the experiences.

She grinned up at Chris after picking the lock in record time. He took away the lock pick and handed her a bobby pin. "Now use this." Darcy muttered under her breath as she struggled with the lock.

A few feet away, Erica tugged Darcy's schoolwork out of her backpack. She studied Darcy's classwork every day, afraid to fall behind. Erica flipped through the folder of extra homework Darcy brought her. She shuffled around Darcy's bookbag for a pen and hesitated over the unfamiliar file. "Darce, is this what Satomi sent you?"

Erica unceremoniously tossed her homework aside and scanned the notes. Chris turned, frowning. "Satomi sent you information? About what?"

Darcy looked between him and Peter, noting the wary glances they traded. "About the murders. That apparently everyone has been aware of except me," she grumbled when neither looked surprised.

Erica raised her hand. "Um, hello? Can someone explain?"

"Apparently, there have been a number of murders around Beacon Hills over the last few months. The only similarity is the way they were killed- with a sword," Darcy said. After living with werewolves for years, Darcy was an expert on reading body language and facial expressions.

Chris and Peter's expressions told her a few things. They already knew about the murders around Beacon Hills. The sword was extremely significant. And they both believed this was all a sign of something worse to come.

"A sword? You're telling me some renaissance wanna-be is running around killing people with an actual sword?" Erica asked in disbelief.

"No," Chris said when Darcy remained silent. "The sword... it's how my father used to kill werewolves."

"I thought he disappeared," Erica said. "Does this mean he's back or something?"

"Not necessarily," Peter sighed. "It's not an uncommon practice among hunters. Wolves are killed this way often." He couldn't seem to resist shooting an accusing look at Chris. Chris looked away, mouth tight.

Something between them had fractured, and they didn't seem to know how to fix it.

Erica met Darcy's eyes in the tense silence that followed, eyes wide. Darcy just shook her head. They would work it out on their own, eventually. There was too much left between them for it to end this way, with silence and resentment.

Darcy's phone pinged. Chris cleared his throat, accepting the opened handcuffs back from her. Peter stepped away, rubbing his hands over his face. Chris hesitated a moment before following him.

Erica handed Darcy her phone, hovering close to read over her shoulder. It was an email file from
Satomi, forwarded from the Alpha of a pack in Nevada.

"This is the super-secret network?" Erica asked. She tapped a fingernail to the email addresses on the original email, a list of Alphas in California and the surrounding states. "God, that's so lame."

Darcy snorted, scrolling down to the attachment. "It's notes on more murders they think are connected," Darcy realized. She sucked in a breath when the list kept going. On and on and on.

"Hey, some of these are police reports," Erica said. "Why don't we have an in at the sheriff's station?"

Darcy thought of Blake, then tilted her head towards Chris, murmuring to Peter at the edge of the woods. "Some do," she said softly. "But I don't think he'd give me information without running it past Chris first."

'Family first,' Blake had said. Darcy wondered how far that loyalty went. It certainly didn't extend to her. They would just have to find the information on their own.

"Boyd has his license," Erica whispered. Darcy looked at her, face close and eyes gleaming excitedly. "He can drive us past the station and I can listen to what they're saying. It's not as good as police reports, but at least we'll know when everyone else knows."

They grinned conspiratorially at each other. Darcy sent a text to Boyd. 'Come pick me & E up we're going sleuthing.'

'Can I say no?'

'Absolutely not'

Boyd sent her the car emoji, followed by an angry face. Satisfied he was coming to get them, Darcy tucked her phone away. She and Erica went through their homework outside, Darcy explaining what she'd missed in class. They worked through everything but math; Erica was in algebra with the other sophomores. She hated math and would never willingly take an upper level math class.

Erica's head snapped up as they finished their chemistry problem set. Chris and Peter, slumped against a pair of trees across the yard, watched suspiciously as the girls waved goodbye and walked too casually to Boyd's mom's sedan.

Darcy climbed in front after a brief argument. "You're supposed to be sick, not hanging out of a car driving around town!"

"No one is hanging out of the car," Boyd said as he turned towards town. "And what exactly are we doing?"

"Driving by the police station so I can listen in on their cases," Erica told him brightly. "I can hear everything now."

Boyd glared at Darcy. "We are not spying on the police."

"No, no, don't turn around! Listen, Satomi sent me files on other deaths around Beacon County. They're all connected, Boyd! Someone is chopping people in half with a sword and we have to find out who," Darcy said earnestly.

Boyd sighed after a long moment. "Fine. But only because I know something's up. My mom keeps getting called out on late shifts and she won't tell me why." He drove them past the station, not
slowing when Erica protested.

"You're driving too fast, I can't hear them!"

"You want me to drive slowly back and forth in front of the police station?" He asked dryly.

Darcy winced. "You're right. Hey, look!" Erica craned her neck around to see. "It's that kid!"

"What kid?" Erica asked. She peered out the window. Boyd glanced over at the station entrance, where the same brown-eyed kid watched them pass by.

"Who, Stilinski?"

"I'm sorry, what was that?"

"That's Sheriff Stilinski's kid," Boyd said. "He has some weird name, I can't remember."

"He watches Derek a lot," Darcy said as Boyd parked at the diner next to the station. Darcy grabbed Satomi's file, gripping it tightly.

Erica laughed. "Derek has a stalker?"

"Something like that," Darcy said absently. She followed Boyd and Erica into the restaurant, Erica making a beeline for the booth closest to the station.

"Lots of cops in here, too," Erica said, scanning the room. She studied the table as she listened to the chatter next door. Darcy slid the file out of her jacket and handed it to Boyd. Boyd's frown grew more pronounced the further he read.

"Can I keep this?" He asked her. "I want to sort through it my way. I can skype you when I'm finished."

Darcy shrugged. "Sure. It's not like I have anywhere good to keep it at home. Cora's nosy and destructive."

"Can't you do your magic thing and keep them out?" Boyd asked her.

"Well, yeah, but it'd be weird to ward my own room. Besides, werewolves are dumb. It'd hurt their feelings if I warded my room," she said, rolling her eyes. "They have no concept of personal space."

Erica, who had thrown her feet up to rest between their legs, grinned at them, unrepentant. She thrived under the easy, tactile manner of the 'wolves.

"The Hale house is safe, anyways," Darcy said.

"Yeah, and no one will be stupid enough to go after them again, with you there," Erica added. Darcy didn't doubt it was Peter who had told her about that night. He always had a vicious satisfaction about Kate's demise.

Boyd glanced between them, dark brows lowered. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing," Darcy muttered, leveling a hard look at Erica. Erica grimaced in apology.

"I'm not getting much from the station," Erica told them. "Just that they haven't found the other half of the body yet and will be out tonight looking for it."
"We'll come back when they do," Boyd said. "And maybe my mom will tell me more tonight." He held up the file. "I'm going to work on this and Skype you later."

Darcy nodded in agreement. She was quiet on the ride home. Erica sent worried glances her way, chewing on her lower lip. She wrapped her hand around Darcy's when Boyd dropped them off, stepping close. "I'm sorry, Darcy. I didn't know you didn't want it brought up."

Darcy mustered up a smile for her. "It's okay. It's not like I ever told you not to."

They stepped inside the house, greeted immediately by Laura, who was home for the full moon next week. She strode past them in pjs, carrying an enormous bowl of popcorn. "Movie night? There's a Harry Potter marathon on."

Erica squealed in excitement and dragged Darcy over to the couch where Derek sat, munching on a bag of pretzels. "Move over," she demanded, shoving him when he glared back at her.

"You suck," he grumbled, but moved over to give the girls room.

"What are we watching?" Darcy asked, smashed between Derek and Erica. Derek swatted her hand away when she reached for a pretzel. Darcy narrowed her eyes at him and sent her spark to the shield rune drawn in Sharpie on her hand. Derek shouted in protest as the shield went up between him and the bag.

"That's cheating!" He lunged for them and growled when the shield didn't budge.

"Sharing is caring, DerBear," Laura said from the recliner. She only laughed when he flashed his eyes at her. Behind Darcy, Erica growled. Darcy shoved the bag of pretzels at her to redirect her focus.

"Quit it, you're stressing out the newbie," Darcy said, nudging Derek with her toes.

"You started it," he muttered, but he sat back and watched Erica closely.

"I'll hurt you all if you don't shut up," Laura threatened. "The movie's starting."

They watched the two of the movies in relative peace. Until Laura, shoveling a fistful of popcorn in her mouth, pointed to the tv and asked Darcy, "Can you do that?" Darcy looked away from where Harry's Aunt Marge floated into the sky and stared at Laura incredulously.

"No, Laura."

"Lame."

Exasperated, Darcy went to bed.

She had no messages from Boyd by the morning, so she waited for him by the front steps of the school. Darcy frowned, watching the Stilinski kid and his shaggy-haired friend whispering urgently to each other by an ancient blue Jeep. He didn't even look up when Derek jogged by, off to meet with his art teacher before class.

"They found the rest of the body last night." Darcy yelped and spun around. Boyd stood behind her, blinking tiredly in the early morning sun.

"Did you stay up all night with those files?" She asked. His words registered. "Oh! Any news?"

"In the 5 hours since they found it? No idea."
Darcy gave an aggravated sigh. She started to follow him to first period, glancing over when the office door opened. Darcy stopped dead in the hallway, disgruntled kids parting around her.

Allison Argent stood uncertainly in the front office, speaking quietly with Mrs. Mary. She was taller than Darcy remembered. Prettier, too.

Boyd stopped, halfway down the hall already. He had to call her name twice before she responded. Darcy forced her feet to move, to follow Boyd, as Allison frowned and looked over. Their eyes met for a brief second. Allison’s gaze hardened and she looked away.

Darcy fidgeted through all of her classes, anxious until she reached Sophia's classroom and got her hands on the engine.

'You think better when working with your hands,' Sophia observed, wrangling her mass of dark hair into a low ponytail. Darcy smiled at her, her nerves soothed for the time being. Sophia wiped her face off with a rag and tossed it aside. 'Is something bothering you?'

Darcy glanced around, noted the students filing out of the room as the end of class bell rang. Wary regardless, Darcy signed back, 'Supernatural drama. The usual.'

The scar on Sophia's face wrinkled with her answering smile. 'I understand. Maya is often in the middle of it, and now Erica will be, too. You're used to it, I suppose?'

Darcy shrugged awkwardly. "Frequent cause of supernatural drama" might be a better fit, but was hard to explain to someone with a (deliberate) limited knowledge of their world. ‘Chris’s daughter moved here for school.’

She’d overheard the gossip during lunch. Allison transferred from her private school just outside of Beacon Hills. She was a year younger than Darcy, and seemed to have already fallen in with Lydia Martin and the insufferable group of people that flocked around her.

Sophia frowned. ‘And?’

‘We don’t really get along.’

‘Oh? Why is that?’

‘Chris has spent a lot of time training me the last few years. I think he’s spent more time with me than he has with her, honestly.’ She scowled down at her project.

Sophia hummed in response, reaching over to stabilize the engine as Darcy worked her aggression out on a screw. After a few moments of silence, she spoke, her hands too busy to sign.

“To be honest, I don’t know much about this world of yours. I try to stay out of it as best I can, actually. The twisted politics just annoy me and at the end of the day, the only important things to me are my family.” She handed Darcy another tool without prompting. “And what I’ve discovered is that family is who you choose. So many people have chosen you as their family, Chris included. He loves you as his own. Maybe Allison is unhappy with that, or maybe she just doesn’t know what to feel. The point is, you have the choice to make her family, too. To draw her into the group of people who love you dearly, and who are all loved in return.” Sophia gently touched Darcy’s hand as she blinked back tears. “You have such a big heart, Darcy. Don’t let fear and doubt overshadow who you are. This world can be so cold and dark, and it needs everything you have to offer.”

Darcy dropped her wrench and turned into Sophia’s waiting arms. The woman held her tightly while she cried, stroking her hair and murmuring quietly to her in Spanish. Darcy didn’t know how long
she cried, just that Sophia’s shirt was wet when she finally sat up and wiped her face. Sophia brushed Darcy’s hair out of her face and smiled at her.

“I can see the weight you bear,” she said. “And I want you to know that I’m here, always, should you ever need me. Maya, too.” Sophia tugged playfully on a curl. “She’s already started one fight for you.”

Startled, Darcy bolted upright. “She what?!”

Sophia laughed at her gobsmacked expression. “The McAllisters? Maya and Braeden stopped by their bar during their travels. She told me the hunters had some… rather disgusting things to say about a young female spark rising to power. They were contemplating a visit to Beacon Hills until Maya, um. Escalated the situation. Anyway, they won’t dare show their faces now.”

“But she doesn’t even know me!” Darcy said too loudly.

“Women in Maya’s position hold power. She knows that, and she knows how to protect others with it.” Sophia grinned at her. “She also told me not to tell you any of this. She says she has a reputation to uphold.”

“There’s a very good chance I’m in love with your girlfriend,” Darcy informed Sophia after a long minute.

“Get in line,” Sophia laughed. She rose, groaning. Darcy watched as Sophia massaged her leg, eyes closed in a pained grimace. Darcy touched Sophia’s arm to get her attention and signed, ‘You know, I have a rune that can help with that.’

Sophia looked at her in surprise. Darcy pulled her ever-present marker out of her pocket and waved it at her friend and mentor. ‘Magic, remember?’ Sophia looked warily at the marker but eventually nodded, slowly guiding herself back to the bench seat. She reached for her pant leg but Darcy shook her head, tapping her wrist.

The rune was simple, designed to heal the deeper, chronic aches and pains. Darcy drew it confidently and reached for her spark. She took measured breaths, reigning in the magic’s excited surging, and gently touched the black mark. Sophia was silent, considering, as it glowed a bright gold. She dropped her hands to her leg a second later.

Sophia looked at Darcy in astonishment. ‘The pain is gone!’ She stood, taking a few careful, assessing steps. Darcy grinned back at her, feeling a warm glow in her chest at Sophia’s relief and wonder.

She was still smiling hours later, perched on the porch steps next to Boyd while the others sprinted through the woods. Peter lounged behind them, sunning himself on the deck chairs. They listened to the growls in the woods, echoed by Cora inside as she did her homework, monitored closely by Talia.

The serenity was disrupted when Darcy’s wards flared, alerting her to an incoming human. She sat upright, staring down the driveway.

“Darcy?” Boyd glanced between her and the empty road. “Is something wrong?” She heard Peter sit up behind them.

“Someone’s coming. A human.”

Talia exited the house, a protesting Cora ordered firmly to stay inside, and came to a stop beside
Darcy instinctively leaned against her legs. Andrew, Derek, and Erica drifted from the woods, heads cocked to listen for the approaching car.

Darcy’s heart thumped as the blue Jeep rattled around the final turn, coming into view. She waited, anxious, as it rolled to a stop and the boy clambered out. He stared at them defiantly, not saying anything.

“Can I help you with something, Mr. Stilinski?” Talia asked politely. Darcy pressed harder against the Alpha’s legs. She wondered if Talia could feel it, too— the threads of fate wrapping around them all. The feeling that everything was about to change.

“Yes, you can. My friend was bitten in the woods last night.” He studied them closely with those gold-brown eyes of his. Darcy controlled her instinctive flinch.

“Oh, dear. I hope he’s up to date on his rabies shot,” Peter said, leaning casually against the porch rail. Erica laughed across the yard. The boy met Peter’s eyes, bristling.

“I know what’s happening to him isn’t normal. I know you’re more than you let on. And I know you’re going to help him.”

“Oh? And why is that?” Peter asked, fascinated with the boy, who stood tall and spoke with stubborn certainty, at odds with his rapid heartbeat and the fear-scent rising from his clammy skin.

“Because you can’t afford to have a werewolf on the loose,” he said, watching how they carefully didn’t react to his statement. His lips quirked in quiet satisfaction. “Especially one with no control, with the full moon days away.” Derek watched him quietly, showing no reaction to the accusation. The kid sent a quick glance at Derek and licked his lips nervously. “Because you’re better than letting a kid die when you can do something to help.” He held Derek’s gaze, eyes beta-bright.

Darcy elbowed Boyd, staring at the exchange with wide eyes. Boyd elbowed her back, also staring. Darcy held her breath as Talia considered him. Finally, she spoke.

“Mr. Stilinski-”

“Stiles.”

“I’m sorry?”

“My name is Stiles.”

“What the hell is a Stiles?” Boyd muttered. Darcy bit her lip to restrain her laugh.

Talia didn’t miss a beat. “Stiles, then. Why don’t you come inside? It seems we have a lot to discuss.”

And so Stiles followed the wolf into her den.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The secret of change is to focus all of your energy,
not on fighting the old, but on building the new.

- Socrates

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“So, about these runes,” Stiles started.

Darcy groaned. “Not again. Stiles, I’ve explained them to you. In detail. Multiple times.”

Darcy sprawled across the deck, panting from her run with Derek, who’d gone inside to get her a water. Stiles appeared seconds after she’d thrown herself to the porch in exhaustion, hovering over her with a manic gleam in his eyes.

He glanced over at a shout from Scott, his shaggy-haired best friend bitten by a mysterious Alpha seven months ago. The Hales, at Stiles’ adamant request (aka relentless badgering), folded Scott into the pack to teach him "their mystical werewolf ways."

Stiles seemed to be at the house more often than Scott, especially now that it was summertime. He’d taken over the library/war room after a week, skimming through bestiaries, taking incomprehensible notes, and asking no less than 100 questions a day.

“Well, yeah, but I have more questions. Like, why are all of these runes just for shielding, or healing? Can you start a fire with one? Can you shoot someone with your magic? What about mountain ash? Can it be weaponized? Oh, or… um.”

Darcy cracked an eye open when the flood of words stuttered to a stop. She tipped her head back to see Derek, still wearing his headphones and wiping his face with the bottom of his shirt, her water bottle in his other hand. Stiles stared determinedly out at the yard where Erica was currently kicking Scott’s ass with vicious glee, his cheeks tinged pink.

Derek stopped beside Darcy’s head, adjusting his grip on the bottle. He tugged his earbuds out and stared at Stiles, shifting from foot to foot. “Oh. Stiles. Hi. I didn’t know you were still here.”

Stiles bristled. “Oh, am I not allowed in your little werewolf club?” He asked, glaring at Derek as if daring him to tell him to leave.

Derek stared at him in confusion. “No, that’s not what I meant-”

“Save it, sourwolf. I’ll just take my offending human presence out of your sight.” Stiles stomped off to his Jeep, fuming. Scott broke away from Erica to job after him, waving half-heartedly at the others.

Erica strolled over, watching Stiles yank the Jeep into drive and peel out of the driveway. “He’s hot when he’s mad,” she mused.

Derek’s claws popped out and went right through the thin plastic of the water bottle he was holding
above Darcy's face. Darcy sputtered and flailed her way out from under the stream of water, choking. Erica laughed so hard she cried. Derek stalked inside, the tips of his ears bright red.

“Do you have to antagonize him when I’m in the line of fire?” Darcy asked, still coughing.

“I couldn’t resist,” Erica said. She sat and reached over to pat Darcy unhelpfully on the back. “They just don’t know what to do with each other. It’s adorable.”

Darcy eyed her friend. “No interfering,” she warned. “Or scaring away the babies.”

Erica snorted. “They’re only a year younger than us. Stiles is actually our age, I think. He was held back a year in elementary school.” She leaned back on her elbows, turning her face to the sun. “Scott’s a terrible werewolf. All he thinks about is Allison. What idiot thought it was a good idea to bite a 15 year old boy?”

Darcy scowled. “I don’t know. But no one else has been turned since, that we know of. It’s like they bit Scott and immediately disappeared.”

“Beacon Hills is pretty big,” Erica said. “Maybe someone’s still slinking around, chewing on teenagers.”

“Gross.” Darcy squinted at the driveway when her wards activated.

“Hey, here comes Maya!” Erica jerked upright. “And Sophia!” She waved at her aunt as Maya’s motorcycle slowed to a stop in the driveway. Maya snapped the visor up on her helmet, Sophia doing the same behind her.

“We’re heading to the lake. You girls want to join us?”

Erica leaped up. “Yes! Let me go change.” She blew a kiss to her aunt and darted inside, hollering for Darcy to hurry up. Darcy peeled herself off the deck, groaning. Maya waved her over.

“How’s the new kid doing?” She asked, turning the bike off. Both women slid their helmets off but stayed on the bike, Sophia’s arms winding around Maya’s waist. Maya balanced the bike between her jean-clad thighs and studied Darcy.

Darcy shrugged. “Obsessed with Allison, easily distracted, hates being a werewolf. So... no different.” She signed the words as she spoke so Sophia could follow the conversation.

Maya nodded thoughtfully. “Chris is going to have a stroke.” Darcy signed Maya’s words so she didn’t have to twist around to face Sophia. Sophia laughed.

“He’s a little distracted, with the divorce and all. Victoria wants to take Allison with her when she leaves, but Peter said Victoria’s family are extremists. Victoria was the sanest of them, according to him.” Which was a terrifying thought.

The Argent divorce took no one but Peter by surprise. Allison was old enough, the Argents agreed, that a separation wouldn’t affect her as greatly. Chris had hopes for an amicable divorce. Darcy, though, wondered about the vicious light that never seemed to leave Victoria’s eyes. She was not the type of woman to give in easily.

Maya scoffed. “She was a Stane first. They’re better connected than even the Argents. More dangerous, too, because they’re not afraid to break the code.”

“Stane?” Darcy frowned, wondering where she’d heard that name. “Wait, hold up- Stane, as in
Obadiah Stane? Of Stark Industries?"

“He’s Victoria’s uncle,” Maya said grimly. “He took over as head of the family after Victoria’s father died on a hunt. Stane supplies hunters with Stark weapons and tech.”

“But Tony Stark is running the company now, I thought. Obadiah Stane turned it over to Tony Stark once he became of age. It’s in my current events book and everything!”

“Stane’s running weapons on the side,” Maya told her. She tipped her head back, eyes drifting closed as Sophia skimmed her fingers through Maya’s thick, dark hair. “Stark either turns a blind eye or doesn’t know about it.”

“And,” she continued, “Stane’s hunters do whatever he tells them. That’s why Gerard wanted an alliance with them so badly. Chris and Victoria were already friends, so he and Stane set up the marriage as a sign of good faith from both families. Both of those men have a ’shoot first, don’t bother with questions’ attitude when hunting. They both believe anything that isn’t explicitly human shouldn’t be left alive.”

Darcy remembered the Stark weapons in Blake’s bag on her first hunt, his smug grin when bragging about the Argent family connections. She looked at Maya. “And no one does anything about it?”

Maya shrugged. “Like I said, the Stanes are extremely well connected. No one has the capability to confront them. They’re the most powerful players in the game.”

“For now,” Darcy murmured. She stared out at the woods, recalling the night the ground rose at her command, how it had swallowed those hunters into its depths. She wondered how many of those men were Stane’s, or affiliated with the extremists. For the first time, she didn’t shy away from those memories. Darcy thought about the power she’d wielded that night, how her magic moved at her every wish without a single rune to guide it.

Sometimes, Darcy wondered just what exactly she was capable of.

Maya was watching her knowingly. “I look forward to that day, Darcy. I really, really do.”

Sophia jabbed a finger in her girlfriend’s side. “I want to go to the lake. You two can plot later.” She shoved her helmet on impatiently, winking at Darcy.

Maya laughed. “Fine, fine. Tell Erica to hurry up. We’ll meet you there.” The bike roared to life. Darcy jogged inside and ran smack into Laura in the doorway.

“Hey, Trouble. Heard we’re having a lake day.” She grinned at Darcy. “I’ll get my bathing suit and we’ll run there.” Laura cocked her head at a thump from upstairs. “Oh, for fuck’s sake- I think Erica’s trying to steal my bathing suits again.” She darted up the stairs, growling.

“But I just got back from my run,” Darcy sighed to the empty room.

"Toughen up," Cora advised as she stomped into the kitchen.

"Brat," Darcy muttered. She trudged up the stairs, her legs protesting. She and Derek ran for two hours this morning. Uphill. Both ways.

"Darcy! Hurry up and change!" Erica bounded into her room, wearing one of Laura's bathing suits and carrying another. She stuffed it into the drawer she'd taken over in Darcy’s room, overflowing with stolen clothes. "I'm gonna go see what else I can steal from Laura."
Darcy picked unhappily through her bathing suits, settling on a plain black one piece with extra support. She found one of Peter's shirts she'd stolen months ago - a soft, worn blue t-shirt with 'Respect the Locals' written underneath the picture of a shark. Darcy tugged her shorts back on and grabbed her running shoes. She still felt hot and sweaty from her run earlier. She was not looking forward to the nearly two mile run to the lake. Especially with Erica and Laura, who could run forever and not get tired or sweaty. Fucking werewolves.

It was now early afternoon and the sun was at its peak in the sky. The gentle breeze from earlier disappeared, leaving the day dry and insufferably hot. The shade of the forest provided some comfort as they jogged to the lake hidden back in the preserve.

Darcy threw her towel to the grass and sat down in the shade, far enough from the water's edge that the others' rambunctious grappling wouldn't get her wet. She eyed Laura and Erica's slim, toned stomachs and frowned, plucking the hem of her t-shirt. Running and training had kept her fit, but Darcy didn't think she'd ever look like Laura - tall, beautiful, and solid muscle. Darcy's hips were too wide, her stomach still too soft, and her chest... She scowled. Boobs were the worst.

Sophia collapsed beside her in the grass, panting and flushed from playing in the water. She wore a threaded olive-green bikini that contrasted beautifully with her mass of dark curls and brown skin. Her prosthetic was fully waterproof, she'd assured Darcy last week (right after some idiot's water hose was incorrectly connected to his project and soaked everyone in shop class).

"You look unhappy, mija. What's wrong?" She studied Darcy; Sophia noted her red cheeks and the fumbling with her over-large shirt. Sophia glanced back at the water, where Laura and Erica tried (and failed) to push Maya underwater. Understanding hit. "Ah. You're worried about your body?"

Darcy huffed and wrapped her arms around her legs. She pressed her face into her knees. "It's stupid," she mumbled.

Sophia sat up. She cocked her head at Darcy, smiling gently. "It's not stupid. It's completely normal. You think I've never had a meltdown about my body before?" She snorted. "My poor mother had to deal with it through my teenage years. But you know what she told me?"

"What?" Darcy asked quietly. She noticed Erica glancing over; Darcy didn't want to talk about this with Erica. Erica was gorgeous and toned - Darcy was neither of those things and self-conscious enough about it that she sketched a small rune in the dirt and held her palm over it. Her spark sank into the earth; the rune for silence flared a brief golden color and faded again. Erica rubbed at her ears and scowled at Darcy. Darcy signed 'It's rude to eavesdrop,' and turned back to Sophia, who was waiting patiently.

"My mother told me that we should celebrate our differences instead of comparing them. Girls face enough judgement from the world that we should never make it worse for ourselves. Instead, we see each difference as something beautiful and lift up our sisters who are struggling." Sophia pressed a kiss to Darcy's hair. "It doesn't matter that you are different from Laura and Erica. You're beautiful, Darcy, and I hope you see that when you look in the mirror."

Darcy tipped over to rest against Sophia. "I don't feel beautiful. These stupid werewolves make me feel fat and slow and short."

Sophia sighed heavily. "I'm afraid my mother had no wisdom to share regarding werewolves."

Darcy giggled. She could hear the smile in Sophia's voice when she continued. "You're not slow, that's for certain. I've seen you with that stick of yours, and you're faster than all those 'wolves with it. As for the rest of it... Darcy, how would you like to go shopping with me?"
Darcy peered up at Sophia, interested. "Shopping?"

"You've literally been living with wolves, child. None of them exactly give a shit about what clothes they put on, besides the fact that they can all wear rags and still look like supermodels." Sophia rolled her eyes and continued, "I can teach you how to dress for your body type, so you aren't wearing their cast-offs and actually find clothes that fit you better. I know I usually hide in my work overalls, but I had to learn this when I was your age." She gestured to her body. "Maya can help, too. She always has trouble finding clothes that fit her right."

Darcy perked up. "Yeah?"

Sophia laughed. "Of course, Darcy. We're pack, or whatever, right?"

Darcy's shoulders dropped right along with her smile. "Sparks aren't allowed to be in packs."

"Well, pack is family, right? And in that case, you're mine and Maya's. Anyone has a problem with that, they're welcome to fuck right off," Sophia said, wrapping an arm around Darcy's shoulders. They sat in comfortable silence, Darcy smiling again, watching while Maya kicked Laura's ass at volleyball.

"Hey, Soph?"

"Mhmm?"

"You're the best."

~*~

Darcy touched her finger to the tiny rune scribbled underneath the hinges and slipped through the door after the rune lit up gold. She double-checked the ones drawn on her arm- all good. Her heartbeat, scent, and footsteps all hidden- runes drawn on the bottom of her shoes, take that, Deaton!- Darcy crept through the library towards the books Peter kept separate, locked away from the rest. The ones about spark powers, the books he thought she hadn't seen yet.

Laura was back in New York, Erica with her dad and Sophia, Andrew and Talia took Cora to the park for a control test-run, and Peter was likely doing gross things with Chris somewhere entirely inappropriate. Derek was at-

Shit.

Derek was here.

Darcy froze behind one of the massive shelves, peering through to see Derek curled up in one of the reading chairs. To Darcy’s surprise, Stiles was here as well. She hadn’t heard him or his Jeep this morning. He was at the long table, books and papers spread out haphazardly. How the hell did he keep track of all that? Darcy squinted, spotting the Hale bestiary, three books on hags and harpies, a scroll detailing the Fae realms (likely all wrong, knowing the Fae), a children’s fairy tale book, and… a cookbook? Derek seemed to be as baffled as she was, shooting Stiles curious glances as the other boy scribbled notes from every open book in front of him.

“What are you doing?” Darcy jumped at the question, then realized it was directed at Stiles. Derek gave into his curiosity and set his own book- Jane Eyre, the nerd- in his lap to stare at Stiles.

Stiles barely looked up. “What does it look like I’m doing?”
“Losing it?” Derek asked dryly. He raised an unimpressed brow at the glower he got.

Stiles heaved a dramatic sigh and sat back violently in the wooden chair. “Look, up until Scott was bitten, I had no idea any of this—” he waved an arm around—“existed. And now you’re telling me there are werewolves, and harpies, and Fae, and these creepy little things that bite your kneecaps, what the fuck— all living in the same world as me. So if I’m living in the same world as all this, I need to know everything to keep my dad and Scott safe.”

“Scott’s pack now,” Derek said reassuringly. “He’s safe with us.”

“Yeah, you’ve made that clear,” Stiles muttered. Darcy, who’d lived with Stiles’ current thoughts half her life, barely resisted groaning out loud. ‘Idiot,’ she mouthed at Derek’s confused face.

“What does that mean?” Derek asked. He scowled when Stiles waved him off. “Stiles. What do you mean by that?”

“Look, I’m trying, okay? I’m trying to catch up, I’m trying to be useful here. I know I’m just a human, but I’m not leaving Scott to get murdered by one of these creepy fuckers. We’re a package deal, so just… get over your issue with me, okay?” Stiles told him, shoulders tight and eyes beta-bright.

Derek stared at him. “I… I don’t have an issue with you.”

“What does that mean?”

“Then why are you such a dick to me?” Stiles challenged.

“I’m not!”

Darcy rolled her eyes. Real mature for an 18 year old, Derek.

“Yes, you are. You walk around glaring at me like I’m ruining your perfect little wolf pack just by breathing near you. Darcy’s not a wolf, and you let her in!”

“Darcy’s not—” Derek cut himself off. “It’s different, with Darcy. She’s different.”

Darcy blinked away the building pressure behind her eyes. ‘Darcy’s not pack,’ he meant to say. She often wondered if there was a distinction for the ‘wolves, too. If they felt the separation the same way she did. She was family, sure. But she wasn’t pack, and that meant… something. To everyone, it seemed.

“Bullshit,” Stiles snapped. He stood when Derek did, getting in the older boy’s face. “That’s bullshit. What, she’s a spark so she can’t be family?”

“She is family,” Derek growled back. “But sparks aren’t allowed to join packs.”

“Yeah, whatever. Read about that last week.” Stiles rolled his eyes at Derek’s snarl, not showing any fear at Derek’s half-wolfed out face. “Sounds to me like someone just wanted the sparks isolated. It worked last time, didn’t it? The Fae killed nearly all of them, and those so-called ‘alliances’ of theirs ran at the first sign of trouble. The packs used the sparks, they didn’t ally with them. Once they had what they needed— the packs got their wards, the Fae got their kill— everyone deserted the sparks. Is that all she is to you?” He stepped closer, following Derek as he backed towards the wall. “Is that all we are to you? Means to an end?”

Derek moved fast, spinning them around and shoving Stiles into the wall. Stiles didn’t flinch, didn’t back down when Derek flashed his eyes at him. “Darcy is my sister.”
“And me?” Stiles asked quietly. “What am I, Derek? Expendable? Just an annoyance, some stupid human kid waiting to get killed by getting involved in this shit?”

“That’s not-you’re not going to get killed,” Derek said, dropping his hands from Stiles’ shoulders. “I- we won’t let that happen.”

“And why not?”

“I-”

They stared at each other in the quiet room, the mood somehow softer than it had been moments ago. They were still pressed close together, chests nearly touching with each breath. Stiles glanced up at Derek uncertainly from under his lashes. Derek made a sound low in his throat, fingers flexing at his side like they wanted to reach for him, to touch him again.

Anticipation built with every shared heartbeat. Derek’s eyes dropped to Stiles’s mouth and he swallowed hard. Darcy held her breath, wondering if one of them would make a move.

Derek broke first, stepping back with a quiet sigh. He looked away, out the large windows lining the west wall, and shook his head. "You shouldn't want this life, Stiles."

"I can't live the rest of my life pretending this doesn't exist," Stiles responded, just as softly. He rubbed a hand over his buzzed hair, growing slowly longer.

"It's different with humans. Packs can try to keep them safe, but they're a target. Always. They get hurt, killed, worse. I don't want that for you."

"It's not your decision to make," Stiles said. He shoved his hands in his pockets and studied Derek, still leaning against the wall. "It's mine. And I'm not going anywhere."

Derek turned towards him and was silent, conflicted, before- "I am. I was accepted to NYU's art program. I'm moving to New York this fall to stay with Laura."

Stiles gave him a crooked smile. "Don't worry. I'll keep them safe while you're gone."

"And who's going to keep you safe?" Derek asked angrily. "When you're throwing yourself into danger at every second?"

"Darcy, probably," Stiles said. "Scott's not much use in that department." Darcy jolted at her name, but couldn't help her fond exasperation.

"She's the only one I trust to," Derek muttered. Stiles cocked his head in question. Derek huffed. "Darcy tends to bring in strays. She gets attached."

"Excuse me, I am not a stray," Stiles said indignantly.

The corner of Derek's mouth curled up. He didn't say anything, just watched Stiles's offended face.

"Darcy gets attached, huh? Not you?" Stiles teased. "Not even gone yet and you're already fretting about me."

"Shut up," Derek said, rolling his eyes. A door slammed in the house; Derek glanced over when Boyd shouted for him. "I have to go, Boyd and I are going to-"

"Yeah, okay, have fun." Stiles waved awkwardly as Derek backed slowly towards the library door. Derek walked into a shelf and stumbled. He straightened, blushing, and muttered a goodbye before
leaving.

Stiles stayed against the wall for another minute. Right as Darcy wondered if she should check on him, he shook himself. Stiles wiped his hands down his face and returned to the table, collapsing in the chair. He stared blankly at the books.

Darcy stepped out from her hiding place and drifted closer. She stopped beside the table and waited for Stiles look up. He didn't. Darcy rapped the table with her knuckles to get his attention. Stiles shouted in surprise, flailing around to face her.

"Jesus, Darcy, what the fuck?! Quit sneaking around!"

She laughed. "I'm not sneaking around, you're just distracted."

Stiles looked up at her, eyes wide. "No, I'm just-"

"Reading eight books at a time?" Darcy motioned to the stack.

"Oh. Right, yeah. Definitely distracted." Stiles squinted up at her, tapping his fingers anxiously on the desk. "What're you doing in here?"

Darcy glanced at Peter's collection. "Sneaking."

Stiles's eyes brightened. "Tell me everything."

Sliding a teetering stack of books aside, Darcy sat at the chair next to him and leaned in to speak quietly. "Listen, about the runes. I've been thinking, and you're right. There's no way defensive runes are the only ones to exist, and I'm trying to look into it. The only problem is, there's no reference to anything like that in any of the book's I've been given."

"You think they're giving you limited information?" Stiles asked. "But why?"

Darcy shrugged helplessly. "Maybe they think it's to keep me safe, or off the radar. Or maybe they're afraid of those runes- Deaton and the Hale adults witnessed some of the attacks on sparks. Surely they saw at least one spark fight back. Whatever the case, I'm tired of just accepting whatever they decide to tell me."

She pointed at the locked bookcase in the corner of the room. "Peter keeps records of sparks in there. I've seen one or two of them- just the details of the Ak'ma attacks."


Darcy nodded. "I just have to work out what kind of rune it is, and how to get around it without alerting Peter or Deaton."

Stiles and Darcy approached the bookcase, studying it closely for wards. "Don't touch it, just in case that's what sets the ward off," Darcy warned.

"Here," Stiles said a few minutes later. He pointed to the small inscriptions on the door handles. Darcy crept forward. She frowned- the rune was somewhat familiar, made up of pieces of the ones marked around the Hale territory. The curve of the base line, three arrowheads threaded together, the deliberate dotted line connecting the shapes in a graceful arch. A simple rune to mark this area as the caster's own, react to attempts to break in, and warn the caster, respectively.
Darcy carefully reached forward with her spark to test it. "It's very weak," she said in surprise. "Deaton made it, you can see in the way it's written." She traced her finger along the firm, solid lines of Deaton's ward, recognizing his writing after years of lessons.

"He's a Druid, though, right? This isn't exactly earth, or a territory to defend. It's just a bookcase." Stiles tapped the thick wooden door.

"Yeah," Darcy agreed. "I just didn't realize how much of his power came from the nemeton." Her own magic was an ocean compared to Deaton's pond.

Darcy copied the rune down on one of Stiles's pages of notes. She'd have to be careful, but a tiny little mark disrupting the dotted line would probably disconnect the two pieces of the ward. Then the rune would be incomplete- the caster couldn't be alerted to the break-in without that connection.

"It's that simple?" Stiles asked.

Darcy studied the rune, arms crossed. "I think so." She looked at his disbelieving expression. "Seriously, runes are super easy to disrupt. You don't have to be a magic user to fuck one up; just know how to read them and you can find the links easily."

She blew on the paper and they watched the rune glow with her magic. "You've been watching Practical Magic again, haven't you?" Stiles asked when she wiggled happily.

"It's Erica's favorite movie!" Darcy protested.

She pointed to the rune. "Try to grab the paper." Stiles did, frowning when he was unable to pick it up. Darcy sucked in a breath when the rune activated. It felt like pins and needles zipping up and down her body. "Okay, now draw a line with your pen, right between the last dot and the baseline." Stiles obeyed. "Try again."

He picked the paper up and looked at her curiously. "Did it work?" She waited another second, then nodded with a broad grin.

Stiles shook his head. "That's all it took, huh?"

"That's it," she said. "Now the question is how to get the line off when we're finished without activating the rune."

"Pencil mark?" Stiles suggested. "You could erase it. No, dammit, werewolves."

Darcy nodded. "Peter would be able to see or smell it. Or the rune might go off when we're halfway through."

"A sticker?"

"That... that could work," Darcy said thoughtfully. "I could use one of Cora's, she's got about a thousand in her room." She ran upstairs and into Cora's room. It looked like a tornado had hit. Darcy waded through stacks of blocks and books, disfigured barbies, and fuck knows what else. Cora playing Godzilla again, it seemed.

Stiles was copying the rune down when she finally made it back to the library, stickers in hand. Darcy carefully measured a long purple snake sticker against the ward. She pulled a small knife, a gift from Chris, from her back pocket and cut it to fit.

"Here goes nothing," Darcy muttered. She pressed the sticker into place and reached out again with
her Spark. "It's inactive," she breathed.

"Fuck, we're brilliant," Stiles said as he reached around her and opened the bookcase door.

"Some of them are missing," Darcy growled. She scanned the bindings. "The ones I was looking for are gone."

"Deaton, maybe?" Stiles grabbed for one of the books.

"Wait!" Darcy pulled her marker out and traced a rune on his arm. Stiles watched with interest as she tapped it. "Okay. Now you won't leave any traces on these books. Peter would be able to smell you on them otherwise."

"That feels weird," Stiles told her, staring intently at the rune.

Darcy frowned at him. " Weird like warm and fuzzy? That's normal, dude."

"No, weird like... I don't know. Wrong."

"What?"

"Nevermind, it's fine." He waved her off and reached for one of the tomes.

Stiles flipped through the book- a record of the first known attacks by the Ak'ma- and wiped absently at his arm. Darcy shuffled through the rest of them.

"Not here." She stomped away, frustrated.

Stiles glanced up at her. "Deaton's got some like this in his office," he told her. "I saw them yesterday when Scott was working."

"Why were you there?" Darcy asked.

"Puppies were there, Darcy. So many puppies."

"Why do I miss all the good stuff?" She whined.

"Scott knows to text me for such things," Stiles said loftily. He grinned at her. "I'll add you to the group text. Allison's in it, too."

Darcy winced. "That might not be such a good idea," she sighed. "Allison doesn't like me."

"What? Why not?"

"God, boys are so oblivious. It's a long story, okay? I'll tell you later. Let's go to Deaton's."  

"Are we breaking into his office, too?" Stiles asked eagerly. He reluctantly returned the book and closed the door. Darcy tore the sticker off, both ends at the same time to prevent a potential half-activation. Stiles swiped his notes into one pile, hiding the page they'd used to practice breaking the rune. He scratched at his arm again.

"No, you're going to distract him while I search his office. And for god's sake, go wash that off if it bother you so much." Stiles sighed in relief and darted off to the downstairs bathroom.

Darcy climbed into the Jeep when he was done, wincing at the roar and rattle when Stiles turned the engine over. Stiles drove slowly and carefully, waving to the cops at every speed trap they passed.
"Do you know them all?" Darcy asked after the third time the officer returned his wave.

Stiles shrugged. "Yeah, pretty much. After my mom died, I spent a lot of time underfoot at the station. Most of the older ones babysat me at some point." He changed the subject. "Why don't you have your license yet?"

She slumped in the seat. "I haven't had a lot of extra time to learn," she grumbled. "Between school, magic, training, baby werewolves, maintaining alliances, and whatever monster pops up, no one's taught me much more than 'this is the gas, these are the brakes.'"

Stiles considered her for a moment. "I'm surprised you haven't taken it into your own hands yet."

"I'm giving it another week before I steal the Camaro," Darcy declared. "No, no, don't park next to that car! That's Mrs. Maughon's car, she clipped Peter on her way out of the parking lot last time. I don't think it was on accident, either." Stiles swerved to park three spots over, shooting a suspicious glare at Mrs. Maughon's car.

Darcy followed him into the vet's office. Stiles stopped just inside the door, so abruptly Darcy ran into his back. "Lydia, hi! What- what are you doing here?" He stuttered. Darcy gave an annoyed sigh.

Lydia Martin, dressed to the nines with a 'stop talking to me, peasant' expression, sat with a small, fluffy dog in the otherwise empty waiting area. Lydia's eyes sharpened when Darcy stepped around Stiles, suddenly interested.

"Odd choice of company," Lydia remarked. Darcy couldn't tell who it was directed at. "Though, you and Scott have been hanging out with them a lot lately, haven't you?"

Stiles shifted nervously. Darcy elbowed him viciously in the ribs. "I don't see how that's any concern of yours," she said sweetly to the other girl.

Lydia shrugged, unaffected. "I've heard things." She tapped a perfectly manicured nail on the arm of her chair. "This town is a little weird, and the Hales are definitely a part of that weird, wouldn't you say?"

"Hmm. You know what I think is weird? How you pretend to flunk all your classes when you're actually in the top three in every class you take." Darcy watched her closely. Lydia's green eyes narrowed.

"Top three?" She asked tightly.

Darcy smirked at her. "I've still got you beat, don't I?" Darcy knew she was right when Lydia's stare turned lethal. "And how strange that Beacon High's top three students are all right here."

Stiles practically snapped to attention when Lydia's startled gaze drifted to him. He opened his mouth, probably to say something stupid, when the exam room door opened and Mrs. Maughon stepped out, followed by Deaton.

"Oh, Laura, how is that uncle of yours?" Mrs. Maughon asked, sidling up to Darcy.

"He's fine, Mrs. Maughon," Darcy sighed, rolling her eyes. "You barely hit him."

"I really do feel terrible about it. Is he here? I really must apologize again." She looked around hopefully.
"He's not, no."

"Well. Do let him know I inquired about him." She hobbled out of the office, a tiny growl sounding from her purse as she passed by.

"Wait for it," Darcy said to Stiles. He frowned at her, then gaped when moments later a crash sounded from outside. "Ha! Hit the trash cans again! Deaton, you owe me five bucks."

"If you recall correctly, Miss Lewis, I never took that bet. Miss Martin, you may bring Prada in here," Deaton said calmly. Lydia looked between Darcy and Deaton suspiciously before stalking into the exam room. Deaton closed the door behind her.

Stiles and Darcy slipped past the gate, lined with mountain ash to keep the supernatural out of the office, and headed towards the back. "Scott's supposed to work later this afternoon," Stiles told her quietly.

Darcy picked the lock on Deaton's office door, reaching inside to grab a jar of mountain ash. "Alright, here's our cover. You want to learn how to manipulate mountain ash, and I am both kind and benevolent and so agreed to teach you."

"I actually do want to learn," he admitted. "Deaton said even humans could use it."

"There's the genius of it. It's not a cover story, it's the truth." She waved the jar at him. "Open it. What time is Scott coming?"

Stiles glanced at the clock. "An hour."

"Perfect, that gives you time to figure this out before you catch your first werewolf!"

Darcy coached him through the process- "grab a handful, close your eyes, and believe"- while she searched Deaton's office, checking carefully for wards. Stiles muttered to himself outside, throwing handfuls of mountain ash with a hopeful expression.

"They hid them somewhere else," Darcy said from the floor, sitting back on her heels. "Which means I'm right to be looking."

Stiles poked his head around the door. "Well, it's not like they're the only people with information about sparks. What about Satomi?"

Darcy brightened. "She would know where to look!" She stepped out of the office and sighed at the scattered mountain ash on the floor. "Stiles."

"I know, I know." He reached for the broom right as Deaton walked into the back. He looked around the room and then studied Stiles impassively.

"Did you succeed?" He asked.

"No," Stiles grumbled.

"Interesting." Deaton went back up front. Stiles stared after him, warring between insult and disbelief.

"What does that mean?" He asked Darcy.

She shrugged. "Who knows. It's Deaton."
"Yeah, but..." Stiles trailed off, staring forlornly at the floor. Darcy patted him sympathetically on the shoulder.

"It takes time. Watch what I do, and then try again." Darcy held her hand out, palm down, and took a deep breath. She reached for her spark and flipped her hand over in a sharp movement. The mountain ash slithered along the floor and up her legs until it reached her palm, winding around itself until a perfect sphere rested in her hand.

"I hate you."

Darcy laughed. "Stiles, it took me forever to get to this point." She offered him the small globe. "It's all about will. Think about what you want it to do and believe it will happen."


He looked down, startled to see the mountain ash still in a perfectly rounded globe. "I'm not doing that," Darcy said as he studied it in awe. "You wanted it to stay in a ball, so it did. Well done, Stiles."

"Well done indeed," Deaton said from behind them. They both jumped. Stiles lost focus and dropped the mountain ash all over the floor again. Deaton watched Stiles, hands folded in front of him and a curious look on his face.

"Hey!" Scott shouted from the back room. "Why am I stuck in here?"

Darcy shrugged when Stiles and Deaton looked to her. "I got bored. You have traps all over your office, by the way. Bye, Scott!" Darcy grabbed Stiles's arm and dragged him from the vet clinic. She heard Scott shouting at her above the low, concerned female voice. Allison was with him.

"Let's go, you're my ride home," she told Stiles. He was too busy laughing to care about her manhandling him out to the car.

Stiles dropped her off at the Hale house and, after collecting his notes, went home to cook for his dad. Darcy waved and turned to go inside- she froze when her wards hummed in warning. They weren't set off quite yet, just buzzing in anticipation. Darcy sprinted inside, snatched up her staff resting beside the door, and yelled for someone to come with her.

Talia caught up with her before she'd gone 10 feet, red-eyed and bristling. "What is it?" Peter appeared on Darcy's other side, scanning the forest as Darcy kept running towards the breach.

"Wards," she panted. "Not set off yet, but something touched them."

"Darcy, can you-" She reached over with her marker and sent a thread of her spark to the runes on Peter's arm.

"Go, they won't be able to smell or hear you." Peter pressed a hurried kiss to her hair in thanks and sprinted away. He would come up behind the intruders, just in case they weren't friendly.

Talia touched her arm to slow her down. She winked at Darcy, then adopted a casual stroll, as if this were their nightly routine. Biting down on a smile, Darcy followed suit. She twirled her staff around and fought the urge to whistle.

They rounded a trio of massive oak trees and found the disturbance. Two men stood just barely outside the wards, standing patiently as Talia and Darcy approached. They both nodded their heads in deference to Talia, and again to Darcy, to her surprise.
The older one, a black man that looked to be in his early 30's, spoke first. "Alpha Hale, I apologize for disturbing you tonight. We wish to speak with your ally and charge, the spark Darcy Lewis." He met Darcy's curious stare, his face open and friendly.

"Darcy Lewis, my name is Trevor Pace. I am third in command of the Prescott pack in Sedona, Arizona. We've heard news that you have allied with Satomi Ito. Is this true?" The younger man watched her with open interest. He was handsome, with dark hair and eyes and a lean, muscled body.

"It is, yes. I'm allied with the Ito Pack as well as the Hales and Argents." Darcy recalled bits and pieces of the Prescott Pack's history. The Alpha, Viola, was a Native American woman from the Yavapai-Apache Tribe. She fell in love with and married an omega, one who had traveled with various nomadic packs from Mexico.

"My Alpha sent me to extend an offer," Trevor said. "We have a request for the wards you are capable of creating and tying with our land. My Alpha would like to express an interest in a favor or an alliance as repayment, should you accept."

Darcy considered him for a moment. Her instincts told her to say yes- she'd heard good things from Peter, Talia, and Satomi individually about this woman. "I would accept, Trevor Pace, under two conditions."

He inclined his head and motioned for her to continue.

"The first condition is that I bring two individuals with me on this trip. One would be Peter Hale-" she motioned to where he leaned against a tree behind the men, much to their shock- "and the other a member of the Ito Pack."

"This is fair," Trevor agreed, eyeing Peter. His eyes dropped to the runes on Peter's arm and he nodded to himself. He turned back to Darcy, though the other man kept half of his focus on Peter. "And the second?"

Darcy smiled. "You step through my wards." She motioned to the runes engraved on the tree beside him, the one he likely touched to get her attention. They were designed to alert her to any ill intentions held by the individual, towards her or the Hales.

Without hesitation, Trevor stepped forward past the boundary line. The young man behind him did the same. The wards flared briefly, alerting her to trespassers, but no further warning came.

Darcy stepped forward and extended her hand. “It’s very nice to meet you, Trevor. Why don’t we discuss details of this visit?”

Chapter End Notes

Sophia is the emotional heavy lifter in this fic, in case you haven't noticed. I just love her, okay?

Next chapter: Darcy's junior year, more of the Teen Wolf crew, and the Fae
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Sorry it took a while for this update- I wanted to spend some extra time until I was happy with it. I don't have a beta, so all mistakes are (as always) my own.

I'm excited to hear what you guys think about this chapter!

One misstep, you're mine

And you'd better be clever if you wanna survive

Once you cross the line

You'll be wishing you had listened when you meet your demise

- Monsters, Ruelle

The plane landed with a jolt and a bounce. Darcy winced as Maya's hand squeezed even tighter around hers. Satomi's daughter was pale, her teeth clenched tightly together as the plane taxied over to the dock. She didn't release Darcy's hand until the flight attendant politely informed them they could leave.

Darcy hurried as quickly as she could to gather her things and let Maya herd her off the plane and into the bustling airport. Stressed as she was, Maya still allowed no one close enough to touch Darcy. Their trip to a Carrillo pack in New Mexico had been a bit tense.

They contacted Darcy weeks after she'd confirmed her alliance with the Prescott pack in Arizona, seeking airtight wards for their territory. Darcy asked Maya to escort her, along with Sam Prescott, the young man who had first approached her along with his pack's third in command. As the Prescott Alpha's son, he was an excellent political choice for the job; Darcy could strengthen ties and express her trust in her newest allies by inviting him, but also show the Carrillo pack that Darcy was extending her reach beyond just the Hales.

The fact that he was cute as hell had nothing to do with it, of course.

The three of them hadn't been prepared for the strange welcome. The Carrillo pack initially protested Darcy's companions, declaring it an offense to their integrity. Darcy, who learned to better phrase "I'm bringing backup just in case you're crazy" over the years, patiently but firmly reminded the Alpha that it was still dangerous for sparks to travel alone and that their company was non-negotiable.

The negotiations hadn't improved from there. Darcy initially expected a favor in return, or the offer of an alliance, but the pack pushed for a monetary exchange. They seemed on edge for the duration of her visit, circling her warily as she worked. Maya and Sam refused to leave her alone for even a second, eyeing the pack with suspicion.
"They're afraid of something," Sam muttered while Darcy carved runes into the stones along the territory boundaries. Maya, sharpening her knives a few feet away, nodded in agreement. "And I don't like how angry they were when Maya and I showed up with you."

Darcy glanced over her shoulder at him. "You think they were planning something?" She noticed the group of the Carrillo 'wolves clustered together, just barely within hearing range. Guards, they'd been told, from potential nomadic wolves that frequented the area. Darcy came prepared, though, and the three of them sat within a warded circle. It was rude, maybe, but they needed to talk without fear of being overheard.

Sam shrugged his wide shoulders, shoving his hands in his jean pockets as he hovered over her. Darcy tried not to be distracted by the solid warmth of him. She frowned at the rune, etching a series of short lines into the base. She and Stiles had been experimenting back at home, and recently discovered that this particular addition to a rune would hide the symbol. It worked as a sort of camouflage, blending the lines of the symbol into the base's surface until no one but the creator could discern the rune. It was an invaluable discovery, especially for wards.

"Maybe. It's a little weird that they were so opposed to us being here. I know my mom has connections with them, and I'm sure Satomi does too." Sam leaned over her shoulder to squint at the rune. "Almost done?"

"Almost," Darcy told him, cheeks warm as she worked on the final marks. "Then about twelve more to finish outlining the territory. I'll activate them once they're all complete."

"There have been rumors in this area," Maya said from her perch. She stared menacingly at the Carrillo wolves, who inched closer and frowned over at them. Probably just now figuring out that Darcy had warded the three of them against curious eavesdroppers.

Sam and Darcy traded looks. "What kind of rumors?" Darcy asked. Sam helped her stand, smiling down at her when she groaned dramatically. Her limbs were stiff and sore after hours of crouching in the desert sand. She flexed her hand, aching and cramping from the tedious carving. Sam caught it in one of his own, his long fingers pressing and massaging absently as he studied the runes on the stone at their feet. Darcy was fervently grateful for the runes disguising her heartbeat- sound and feel, thank you Satomi. She just wished she had one to control the fire-engine red blush that splashed across her face.

The side of Maya's mouth was quirked up, though she didn't look away from the Carrillo 'wolves. "Rumors of a nomadic pack causing trouble for those already established in a territory. Acting as some sort of policing unit, deciding whether the Alphas are strong enough to keep their pack and territory."

"What?" Darcy asked, sufficiently distracted from Sam's long fingers and smooth brown skin. "What gives them that right?" Sam stilled and frowned over at Maya, too, though he hadn't released Darcy's hand.

Maya lifted a shoulder. "The fact that no one's stopped them yet. They'll continue to grow more powerful, too, if they remain unopposed." She studied the desert around them, more focused than all of the werewolves present. "Braeden's looking into it. She'll reach out if it's something we need to worry about." She stood, handing Darcy her staff. "Let's move on."

~*~

School started all too early the next morning. Darcy squinted grumpily at her locker, jetlagged and un-caffeinated. Stiles flopped against the locker next to hers, grinning widely.
"So? Did it work?"

"Ugh, you already know it worked, we practiced like 1,000 times." She shoved her books into the open locker and blinked at them, realizing she put them in her bookbag for class only seconds previously. Snarling under her breath, Darcy angrily snatched them back up again and slammed the locker shut.

"No coffee this morning?" Stiles asked sympathetically, though from a careful distance. He raised his hands with an innocent smile when she glared at him, opening his mouth to speak when someone knocked aggressively into him on their way past.

"Watch it, Stilinski." Jackson Whittemore sneered at Stiles, who rolled his eyes at the other boy. Scott, giggling with Allison down the hall, looked up with a frown. He said something quietly to Allison and started weaving towards them through the throng of students. Allison deliberated for a few seconds, eyes on Darcy, before following.

"Hey, jackass, how about you watch it," Darcy said. She was in no mood for this shit. Darcy dropped her bookbag and jabbed a finger into Jackson’s chest. “I know there’s not nearly enough room in the hallway for you and your ego, but try to keep the rest of us out of it. We suffocate on your over-priced cologne as it is.” Stiles poorly disguised his laugh as a weak cough.

Jackson stepped back from Darcy, swatting at her hand and missing. She bristled anyway, preparing to knock him flat when Scott hurriedly fisted a hand in the back of her shirt to keep her in place.

“Fuck off, Whittemore,” Stiles said. He rested an arm casually on Allison’s shoulder, who eyed him dangerously but permitted it.

“You think I don’t know something’s going on? Huh?” Jackson asked, stepping close and dropping his voice. “In your little club of crazies here? No one gets that good overnight, McCall. Especially not you.”

Scott smiled calmly back at him. “Practice and a good attitude, dude. Makes all the difference.”

Jackson’s cheeks flared red with anger. Before he could say anything, Danny Mahealani- the single nicest person in the school and somehow also Jackson’s best friend- walked by the group, eyes trained on his phone.

“Jackson, come on, I don’t want to be late.” He kept walking, not sparing the hallway drama a glance. Jackson followed after one last sneer at their group.

Scott didn’t let go of Darcy’s shirt until Jackson rounded the corner and left their sight. He patted her back. “No homicide before first period, Erica would never forgive you for not inviting her,” Scott told her cheerfully.

Stiles snorted, then yelped when Allison side-stepped from underneath his arm. She masterfully dodged his flailing limbs and pressed a kiss to Scott’s cheek. “I’m going to go look for Lydia; someone needs to warn her Jackson’s in a mood.” She left with a vague wave at the group that, to Darcy’s surprise, seemed to include her.

“Bilinski! McCall!” Coach Finstock barked right in Stiles’s ear, who nearly levitated off the ground in surprise. Darcy’s nerves couldn’t handle that disaster of a human being this early, so she slipped away from the enthusiastic… pep talk? Lecture? She couldn’t tell from all the shouting and manic laughter.

Darcy jogged to shop class, where she was meeting Erica for her first day back. Darcy was taking
college classes with local professors willing to let an advanced high school student enroll. After she’d placed out of four sequential math classes, they were much more welcoming.

She kept her independent study with Sophia, but moved it to her first period rather than at the end of the day; she’d leave right after for the local community college. Maya, god bless her, kidnapped Darcy one day last summer and gave her a crash course (literally) in driving. She was scheduled to take the test next week; Boyd would also be taking classes at the community college and would drive until then.

Darcy slipped through the door, grinning at the rapid-fire Spanish coming from the office. She headed towards the arguing, only to stumble to a confused halt halfway across the room. Lydia stood beside Darcy’s usual workstation, staring blankly into the space between the desk and wall. She stood unnaturally still, head cocked, utterly unaware of everything around her.

“Lydia?” Darcy asked hesitantly. She glanced back when the arguing cut off and the office door opened to reveal a bewildered Erica. Darcy shook her head at her friend, motioning for her to stay with Sophia, who was peering curiously over Erica’s head.

Lydia didn’t move. She didn’t react when Darcy called her name again. Darcy hesitated, then gently touched Lydia’s slender wrist. “Lydia?”

A deep inhale, like someone surfacing from underwater. Lydia blinked rapidly and stumbled backwards. She rubbed at her eyes, still staring at the same spot until Darcy cleared her throat awkwardly. Lydia jerked around, narrowing her green eyes at Darcy.

“Are you okay?” Darcy asked. “Did you.. uh.. need something?”

Lydia glanced between Darcy and the mysterious spot again. She seemed to realize Darcy didn’t see whatever she was looking at. Confused panic flashed across Lydia’s face, almost too quickly for Darcy to catch, before her expression smoothed into its usual disdain.

“I’m perfectly fine,” Lydia said, brushing her hands down her front. She couldn’t help but glance back at the spot again. Darcy followed her gaze but saw nothing but the wall. “I was just on my way to English.”

“That’s on the other side of the school,” Darcy told her quietly. “Are you sure you’re feeling alright?”

“I told you I’m fine,” Lydia snapped. She brushed past Darcy and stalked out the door, the picture of confidence in a short black dress and blood-red heels.

“Well, that was weird.” Erica commented. She crossed the room to study the same spot, hands on her leather-clad hips. “I didn’t even hear her come in.”

“I don’t think she remembers coming in here.” Darcy blew out a breath. “Did she seem scared to you?”

Erica shrugged. “I thought she was her normal bitchy self. I gotta get to class. We can contemplate the insanity that is Lydia Martin later.” She strutted out of the classroom, waving to Sophia.

Sophia touched her fingers to Darcy’s shoulder. “Everything okay?”

Darcy threw her hands in the air and gave up on the morning. “Who knows. Probably not, knowing this town.”
Sophia tucked her arm into Darcy’s and guided her to Sophia’s own workstation. “No use worrying about it right now. C’mon, let’s get started.”

Two weeks later, Darcy was too busy to notice Lydia’s strange behavior but in passing as she ran from class to Boyd’s car. Erica reported similar uncharacteristic airheadedness from the redhead queen bee of the school. Jackson, apparently, was still too obsessed with working out Scott’s secret to success to notice his girlfriend becoming lost in her own mind.

It came to a head one morning before Darcy’s independent study. Allison hovered awkwardly outside the classroom, clutching her books tightly. Sophia noticed her first, nudging Darcy with a knee until she looked up.

Darcy blinked at the other girl for a moment, thinking maybe she was lost. But Allison squared her shoulders and marched into the room, coming to a stop at Darcy’s side.

“Darcy.”

“Uh, yeah. Hi?” Darcy fumbled with her tools, hardly noticing Sophia gently taking them from her and moving away.

“Have you seen Lydia?”

Like an idiot, she looked around the room. “No?”

Allison worriedly chewed at her bottom lip, her dark hair falling into her face as she studied Darcy’s disaster of a project. “She isn’t answering my calls,” Allison told her after a long moment. “I haven’t heard from her since school yesterday.”

Darcy frowned, sitting up. “Is that normal? She’s not just sick or something?”

Allison shook her head. “Look, I know we aren’t... “ She trailed off, then checked the blank screen of her phone. Allison swallowed and looked Darcy in the eyes for the first time since she’d walked into the room. “I didn’t know who else to ask,” she said. “My mom is visiting her family in New York, and my dad and Peter...”

Darcy wrinkled her nose in solidarity. “Yeah, I get it. They’re a little distracted.”

“Will you help me look for her?” Allison blurted. “I’m just... really worried. She hasn’t been herself lately.”

“Of course,” Darcy said. She wiped her hands off on her jeans, then sighed at the grease stains left behind. “After school? I get done at 2:00.”

“I’ll meet you at her house.” Darcy watched Allison stride out the door. She noticed that Allison wavered between her initial shy, uncertain disposition and the Argent family’s familiar unshakable composure. With influences like Victoria Stane-Argent in her life, Darcy couldn’t help but wonder what kind of hunter Allison would turn out to be.

Victoria, realizing that the boy dating her daughter was a werewolf, took Allison aside and revealed the truth, along with an offer to ‘deal with him.’ According to Chris, the discussion was notably anti-supernatural until he arrived with dinner an hour later only to be confronted with a shell-shocked and angry daughter.

Darcy was anxious all day, avoiding Boyd’s mildly concerned looks as he drove them back from their college classes that afternoon. She shook her head when he made to turn towards the Hale
house. "Can you drop me off at Lydia's house?"

Boyd eyed her but turned left instead, heading towards town. He didn't ask questions, but Darcy saw his eyebrows raise in surprise at the sight of Allison waiting in the Martin's driveway, parked next to Lydia's car. "I'll have my phone on me if you need a ride," he told her quietly as she opened the car door.

Darcy smiled at her friend. "We'll be fine. We're just going to check on Lydia."

"Uh huh. Text me every thirty minutes or I'm sending Erica after you."

"Boyd," she said, rolling her eyes. "She's not going to shoot me."

"Her mom wanted to shoot Scott," he reminded her. "And I heard she hates magic users more than anything else. Be careful, Darcy. We don't know what Victoria may have told her."

Troubled, but refusing to let it show, Darcy waved him off. She kept a marker in her pocket and the important runes already drawn on her upper arm, hidden underneath her t-shirt. She remembered Victoria's face all too well on that night years ago. Darcy wasn't taking any chances that Allison would feel the same way.

Allison stood by the front door and waited for Darcy to join her. Darcy reached for the doorbell.

"Don't bother, they're never home." She pulled out her keychain. "Lydia gave me a key and the alarm code."

"Does she do that for anyone else?" Darcy asked, following Allison through the front door and watching as Allison typed in the alarm code, carefully shielding it from Darcy's view.

"Not even Jackson," Allison said. She started up the stairs. Darcy grimaced at the overwhelming quiet in the giant, lonely house. After living with the Hales, this house felt like a museum, or a well-decorated tomb. Allison glanced back at Darcy and noticed her expression. "I know, it's awful."

She knocked on the closed door at the top of the stairs, pushing it open when there was no answer. "Lydia?" Allison stopped at the threshold, peering into the dark room. Darcy slipped past her, fumbling for the light switch.

Something felt off.

"Stay behind me," Darcy said quietly as the lights flickered on in the empty room. The otter spun in nervous circles around the runes on her arm. She could practically feel the heat of Allison's scowl behind her.

"I can take care of myself," Allison told her, quiet and angry.

"Never said you couldn't. I just thought you might be a little happier if I got jumped first. Gives you a little warning, you know, time to escape." Darcy cautiously toed the bathroom door open as Allison scanned the room.

Allison scoffed. "I wouldn't run away."

"Oh, yeah? Even if something was lurking in here, ready and able to take down a spark?" Darcy challenged. Sue her, she was a little on edge. The bathroom was empty. It was also the cleanest bathroom she'd ever personally seen, especially after she started sharing with Cora at home. A little creeped out, Darcy crouched to see underneath the bed.
"I'm not my mother, if that's what you're suggesting. Or my aunt." Allison flung the closet open as Darcy turned to stare at her. She met Darcy's shocked gaze. "I can make my own decisions."

"You... you know about Kate?"

Allison was quiet for a long few minutes. Finally, she sighed and kicked at the wheels of Lydia's desk chair. "Yeah. Mom told me what happened, first, but later Dad told me the rest of it. What she did, what you did." Allison fiddled with her shirt hem before looking up at Darcy. "I'm sorry for what Kate did to your mom."

Darcy flinched, suddenly having trouble breathing. She remembered every detail of her mother's death— they'd been connected with a familial magic strong enough to keep them tied for miles. It was how Darcy had stayed alive, hidden from Kate while her mother tried to draw the other woman away.

She rubbed at the pain in her chest, fighting back the surge of magic responding to her panic. She could distantly hear Allison talking to her, apologizing, but Darcy focused on measuring her breaths. She kept her eyes trained on the thick carpet of Lydia's bedroom, fully aware that her eyes were probably gold. Allison might say she was okay with magic, but seeing it was entirely different.

Darcy blinked to clear away the small green spots in the corner of her vision. She frowned when it remained, threaded through the carpet and down the stairs. "Do you see that?" She interrupted Allison's concerned questioning, pointing at the spots.

Allison looked even more concerned. "No, I don't see anything. Are you sure you're okay?" She swallowed hard when Darcy raised her head, revealing her spark-gold eyes. She put it together quickly, though, and inhaled sharply. "Oh. What do you see?"

"Green lights?" Darcy said with an uncertain jerk of her shoulders. "They lead back down the stairs."

"Well, let's see where they go." Allison stepped aside and trailed Darcy back downstairs and out the back door, where Darcy stopped and stared at the forest behind the house.

"I didn't know Lydia's house backed up to the preserve," she said uneasily. Allison looked between the woods and Darcy. Darcy cleared her throat. "The lights lead into the woods."

"Hang on," Allison told her, and ran around the side of the house. Darcy heard a car alarm beep, and took the brief minute of solitude to send Boyd a text. A moment later, Allison jogged back around the house carrying a large, sleek crossbow. Darcy eyed her warily. "What?" Allison asked defensively. "You're telling me the creepy lights that stole my friend lead into the dark, even creepier forest. Of course I'm bringing my bow."

Darcy just mentally checked on her shield rune and started following the trail of lights again. Allison stayed a step behind and to the side, bow held comfortably in her hands.

"I wonder if this is what Lydia was seeing," Darcy said lowly. The lights were small but distracting, bobbing gently in the air.

"You couldn't see them before?" Allison asked. "I thought you were just not admitting anything to her because of the whole secrecy thing."

Darcy rolled her eyes. "I'm not a complete asshole," she muttered. "I didn't see any of these until I used my spark in her room. If I had, I might have said something to her earlier."
"If Lydia saw these, too, does that mean she's... something? Or just that she was stalked by whatever left these behind?" Allison stepped soundlessly through the woods- she'd started training with Chris, then.

"Who knows. Could be either, could be both. I wouldn't have let her think she was crazy, though. I've just been a little busy." Darcy couldn't help but feel a little guilty, though. She'd seen the changes in Lydia's behavior, noticed her becoming quiet and distracted. It fell down Darcy's list of priorities, and now Lydia was missing.

"Wait," Allison whispered. Darcy froze and glanced back at her. Allison was still, bow raised and pointed at the trees behind them. "Something's following us."

Darcy sucked in a breath, wishing she'd remembered her staff. She stepped closer to Allison and leaned in. "You shoot, I'll shield." Allison gave a sharp nod in return, slinking forward. Darcy focused on the runes on her arm, ready to wield her magic at a moment's notice.

A sharp whistle pierced the tense silence and both girls relaxed, though they stayed alert until Chris stepped through the trees, Peter close behind him. "What on earth are you two doing out here?" Peter asked, baffled. Allison let the bow drop and Darcy released the well of magic she'd been holding with a sigh. All this intense concentration was giving her a migraine.

"Lydia is missing," Allison told her father.

"And we found weird lights in her room that led this way," Darcy explained. She narrowed her eyes when Chris and Peter traded looks. "What? What do you know?"

"Allison…” Chris approached, expression grave. Allison and Darcy waited for the blow. “Lydia’s neighbors were killed last night in their home.” Allison staggered, jerking out of her father’s grip.

“No. No! She’s not… Dad, come on.” Allison backed into Darcy, who tucked her hand around the other girl’s trembling forearm in silent support. Peter noticed, one brow raising.

“Her room was empty, totally clean,” Darcy told them. “No signs of a struggle, no blood, nothing. We were following the lights from her room out here.”

Peter’s shoulders lost a little tension. “Good. That’s good. The neighbors were killed in their beds, late last night by the looks of it. Lydia may just be missing, then.”

Allison was breathing heavily, but her hands stopped shaking with the hope that Lydia was still alive. “How were they killed?” She asked, steady again.

Chris winced. “Let’s just say it wasn’t pretty. The important thing is that their baby wasn’t found in the house.” Darcy tried not to think ‘Lydia stole a baby?!’ too loudly. Judging by Peter’s eye roll, she wasn’t very successful.

And then clarity hit. “Wait,” Darcy said, fingers tightening on Allison’s arm. “Wait a second. Missing baby, dead parents, shining lights?” She resisted the urge to curl up in a ball under her shield and hide. “You think this is the Fae.”

Chris’s mouth tightened. Peter scanned the darkening woods around them, wary. “This isn’t a discussion to have here and now. Let’s go.”

Allison was quiet as they walked back to her car. She slowed to march along beside Darcy, leaning in while the two men conversed ahead of them. “You’ll keep me in the loop?” Darcy must have looked surprised, because Allison smiled unhappily. “My dad’s still trying out keep me out of all
“I will,” Darcy promised lowly. “Find your family’s bestiary, if you can. Look up everything you can on Fae. I’ll get Stiles on it tonight.” They separated, Darcy following Peter to his car across the street as Chris climbed into Allison’s passenger seat. The Martin’s driveway was still empty save Lydia’s car. Darcy wondered how Lydia could stand to live in that giant, horribly empty house by herself.

She was still wondering the two days later, standing outside a house one street over from Lydia’s mansion. Another family found murdered last night, another baby missing. Red and blue lights flashed ominously outside the home, police drifting in and out with strained, pale faces.

Darcy texted an update to the Scott, Stiles, and Allison group text she was now a part of. She sent another separately to Allison, confirming the plans they’d reluctantly made earlier.

‘Looks like we were right.’

‘I’ll talk to Dad. Meet up later.’

Darcy texted an affirmative and climbed back into Stiles’s Jeep, idling two houses down. She sighed heavily, trying not to let her hands shake with the knowledge of what was coming. “Everything okay?” Stiles asked. He turned the police scanner down, watching her curiously.

“Yeah. A changeling fits,” she told him, staring determinedly out the window as the Jeep rumbled along the backroads. Her heart felt like it would beat right out of her chest. “We’ve got to find it and kill it, tonight. Otherwise another family’s going to end up shredded to pieces in their beds. And another child will be taken to the Fae realm to be killed or worse.” A moment later, she pointed to the trees marking the beginning of warded Hale territory. “Drop me here, I want to check the wards again.”

Stiles obeyed, only a little suspicious. “I’m going to go pick up Scott from Deaton’s and we’ll start tracking the changeling.”

Darcy nodded. “Erica and Boyd will start on this side of town, then. Meet in the middle. Talia’s still out of town, but Andrew and Laura are home if you need backup. Remember, iron is the only thing that’ll kill it.”

He tossed a thumb over his shoulder with a grin. “Iron bats in the backseat. Gonna be fun explaining that purchase to my dad.”

She could only manage a weak smile. “Be safe, okay?”

Darcy waited until Stiles drove away to let her smile drop. She leaned against one of the massive trees that she'd marked years ago and pulled out her phone. Maya answered on the first ring.

"Hey, kid. I'm almost there." Her voice was muffled from inside her helmet.

"I'm by the road," Darcy told her. She could hear Maya's motorcycle approaching. "The others have started already." Maya cursed under her breath but didn't bother responding as the bike roared around the bend and she noticed Darcy.

Maya handed her a spare helmet, holding the bike steady while Darcy climbed on behind her and wrapped her arms around Maya's middle. She tapped Maya's waist when she was settled and held on for dear life as Maya pulled a quick 180 turn and opened the bike up. Darcy closed her eyes and
rested her forehead on Maya's back.

She was terrified. But they'd agreed the night before, as a whole, that the fewer involved in this insane plan, the better.

Darcy twitched when her phone vibrated in her pocket. She tapped Maya's back urgently; Maya slowed the bike to a stop, waiting as Darcy wrestled her helmet off to read Allison's text.

"Allison sent coordinates," Darcy shouted over the bike engine. Maya twisted around to squint through her visor. The second text came through- 'tracking, C&P with. hurry.'

Maya finished tapping at her own phone and motioned for Darcy to hold on. They drove for another few miles; Maya slowed the bike to a stop at the edge of the preserve, closer to town than Darcy was comfortable with.

Darcy tried not to fidget nervously while Maya rolled the bike off the side of the road, hiding it in the treeline. She pulled two pistols from her saddlebags. Darcy caught the flash of knives already hidden in the woman's clothes. Maya noticed her gaze and smiled reassuringly. "Everything's iron. Here, I brought you these." She crouched down to tuck two knives into Darcy's boots and slipped a wicked looking blade into a sheath and then in Darcy's waistband. Maya straightened and caught Darcy's face between her hands, expression grave. "Go for the one at your back first, should it come to that. And no matter what happens, you stay close to me, okay?"

Darcy nodded. Maya released her and tugged a piece of paper out of her back pocket. "Mom sent me with this to give you." Darcy opened it and frowned at the unfamiliar rune. "She said an old friend of hers gave it to her for protection against the Fae's glamour. When active, the person can't be enthralled. Theoretically." Darcy sucked in a breath, realizing she was holding something worth more than gold.

"Holy shit," Darcy said, staring at Maya with wide eyes.

Maya grinned at her before tugging up her shirt. "Draw it on me now, and make sure to get the others before we go." Darcy pulled her Sharpie out and carefully traced the rune onto Maya's abdomen. "Keep the runes hidden from sight on everyone- I don't want the Fae taking offense to them. Besides," she said, pulling her shirt down over the black ink, "it'll keep them on their toes if they can't rely on their glamour to enthrall any of the humans."

Darcy sketched it on her own stomach and tucked the carefully folded paper into her jacket pocket, zipping it closed. "Ready," she told Maya. Darcy followed the mercenary into the dark woods, all too aware of the unfamiliar blade at her back. Maya checked her phone once more, then quietly but confidently redirected their path.

They hadn't been walking long when Maya held up a hand, freezing in place. Darcy looked to the side and found Peter's beta-bright eyes watching her about 50 feet away. He tipped his head to the side; Darcy followed the cue and saw Allison creeping forward with a different bow than she'd had the other day. Allison was focused intently ahead, eyes trained on Chris as he shadowed the Fae.

Maya and Darcy fell in beside Peter, who signed to them that Chris had tracked the changeling from the home of its last victims. He'd been too late to stop the changeling from slaughtering another family, but was able to get a shot in during the attack. A third baby taken to the Fae, then, if the changeling replaced it to stay inside the house undetected.

Now the changeling limped through the forest, chittering angrily. Darcy shivered at the sound but pulled her marker back out, tapping it on Peter's bicep to stop him. He obeyed, attention still directed
on the monster his lover stalked as Darcy shoved his shirt up and sketched the rune in the middle of his back.

Carefully, Darcy moved sideways until she was in step with Allison, who spared her a brief glance. Darcy held up her marker and mouthed 'protection' at the other girl. Allison didn't respond for a long few moments as they continued through the depths of the preserve. Finally, she nodded in acceptance and let Darcy pull her shirt aside to trace the rune on her right shoulder blade.

Chris stopped ahead of them, waiting until everyone drew up beside him to speak so quietly Darcy strained to hear him. "It found the gate." She mustered up her courage and peered around him.

The changeling was smaller than she'd thought- so small to have done such damage to the people it had killed. It might have been disguised as a small child before Chris had clipped it with an iron bullet; now it was a distorted nightmare with too many joints and teeth jutting out of its mouth. It reeked of blood and decay.

It stopped next to a small, subtle circle of flowers barely noticeable on the forest floor. Darcy gasped when the Fae stepped inside the circle and promptly disappeared. Maya grimly slid her guns out of their thigh holsters and approached the spot. Darcy stopped Chris from following. "Wait, turn around."

He double checked his own pistols while Darcy sketched the rune onto his back. Maya motioned for Darcy to join her beside the ring when she finished. "Darcy and I will go first." She cut Peter’s protest off with a brief, dismissive glance. "I need her to watch my back. The two of us can handle anything that might be waiting on the other side of this gate until the rest of you come through."

Darcy tried to look competent next to the lethal woman positively bristling with weaponry. "Chris next, then Allison, then Peter. Once we’re in, we stick close. No wandering, no matter what you might see or hear. Darcy will activate the rune once we’re in the Fae realm, but there’s no guarantee it’ll work."

Darcy hooked her fingers into the waistband of Maya’s jeans and smiled tremulously at the others before she followed Maya through the Fae gate and into the Underhill.

Stepping into the Fae realm felt like wading through a veil of acid water. Her skin shifted and burned, like something inside her was trying to claw its way free. Darcy clung to Maya and gritted her teeth until they broke through the membrane separating their worlds, trying not to think about how terribly thin that divide really was.

She took a deep breath and looked around, caught somewhere between wonder and horror. The landscape mirrored the preserve they’d just left in a beautiful, twisted echo, but the forest around them looked like someone tripping on acid had been given powers of creation.

This forest was thicker, lusher, than the one Darcy called home. Mutated plants curled their way along the ground, rapidly sprouting flowers that changed color and shape as she watched. The tree trunks were smooth and polished, gleaming like black obsidian with beautiful leaves that changed color in the breeze. Darcy looked up, staring into the gray-green sky and wondering if the trees stretched until they touched the rolling clouds so far above them.

The air around them was changing, too. Darcy swallowed as the wind wove through the air and, like an artist dipping their paintbrush in water, the air rippled until she was looking at this strange world through red-tinted lenses. It changed again before she could ask if Maya had noticed, fading and distorting so fast Darcy lost track of the nauseating auras.

A paper-thin leaf drifted past them, morphing into a burst of snowflakes as it dipped in the wind.
They melted in a ray of filtered sunlight, only to reappear as a blossoming flower bud that touched the ground briefly and took hold, creeping across the forest floor like the others.

“Don’t touch anything,” Maya whispered. Maya’s eyes were wide but her hands were steady on the raised guns. “The Underhill is designed to draw humans in and trap them. Activate the runes, Darcy.”

Darcy hesitated. “Will they know I’m here if I do?” This was a world that lived and breathed magic, and her spark would be a lit match dropped in gasoline.

Maya shrugged as she rotated in a slow circle, assessing the forest for any threats lurking behind the trees. “The glamour in here is going to kill us faster than any Fae would. What we’re seeing isn’t the truth of this place.”

“Here goes nothing,” Darcy muttered, and threw her spark into the runes. She nearly fell over in shock when the vision around them vanished. In its place was a desolate landscape so bleak she almost pulled her spark back from the runes just so she wouldn’t have to look at it anymore.

Ash fell in a steady rain, piling high on the ground. The trees were burned husks crumbling in the wind. Darcy choked on the thick smoke that sat heavily in the air, pressing down on them from above. The landscape was bruised and blistered; the wind carried echoes of faint screams past them, both human and not.

Maya whirled, placing herself between Darcy and the ripple that appeared in the air. Chris materialized, followed closely by Allison and Peter. They staggered to a standstill, awed.

“Darcy,” Maya said tightly. Darcy felt a little bad for the others as she activated the runes on their skin. Their awe vanished, replaced immediately with uneasiness.

“What…” Allison stumbled back as a tree beside her groaned, pieces of it falling away to reveal a vicious blue fire smoldering inside. Peter caught her and nudged her over to Maya and Darcy.

“What the ever-loving fuck,” Peter said evenly. He crowded close to Darcy, who still hadn’t released Maya’s belt, and studied the ash raining down around them. “We wouldn’t have lasted twenty minutes in this place without that rune, if all of that was glamour.”

“How are we going to find anything in here?” Allison asked. Maya had reminded Darcy at length to never speak a name out loud in the Underhill- any nearby Fae could use the name to enslave them forever. Chris must have done the same for Allison.

Maya opened her mouth to answer when the pile of ash closest to them shivered and dissolved to reveal a short, hunched creature with bright red eyes and prominent teeth exposed in a manic grin. It didn’t react when Maya and Allison pointed their weapons at it, Chris twisting around to guard their backs. Darcy felt her otter tattoo circle the shield rune on her arm, ready to erupt at a moment’s notice as she stared at the Fae.

It curled long talons into the ash. Darcy wrinkled her nose at its strange metallic scent, eyeing the dirty brown hat covering its grisly hair. “You seek another visitor?” It croaked.

“Yes,” Maya said. “Another visitor. Human, like me.”

“Like you? No. No, not like you. Like us.” Heedless of the weapons pointed at its head, the Fae hobbled forward. Peter tensed, a hand on Darcy’s arm to pull her away should it lunge.

“Fine, not like me, then. But you know the visitor to which I am referring,” Maya told it.
“Hair like fire, the voice of death,” it chanted, then cackled. “The Queen has her now. The brightest gift in ages, until this one stepped through the gate.” Allison aimed her iron-tipped arrow at the Fae as it shuffled to a stop and leered at Darcy. “I will take you to your friend, travelers. But not now, no, it is far too late now. You must rest first.”

“Redcap,” Chris said quietly, still facing the other way. Maya flatly refused the redcap’s offer, and Darcy held her breath when the Fae trembled with rage. Allison flexed her fingers on her bow, preparing to fire.

“It’s angry,” Allison warned her dad softly. Chris slid his finger to the trigger of his gun with a short nod. Peter brushed against him, teeth elongating as he started to shift.

“And it’s going to be really pissed when Maya dropkicks it out of existence,” Darcy said under her breath as Maya rudely declined another offer of refuge. Allison choked on a laugh.

The argument escalated. The redcap growled deeply. Before it could do anything further, Maya shouted something unintelligible. Darcy yelped in surprise when the redcap shrieked and vanished in a burst of flames.

“What the hell was that?” Darcy asked, staring at the empty spot where the Fae had stood.

“Scripture, recited in Hebrew. Redcaps are deterred by bible verses and the cross,” Maya told her.

“You have bible verses memorized in Hebrew?” Peter asked skeptically.

“You don’t?”

Darcy had to bite back a laugh at Peter’s expression.

“Let’s go,” Maya said.

“Go where?” Allison asked. “How are we supposed to find her?”

“Theoretically, from the very little I know and understand of this place, we should be able to walk in any direction seeking the Queen and eventually, hopefully, we’ll find the Seelie Court. Intentions are important, here.”

“That’s a lot of guessing,” Allison said doubtfully.

“No one knows anything for certain about the Fae realm, to be honest,” Maya told her. They followed her as she picked a direction and started walking. “It’s considered a ‘sideways’ realm, like taking a step sideways into a dimension parallel to ours. At least, that’s the most logical explanation anyone’s come up with so far.”

“Oh, logical is what we’re calling it?” Peter muttered, side-stepping a smoldering piece of bark that floated past.

“Says the werewolf,” Chris said dryly. Peter snapped his teeth playfully at the hunter.

“So the Fae can jump back and forth between realms?” Allison asked, horrified.

Maya shook her head. “Thankfully, no. There are gates between our realms- that’s what we came through. If the gate is held by a powerful Fae, it’ll be stable enough to take you from one dimension to the other. If a human is unlucky enough to accidentally fall through, they’re sucked in by the glamour and enthralled.”
“Does the Seelie Queen hold the gates?” Darcy asked.

“Probably,” Maya shrugged. “She’s the strongest Fae in the Underhill, except for maybe the Unseelie Queen. Who we will not talk about anymore, in case she hears.” Maya slowed, squinting ahead of them. “Fuck. Okay, I think we’re almost there. Stay close.”

Darcy realized the ash at their feet had solidified into smooth white stone. The trees around them were immense now, stretching taller than she could see with trunks so large the five of them together wouldn’t be able reach halfway around their base. They were scorched into sheer black glass, the same blue fire flickering somewhere deep within and casting wicked shadows across the white expanse.

She flinched when fingers- the smallest of which was the entire length of her body- wrapped around one of the nearby tree columns, though nothing appeared from the inky depths. Allison made a surprised noise low in her throat beside Darcy, swinging her bow towards the grotesque faces peering at them from inside one of the tree columns.

In the time it took to blink once, twice, they were surrounded by Fae on all sides. Darcy’s stomach twisted. The Fae were far too varied for her to comprehend, but they all shared the same savage, alien semblance. She recalled Peter’s description of the Fae, from her lessons years ago. He’d told her that the ancient Fae had copied human forms and let their magic corrupt their physical forms into beautiful, depraved impersonations.

Darcy was too afraid to wonder what the Fae would look like with their glamour. As it was, their true forms, however dynamic, were a mockery of human bodies.

Some of the Fae seemed to be caught in the earth’s seasons. Dryads floated between burning glass trees, their hair a tangle of luminous flowers in an endless cycle of blooming and dying, blooming and dying. Darcy saw Fae with antlers, Fae with thorns growing along their brown-green bodies, others with fawn ears and wild creatures lurking beneath their skins.

Darcy could feel the cold fury of the autumnal Fae, lurking in the quiet dark. Winter Fae, wicked and cruel, prowled behind them. She caught the sharp lines of their bodies, their mouths and hands stained red with blood. The heat of the summer Fae scorched the tiles they stood on, splashing water and hissing steam and fever-bright eyes.

Others were ever-changing, never holding down one form for more than a few panicked heartbeats, their razor-sharp teeth and fathomless black eyes the only constant. There seemed to be no gender distinction among any of the Fae, just an endless state of chaos-wonder-fear.

“Eyes up,” Maya whispered. Sweat slid down the side of her face, the only outward sign of her fear. Allison pressed tightly against her dad and Darcy reached out to tightly grip Peter’s clammy hand. Her spark hummed in response to her terror.

A massive throne of ash and bone loomed ahead. Black glass, burning a molten blue from within, crackled in a deadly arch above it.

The Seelie Queen watched them approach with predatory interest.

Urgency clawed at Darcy the closer they came to the Queen. She clamped down on the desire to flee as they came to a halt a stone’s throw from the throne. Darcy looked up at the Seelie Queen with dread and reluctant awe.

The Fae Queen adopted a feminine shape, though she was horribly thin with skin the color of the ash
drifting from above. Dark smudges, like fingerprints dipped in blood, were streaked across her skin in an intricate, elaborate constellation. Delicate ears tapered to a point at the back of her head. Her hair was as black as the obsidian trees, matched by full lips stretching across a mouthful of fangs. The same blue fire incinerating this world from the inside out flickered beneath the Queen’s near-translucent skin.

When she leaned forward to peer at them wide, solid-black eyes, her hair floated through the air as if it were underwater. “How brave you must be, to come so far,” the Queen said. They tried not to shrink away from her voice- thin, pitched like nails dragged down a chalkboard.

“We’ve come for our friend,” Maya said. “She was taken from us.”

“Taken?” The Queen leaned back, moving as if she had more joints than it appeared. “No, not taken. The thief entered my realm willingly.”

Darcy and Allison frowned. “A thief?” Maya asked.

“She tried to steal the gates from my grasp,” the Seelie Queen hissed. “The girl is one of mine and shall be punished as such.” With a wave of her hand, Lydia was dragged out from the trees and brought to the foot of the throne. She was bound by a Fae so large its talons wrapped around her body in a macabre cage. Lydia’s eyes were practically glowing with her fury. Allison made an aborted movement towards her friend.

“She’s not one of yours,” Allison said, rounding on the Queen.

The Queen wrapped her fingers around the arms of her throne and snarled at Allison. Chris pulled his daughter back, his gun twitching.

“Oh, but she is. This one carries the voice of the dead. It is a gift from my own court.” Darcy sucked in a surprised breath. Holy shit. Lydia was a banshee.

She was interrupted from her thoughts when Peter’s hand slid limply from hers. His head was tipped to the side, eyes distant and dreamy. Darcy looked wildly around, trying to find the source of his distraction. A Fae with greedy, moon-white eyes reached for Peter with manic glee. Darcy didn’t think, just reached for her spark and shoved.

The shield knocked Peter backwards into Chris, who barely caught him before the ‘wolf hit the floor. There was a ripple of unease and the Fae surrounding them backed away, hissing in anger. Darcy spun around when the Seelie Queen jerked in shock, the cobalt blazes flaring in response. Her spark surged, breaking from her control. It crackled violently, encircling their group with tangible warning.

Darcy stepped forward, feeling the wild, raging strength of her spark all the way to her bones. She had no rune for this, but that didn’t seem to matter. Maybe magic just worked differently in this realm. Whatever the case, Darcy saw their fear. She would use it against them before the Fae decided the risk worth the reward.

Lydia’s eyes were wide and accusing. Darcy winced. They’d have a lot of explaining- and apologizing- to do when they were home. “Let me rephrase. We’ve come to retrieve our friend, and we’ve asked politely once.” Darcy met the Seelie Queen’s furious blue-black eyes, her own lit a bright gold.

“You ask for a favor,” the Queen said. “I do not give favors to those that threaten me and mine, child.” The fire pulsed violently under her skin.
“Funny, I don’t either.” Darcy cocked her head with a bland smile. The Fae skittered back when her spark crackled again, watching it fearfully.

“A trade, then,” the Queen proposed with a hungry smile.

Darcy started to speak, only to be interrupted by Lydia clearing her throat. She stood regally in a gauzy pink nightgown, barefoot and bright-eyed. “I would like to propose an alternative option.” She raised a brow at Darcy’s surprised stare. The Seelie Queen reluctantly turned her head to study the teen.

“And what do you have to offer?”

Lydia’s expression tightened into a sneer in response to the Queen's scorn before she smoothed it away. “A wager.”

“Oh?” Interest colored the Queen’s voice.

“You say only the strongest of Fae can hold a gate stable enough to pass safely through. None but yourself can do so in this court.” Lydia swatted dismissively at the talons trapping her in place. The Fae released her after a confused, questioning glance at the Queen. Lydia stepped forward, unwavering as she stared the Seelie Queen down.

“I say that I can not only hold a gate on my own, without any guidance other than what I’ve gleaned from your own company, but also that my friends and I can pass safely to and through them.”

Darcy gaped at Lydia, who ignored her in lieu of holding the Queen’s malevolent gaze. Somehow, in the time it had taken them to figure out where Lydia had been taken, cross into the Fae realm, and track her down, Lydia collected enough information from the Queen and her court to work a way out all by herself.

“And if you cannot?” The Queen purred.

“Then we remain in your realm, at your service.” The Queen’s eyes drifted to Darcy, then back to Lydia. “But, should I succeed, you will agree to leave the gates under my control and will not allow any within your power to slip through.”

“I would not deny my subjects the lure of your realm,” the Queen said with a wave of her clawed hand.

“You have so little control that they may do as they wish, then?” Lydia countered smoothly. There was a nasty pause. The Fae eyed their Queen, shrinking away from her barely-contained fury at the insult. Darcy held her breath, as did the others. Lydia alone remained unmoved.

Finally, the Queen spoke. “You have a deal, little banshee. Should you summon the strength and skill to take the gates from me, I will allow them to remain yours and permit your friends safe travel through them. My subjects will not seek passage through your gates.”

“We have a deal, then,” Lydia said. She tossed her hair over her shoulder and turned her back on the Seelie Queen. Lydia marched down the path they’d come, not slowing for the group as they cautiously followed her. The Fae watched silently. Darcy backed away but kept her eyes on the Queen, trusting Maya and Peter not to let her fall. The walk back to the gate felt light years longer; every shadow threatened their safety, every whisper the creeping of a Fae waiting to strike.

Lydia drew to a stop and stared at a faint tremor in the air. The rest of them stayed quiet, Allison moving to stand beside the banshee. Time passed. The air grew cold.
“It’s okay if you can’t,” Allison told her friend quietly, reaching for her friend’s hand. “We’ll figure it out.”

Lydia shook her head, lips pressed tightly together. “This is about will, not power. The Queen is the ruler because she has the strongest will of them all. I’ve watched them for days- she has the will to manipulate the magic however she wants. But that bitch is not stronger than I am.” She fell silent again but kept hold of Allison’s hand.

Allison glanced at Chris, concerned. Chris grimaced. “Time moves differently here. We’re lucky it was only days for her and not weeks, or months.”

The expanse of ash was empty, save for the burning trees. But Darcy still felt eyes on them, a prickle of awareness along the back of her neck. She stepped closer to Maya, ready to ask for an alternative plan of escape when Lydia gasped as if she’d been underwater too long.

The air split apart in front of Lydia, wavering once and then solidifying into a doorway. Lydia grinned triumphantly. “Well?” She asked, gesturing to the gate. Peter met Chris’s wary gaze and shrugged, stepping past Lydia to examine the gate.

“Guess I’ll go first. Try not to toss me into an alternate dimension, dear,” Peter told Lydia. She frowned scornfully, as if to say ‘You should be so lucky.’ He grinned at her, winked at Darcy, and stepped through.

Chris grudgingly followed after Allison refused to leave Lydia. Maya stared Allison down. “Go. Darcy and I can keep her safe until it’s her turn.” Allison vanished into the gate.

Darcy shook her head at Maya when she motioned her ahead. “They’re more afraid of me than your bullets. I’ve got it.” She held up a hand and let her spark wind around Lydia. “I can hold this until she steps through, but not for long,” Darcy said. Maya scowled but went through next.

Darcy edged closer to the gate and met Lydia’s eyes. “I’ll keep my spark close, in case the Queen tries to stop you.” Lydia didn’t react as Darcy directed her spark to wrap around her. “And Lydia? I’m sorry. I should have tried to help you sooner.”

“Yes, you should have,” Lydia told her. “But you did willingly go into a parallel dimension to get me back, which goes a long way towards an apology.” She gave Darcy a small, honest smile. Darcy returned it before stepping through the gate.

She broke through the veil and fell to her knees, back in the preserve. Her head swam and her stomach gave a sickening lurch. Darcy clamped down on the nausea, hardly noticing Maya’s supportive hand on her shoulder.

They waited anxiously in the dark forest until Lydia glided regally through the gate. It closed the moment her feet touched the ground, zipping closed until all that remained was the small circle of flowers. Allison threw her arms around Lydia with a wet laugh.

Darcy sighed in relief, tipping her head back to stare at the totally normal stars above them. She eyed Chris and Peter, panting to the side, and looked back at Lydia. Allison met Darcy’s gaze over Lydia’s shoulder, her dark eyes grateful.

Branches rustled behind Darcy. She let Maya drag her upright and away, reaching for her spark. Allison raised her bow as her dad and Peter faded into the shadows. Moments later, Scott and Erica burst through the trees, breathing hard.
“Where have you been?” Erica cried, leaning over with her hands on her knees. “It’s been two days!” She lunged for Darcy and Maya, wrapping them in a suffocating hug. Scott was peering suspiciously into the dark, twitching in surprise when Peter and Chris left their hiding places.

“Lydia!” Stiles skidded to an ungainly halt beside the girls. “You’re okay! Ouch!” Lydia reared back and punched him in the shoulder as hard as she could. Stiles gave her a wounded stare while Allison pressed her hand to her mouth to cover her laugh.

“That’s for acting like I was crazy when I asked you what was wrong with me!” Lydia told him angrily.

Stiles hung his head. “Okay, yeah, I deserved that.”

“Did you say we’ve been gone for three days?” Darcy asked, wrestling free from Erica’s iron grip.

“Yeah. And it hasn’t exactly been a peaceful three days, either,” Stiles muttered. His t-shirt was stained with sweat and he kept anxiously readjusting his grip on the metal bat in his hand.

“No, it has not.” Stiles squawked when Satomi stepped out of the dark behind him. The Alpha met her daughter’s stare over Erica’s head. “A druid has been murdered on Hale land.” Maya inhaled sharply.

“Deaton?” Darcy asked fearfully.

Satomi shook her head. “No. A woman. She was slaughtered at the nemeton last night.” Maya gripped Erica tightly, dread crossing her face.

“What does that mean for us?” Darcy asked. Satomi was solemn when she turned to Darcy.

“It means that war is coming to Beacon Hills.”
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait! This is a short chapter, but I wanted to give you guys something since it’s been so long. The rest of this chapter will be up before the end of the week- it's already nearly finished, but my total word count for the chapter as a whole is well over 10k words.... So I'm also trying to split that up a bit.

You may have noticed I finally decided on a final chapter count. It may change some, since this story tends to run away from me lol. But you can count on at least four more chapters in this fic, and then I'll move on to part two (which will introduce Jane & Thor and start the major MCU crossover).

Thanks for your patience, comments, and kudos! I'll get my shit together someday, I promise.

When it rains, it pours

There will be blood in the water

Cold to the core

Fate falls hard on our shoulders

- Ruelle, *Live Like Legends*

~*~

Darcy gritted her teeth as she sprinted down the dark alleyway, pressing a hand to the deep wound in her side. Her head was swimming, vision blurring, and she could taste blood in the back of her throat. The relative safety of the street yawned ahead. A deep growl rumbled behind her, closer than she’d thought. Too close.

She wasn’t going to make it.

~*~ FIVE DAYS AGO ~*~

“Her name was Julia Baccari,” Maya announced, ending the call and tossing her phone onto the table. “A Druid Emissary to a pack that was slaughtered last year. The Alpha was not found among the dead.” She collapsed in a chair and propped her feet up on Darcy’s chair.

“That fits,” Darcy said, waving a paper in the air. “Same thing happened with another pack.
Everyone dead, the Alpha mysteriously disappeared.

“And what? They joined up to make one tiny super pack?” Stiles asked from across the war room/library table. He motioned to the scattered pages and notes in front of them. “What’s our count up to now? Six packs total?”

Maya shook her head. “No. Mom knew of a couple of these attacks. The Alphas were killed alongside their packs in some cases. So far, we have only two missing Alphas with dead packs.”

Boyd turned from the board he and Stiles set up last night. Darcy tried not to look at it too often—the mess of red and blue lines gave her a headache. It made perfect sense to the two of them, though, so she didn’t complain. “So how did an Emissary from another pack get here, and what was she doing at the nemeton?” Boyd frowned back at the police photos Stiles had copied from the Sheriff’s case files.

“And who killed her?” Erica chimed in. She was sprawled out on the floor, painting her nails a bloody red. “I mean, I feel like she was probably up to no good, so they most likely did us a favor. But still.”

“Potential homicidal maniac running around Beacon Hills,” Stiles said in agreement, chewing thoughtfully on a pen.

“What else is new?” Darcy muttered. Maya huffed a laugh.

“That’s the spirit, darling,” Peter said, sailing into the room. He set a stack of pizza boxes down on their notes, ignoring Darcy and Stiles’s protests. “Someone update me.” Peter handed Boyd and Erica and entire box each, then retreated to the corner chair with his own.

“Six dead packs, two missing Alphas, one murdered Druid, and a partridge in a pear tree,” Darcy told him, reaching for a slice of pepperoni. Erica cackled from the floor while Boyd rolled his eyes.

“Thank you, darling, that was ever so helpful,” Peter drawled. Darcy grinned at him through a mouthful of pizza.

“The dead Druid was part of one of the packs that were murdered,” Maya said. “One of the first, actually.”

“Plus, there have been ‘animal attacks’ all over the place,” Stiles interjected. “People found mauled in the woods, looking like they’d been chewed on by… well, by a werewolf.”

“Any near Beacon Hills?” Peter asked, concern furrowing his brows.

Stiles shook his head. “No. Not yet, at least. But…” He glanced at Boyd, who stepped aside so they could see the board. He flipped it around to reveal a large, detailed map pinned to the other side.

“The animal attacks do seem to be getting closer and closer to us,” Boyd said. He traced a path of red X marks in a disjointed line, ending at the California-Nevada border. Boyd paused when Scott stumbled into the room, panting, and collapsed in the chair beside Stiles.

“Ran the borders with Talia,” Scott said breathlessly. “Never again.” Stiles patted him on the shoulder and offered him his own box of pizza. Scott took it gratefully, shoving half a piece in his mouth with a tired groan.

Maya looked up from the stack of coroner’s reports she’d somehow acquired. “What’s the date on the most recent attack?”
“Last week,” Boyd said grimly.

“Fuck.” Maya scrubbed her hands over her face. “They could be in Beacon Hills any time now.”

“Surely they wouldn’t be stupid enough to go after the Hales or Satomi,” Stiles said. He glanced around the room. “I mean, both are large, established packs with powerful Alphas. Plus the Argents are here, and Darcy.”

“I don’t know,” Maya sighed, leaning forward to rest her arms on her knees. “It depends on what they’re after,” she said with a furtive glance in Darcy’s direction.

Darcy sat upright. “You think they’re coming for me?” Peter’s eyes flashed in the corner of the room. Erica set her pizza down and exchanged a wary look with Boyd.

“I think they’re looking for an excuse to,” Maya admitted. “If power is what they’re after, it only makes sense they’d start looking in this direction.”

“So we work out a buddy system,” Talia said from the doorway. “No one goes anywhere alone, not until we know exactly what we’re dealing with.”

Maya nodded in agreement. “Speak up if something seems weird to you. Stick together in school, and maybe warn Allison and Lydia, too.”

“I’ll let Chris know tonight,” Peter said, standing. “And I’ll see if he’s worked anything out on his end.” He pressed a kiss to Darcy’s hair before leaving.

Erica and Boyd stayed the night. The three of them made a massive pile of blankets and pillows and slept on Darcy’s bedroom floor. At some point in the night, Cora crept through her and Darcy’s adjoining bathroom to curl up beside Darcy.

As usual, Erica hogged the bathroom all morning to get ready. Boyd went across the hall to use Derek’s shower. “Can you believe it’s our senior year already?” Erica asked from the bathroom. Her voice echoed loudly off the tiles.

“Yes, I feel a million years old,” Darcy groaned from the floor.

“That’s ‘cause Cora kicked all night and you got a total of about three hours of sleep,” Erica said, leaning over Darcy. “And you haven’t had an coffee yet.”

Boyd entered the room then, holding two steaming mugs. He handed one to Darcy. “I used all of the sugar in the house, so it should be just how you like it.”

“You’re my favorite,” Darcy told him seriously.

“Where’s mine?” Erica pouted.

“You don’t even like coffee,” Boyd said. “And I refuse to buy you energy drinks after what happened last time.” Darcy shuddered. Erica glowered at them both.

They made it to school with ten minutes to spare- after dragging Erica from the bathroom and into the car. Their lockers were beside each other this year. Not due to luck- Erica thoroughly terrified the two freshman boys on either side of Darcy’s locker on the first day of school and appropriated them for her and Boyd.

“You have the same schedule this year, Darce?” Erica asked, peering over Darcy’s shoulder.
“Independent study, nerd class, nerd class, and- oof! Geez, you have pointy elbows,” she said, rubbing at her stomach.

“Yes, Boyd and I are taking college classes again,” Darcy said. “Boyd’s driving us after first period.”

“Why aren’t you?” Erica asked. “You have your license.”

“And no car,” Darcy reminded her. “Laura’s got the Camaro, Talia and Andrew have the Range Rovers, and Peter has his stupid Jaguar.”

“Didn’t the Carrillo pack pay you, like, thousands upon thousands of dollars for the wards?” Boyd asked, shoving books into his bag.

“Yeah, and the other packs you’ve done work for,” Erica said. “You could totally buy a car. Hell, you could buy a house.”

“I-” Darcy stopped and thought about it. “Yeah, I guess I could.” She certainly had enough for a car, and that was without the trust fund the Hales set up for her. Plus, she’d discovered money left for her by her mother, from her own Spark contracts, that Darcy would come into when she turned eighteen. “Maybe when we graduate.”

“If we live that long,” Erica grumbled.

“Yeah, about that,” Stiles said from behind them. They turned to see him tugging anxiously at the straps of his bookbag. “My dad got called out this morning for a body found in an alley. Any guesses as to the cause of death?”

“Animal attack,” Darcy said. Dread pressed on her chest. “They’re here.”

“Got it in one,” Stiles said with false cheer. “We’re all gonna die horribly.” Danny, passing by, gave them a strange look. “Hypothetically!” Stiles called after Danny. “I meant that hypothetically!” He looked at them, sheepish. “I’m gonna go do some damage control.” He darted off after Danny, who looked mildly annoyed to have Stiles babbling at him so early.

The halls emptied as students made their way to class. Erica blew them a kiss and bounded off. Boyd and Darcy made their way to Hallway 3, where Sophia’s classroom and Boyd’s AP math class were. They turned the corner and slowed to a stop.

Jackson stood in front of his locker, shivering feverishly. He stared blankly at the inside of the open locker, bag slipping from limp fingers. Darcy recoiled when he glanced back at them. His skin was pale and clammy, with violently dark circles underneath his eyes.

“Are you okay?” Darcy asked hesitantly. She eyed him warily, shifting in front of Boyd. She wasn’t taking any chances, not with the way things had been going for them lately.

“I’m fine,” Jackson snapped. He slammed his locker shut and brushed past them.

Darcy stared down the hall after him. Boyd nudged her gently with an elbow. “C’mon, we’ll be late. He’s not worth worrying about, anyway.”

“Yeah, but… he just seemed- I don’t know, wrong.” She let Boyd lead her to Sophia’s classroom, thinking hard. “Do you think something happened to him?”

“Something like…” Boyd leaned against the wall, ignoring the late bell as it rang through the empty hall.
“I don’t know. Maybe I’m just paranoid.”

Boyd lifted a shoulder. “Paranoid’s probably going to be pretty accurate, with our luck.”

“That’s what I’m worried about.” Darcy sighed. “I’ll see you after class. Try not to get killed before then.” Boyd snorted a laugh and left for his own class across the hall.

Darcy and Sophia were barely ten minutes into their latest project when Maya strode into the room, carrying a box of donuts and a tray of coffee. “I come bearing gifts,” she announced.

“Gimme,” Darcy said from underneath the Mustang. Maya rested a booted foot on the creeper and rolled Darcy out to hand her a coffee. Maya greeted Sophia with a kiss and a donut. Darcy accepted the blueberry donut Maya offered. “What’re you doing here?” She asked around a mouthful of donut.

“Security,” Maya said with a wink.

“Are you following me to my college classes, too?” Darcy asked skeptically.

“You bet, kid. That’s a twenty minute drive outside of Hale or Ito territory. We can’t risk you and Boyd being there alone.” Maya

“Surely you have better things to do,” Darcy said.

Maya shrugged. “’M taking a break from hunting to deal with all this shit before it blows up in our faces.”

“You’re such an optimist,” Sophia teased. Maya grinned and tugged playfully on her girlfriend’s hair.

“It’s fine, Darcy,” Maya said when she noticed Darcy’s skeptical expression. “I’m trading off with Peter and Chris throughout the week. We just don’t want to leave anyone unprotected.”

"Still sounds like babysitting to me," Darcy grumbled.

~*~ THREE DAYS AGO ~*~

Stiles was pale and subdued in the morning. Darcy eyed him worriedly. He was barely aware of her concerned hovering, too focused on studying the busy halls. There’d been another death, only this one didn’t fit the pattern. And worse- Stiles witnessed it.

"You didn't see what it was?” Darcy asked quietly. Erica and Scott were currently walking the halls, trying to determine whether there was a new murderous creature stalking the high school. A student was missing- Isaac Lahey, a year younger than Darcy. His father was the first assumed victim of the Alphas.

Stiles shook his head and leaned back against the lockers with a heavy sigh. "No. My hand touched something slimy on the door handle and next thing I knew, I was paralyzed on the ground. But something... something moved in the garage, before the mechanic collapsed. I think whatever it was paralyzed him too. And then..."

And then the hydraulic lift activated, lowering to the ground and crushing the paralyzed man to
"This wasn't the Alphas," Boyd said from beside Stiles. Darcy caught Allison's eye across the hallway, where she stood attentively at Lydia's side. Allison shook her head. No news.

"No," Stiles agreed. "Whatever paralyzed the mechanic came from above, like it was crawling along the ceiling. I was on the ground before I could see anything more definitive."

Darcy recalled the Gorgon, and how it froze its victims with a stare. She wondered if this new monster came from a similar species. Darcy stepped back to hide behind Boyd's broad shoulders and pulled out her phone to text Satomi and Maya.

"Incoming," Boyd muttered.

Darcy shoved her phone back into her pocket and gave Harris her best 'fuck off' smile as he shoved his way through the crowded hall. He glared suspiciously but continued past them, turning the corner and disappearing.

"Ten bucks says its Harris killing everybody," Stiles said.

Darcy snorted. "Yeah, right. If that were true, we'd be at the top of his list."

Stiles huffed a laugh, rubbing a hand over the dark circles around his eyes. "So what's the situation here? A pack of bloodthirsty Alphas here for power, and an unknown monster lurking around paralyzing people? That's a little too convenient."

"And if it looks like the Hales can't keep their territory under control, that would give them an excuse to come sniffing around," Darcy said.

"So they cause the chaos and then say it's lack of stability that brought them here?" Boyd asked, scowling.

"Yeah," Darcy sighed. She absently rubbed her thumb underneath her sleeve, brushing against the otter tattoo circling her wrist. She felt a mounting fury at the sheer arrogance of this Alpha pack. It was getting harder to keep the rage controlled. Darcy wanted to punch something.

"My dad's exhausted," Stiles told them. "He's been taking double shifts, trying to figure out what's killing all these people." Guilt had his shoulders slumping, head bowed.

"We could tell him..." Darcy started hesitantly.

Stiles cut her off. "No. I don't want him involved in this, it's too dangerous."

"Not knowing what he's facing could be worse," Boyd told him gently. Stiles shook his head vehemently, sucking in a shaky breath, then another, and then he couldn't seem to stop.

"No," Stiles said. Scott materialized beside them, dark eyes wide with concern.

"Hey, buddy. Breathe with me," Scott instructed calmly. He counted under his breath, just loud enough for Stiles to hear over his own racing heart and too-deep breaths. Boyd stepped back to shield him from the curious eyes; Darcy gave her best Talia impression that sent the nosy students scurrying away.

She glanced at her phone when it buzzed, skimming through Laura's text. "Laura and Derek are flying home tomorrow morning," she told them. Stiles, breathing barely under control again, sent her
a wide-eyed look. Scott unsuccessfully hid a knowing smile as Stiles was immediately distracted from his panic.

"Huh?"

"They're coming home," Darcy repeated. "We need all the help we can get right now."

The bell rang, interrupting Stiles's response. Scott steered him towards their shared first period class, heads low as they whispered to each other.

Boyd sighed. "It'd probably be helpful to have the Sheriff in the know."

Darcy nodded in agreement. "One of the deputies is a hunter. We can make do with him." For now, she thought ruefully. If the Alphas continued to escalate, they may not have a choice.

Boyd and Darcy walked to class. Danny, for once without Jackson by his side, looked up from his phone and watched them go with an unreadable expression.

Darcy's shoulders tightened in her Comparative Politics class later that day as her phone vibrated urgently in her bag. The professor released them minutes later, and Darcy shot up from her seat and out the door.

Peter appeared at her shoulder almost instantly. "What is it?"

"Talia caught a scent," Darcy said excitedly. "She and Maya are following it now- they think it's whatever creature killed the mechanic. Talia says it smells reptilian?" Confused, she glanced at Peter. "Would a Gorgon smell reptilian?"

"You think that's what it is?" He asked as Boyd joined them at the car.

Darcy shook her head as she climbed into the backseat beside Boyd. "I mean, it had similar characteristics, just from what we know. I thought looking at monsters in the same general species might narrow it down a bit."

"Not many monsters have paralytic abilities," Peter agreed. "It's a good place to start."

"I'll text Stiles and Lydia," Darcy said. Boyd held up his phone, showing her that he'd just done so. "They can start researching while we go help Talia."

Peter shook his head. "Oh, no. You aren't going out tonight. Not until we know what this thing is. And absolutely not while the Alphas are roaming around."

"Oh, yes I am," Darcy shot back angrily. "If we can catch this thing, that's one less monster in Beacon Hills. We can't afford to have it killing anyone else, and you definitely can't afford to leave me behind."

Peter scowled at her but, well aware of the truth to her statement, didn't argue. Of course, he made a point to assign himself and Chris to her patrol later that night. She rolled her eyes at them, but couldn't help feeling a little relieved.

Erica, Scott, and Boyd remained at the Hale house with Andrew, where they would maintain the perimeter in case the Alphas took advantage. Allison guarded Stiles and Lydia at the Argent house as they poured over bestiaries. Talia and Maya were still tracking the scent the Hale Alpha picked up hours earlier.
Darcy soon found herself wishing for Derek and Laura as she trailed behind Peter in the outskirts of Beacon Hills. Between Derek's quiet strength and Laura's terrifying ferocity, they'd have a much more formidable team. As it was, she was grateful for Chris's intensity and Peter's clever mind.

And her spark, which she used to light the way as they approached from the opposite side of town where Talia first noticed the scent. The sun slipped from the sky. Darcy shivered in the cool night air, cringing at the smell of the dirty alleyway they crept through. Her spark offered a dim light that cast ominous shadows on the old brick walls.

Peter halted so suddenly Darcy collided with his back. The hairs on the back of her neck rose at the abrupt silence. He took a slow, deep breath, claws sliding out with his beta-shift.

"Peter, what-"

Chris yanked her back, shouting a warning. Darcy stumbled and fell. She felt her phone crack in her back pocket. Peter turned, too slow, as a dark shadow lunged from above.

Darcy cried out as the monster hissed and swiped at Peter with a long, scaled tail. Peter snarled, then faltered, a hand coming up to brush the back of his neck. He collapsed. Chris aimed his rifle and opened fire. Darcy scrambled over to Peter, heart in her throat.

"Peter?" She laid a hand on his chest, sobbing in relief when it rose. His eyes were open on her but he didn't move. She peered at the thin scratch across his neck, barely trickling blood. A thin, slimy substance seeped from the wound.

A growl sounded further down the alley and Darcy whirled, staff raised. She relaxed when Talia leaped past her and tackled the monster from its perch halfway up the wall. Maya appeared moments later, out of breath. She ran to Darcy's side, carefully monitoring the progress of the fight.

"He's paralyzed," Darcy said, pointing to the scratch. "It cut him and he went down."

Maya laid a reassuring hand on Darcy's arm. "He'll be okay. Werewolf metabolism will burn it out of his system faster than a human." A hiss sounded from behind Darcy. Maya jumped to her feet and fired- Darcy hadn't even seen her draw the guns.

She stayed crouched protectively over Peter as the monster snaked its way up the wall and disappeared over the edge. Maya moved as though to follow it. "No," Talia said. She staggered closer, Chris's arm thrown around her shoulders. He was limp, head lolling.

Darcy's heart thudded painfully. "Is he okay?" Peter's eyes flashed blue, straining to follow her gaze.

"He was knocked unconscious," Talia told them. She studied Darcy, then Peter. "Are you hurt?"

Darcy shook her head. "It scratched Peter."

"We should get them back to the house," Maya said, watching the rooftops. Darcy and Maya propped Chris up between them while Talia threw Peter's limp body over her shoulder. Darcy pointed the way to Chris's car, parked a couple streets away. They hadn't made it very far before the attack.

Once they were safely in the car, Darcy tugged her phone out. "Ugh." The screen was black. A piece of the shattered glass nicked her finger and she threw her phone to the floor with a scowl.

They made it almost all the way home before a howl echoed through the near-black forest. Talia didn't hesitate- she threw open the car door and leaped out of the passenger seat, shifting in midair. A
heartbeat later, the Alpha wolf sprinted into the woods and out of sight.

"Fuck," Maya said emphatically. "Darcy, can you tell who that was?"

Darcy climbed into the front seat and managed to close the open door. "Andrew, I think," she said fearfully. The engine roared; Maya sped down the driveway with reckless abandon. Darcy clutched the door handle and said nothing.

The SUV skidded to a stop before the house. Darcy sprang out of the car and ran for the woods. "Darcy, wait!" Maya called. She didn't stop, just ran towards the growls reverberating through the woods.

Scott stumbled out of the preserve then, shell-shocked and injured. Darcy skidded to a stop. Scott met her gaze as he pressed the remains of his shirt to bleeding lacerations on his arm.

"They took them," he rasped. Maya appeared at Darcy's side.

"Who?" Maya asked urgently. "Scott, who?"

Darcy saw the fear written on Scott's face. She shook her head in denial. Her lower lip trembled. Pressure built behind her eyes. Scott met her eyes, pale and bloody.

"They took Erica and Boyd."
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

This chapter is over 12,000 words. I don't know what happened.

Also, I love Laura Hale. That is all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The danger is I'm dangerous
And I might just tear you apart
You're my kill of the night
- Gin Wigmore, *Kill of the Night*

~*~

The rest of the night passed in a haze. Peter and Chris recovered slowly, Chris helped along by the healing runes Darcy activated for him. Talia hovered by Andrew, who bore deep wounds from the three Alphas that attacked before Darcy healed him as well. He was still weak from the blood loss.

Darcy curled up in a chair nearby, staring blankly out the window. She felt hollow. Cora passed by at one point, tucking her well-worn stuffed animal under Darcy's arm before climbing into her mother's lap and falling asleep.

Maya left for Satomi's pack house to check on her family and ensure they were safe. She offered to drop Scott home on her way to pick up Sophia. The Hale house was left horribly quiet.

"What are they going to do to them?" Darcy asked eventually. She rubbed the toy's soft ears between her fingers. "Boyd is human. If they..." She pressed her lips together to hold back a sob.

Chris, slouched against Peter's side, closed his eyes. "I don't know, honey. There's a chance they may bite him."

"It isn't within their interests to kill a member of the Hale pack," Talia reminded them. "That would be grounds for an outright war."

"They killed all those other packs," Darcy said. She tried not to remember the photos of the aftermath from Satomi’s files.

"For power." Peter flexed his hands, finally able to move them. They all turned to listen. "There's a story, one of the oldest in our history, about taking power from a pack. Not in the typical sense, with an Alpha's strength growing with the size of the pack. This story suggests one can... absorb the strength and power by killing a pack and its Alpha. No one was insane enough to try, to my knowledge. Until now."
"So they might start with Erica and Boyd," Darcy concluded.

"I don't know," Peter said softly. She looked away from the apology in his eyes. "That might not be the case. They're after power, so they might have just taken them as leverage."

"To get to me."

"Yes."

Darcy fell silent. Her watched ticked steadily past the 2AM mark.

"What if-"

"No."

"You didn't even let me finish!" She said furiously, jerking upright in her anger.

"You are not using yourself as bait," Peter growled back at her. Chris wearily swiped a hand down his face.

"It wouldn't help anyone if they took you, too, Darcy," Andrew told her gently.

"Besides the fact that I highly doubt they're capable of holding me anywhere, this is all we've got right now," she argued. Darcy sat up and leaned beseechingly towards Peter. "Peter, listen. All I have to do is draw them out somewhere public enough that they can't just drag me off. You know they have to be watching us- they won't be able to resist approaching to me alone."

"That could work," Chris said slowly. Peter whirled. Chris held his hands up in a placating gesture. "She's right, Peter. They'll get her alone eventually, and who knows what they'll do to those kids in the meantime. We can control the location and the timing if we set it up right."

Hope washed away all weariness. Darcy turned to Talia. Her foster mother nodded thoughtfully. "We'd have to be careful choosing where. If they think it's a trap, they won't approach her. Too public and Darcy can easily be lost in a crowd. Too quiet and they may risk attacking." Talia narrowed her eyes at the door.

"The diner! The diner by the police station," Darcy suggested. "We could have Blake there, and you," she told Chris. "Peter and I can-"

"No, they know he'd never leave you alone after Erica and Boyd," Chris objected. "And they won't approach if he- or Talia or Andrew- are with her."

"What about us?"

Darcy whirled around and nearly fell out of her chair. Derek and Laura stood in the doorway, grinning tiredly. Darcy threw herself at them and tried not to bawl her eyes out. Derek caught her and let her press her face into his chest until she had the tears under control again. Laura elbowed him out of the way and wrapped herself around Darcy.

Talia smiled at her eldest children. "You're early."

"Caught an earlier flight," Derek explained, accepting a kiss from her.

Laura dragged Darcy to the couch, keeping an arm wrapped around her shoulders. "Catch us up."

~*~
"Stop fidgeting," Laura hissed. Derek scowled at her over the table.

"You’re not the one with hunters at your back," he grumbled. Darcy, seated next to Laura, looked up at a uniformed Blake two booths behind Derek. Blake was joined by two other deputies. At the booth across the diner sat Chris and Allison, chatting comfortably about her classes. Chris sat with his back to the door to better hide his face; Darcy disguised his and Allison’s scents before they left for the diner.

"Don't draw attention to them," Laura said in exasperation, smacking Darcy on the leg. "God, you two would make the worst spies ever."

"We're not trying to be spies," Darcy reminded her. "We're knowingly walking into an ambush."

Laura shrugged. "At least we have french fries." She smiled happily down at the giant pile on her plate.

"How can you eat at a time like this?" Derek asked despairingly.

"Baby brother, nothing short of the apocalypse could keep me from this diner's fries."

"Stop calling me that. I'm bigger than you."

"Doesn't matter. You'll always be my itty, bitty, baby brother," Laura said with a shit-eating grin. Darcy kicked Derek in the shins when he growled back at his sister.

"Stop it, you heathen. No growling in public!" Darcy rolled her eyes. "Honestly, half of New York's probably caught onto you idiots."

"Half of New York has the same secret," Laura told Darcy through a mouth full of fries. "It's supernatural central."

Darcy blinked at her in surprise. "Really?"

Derek nodded. Before he could answer, the bell above the door chimed. Derek’s attention diverted to the two men approaching their booth. Darcy tensed when one of Alphas slid into the seat beside Derek, the other dragging a chair over. He flipped it around and sat, smiling with too many teeth to be friendly.

"’Bout time you dicks showed up," Laura said casually. Derek looked like he was fighting not to go for their throats. Darcy found herself tamping down the same urge. She deliberately set her steak knife back on the table, unsure of when exactly she’d picked it up.

"We weren’t sure what sort of welcome we’d have," the werewolf beside Derek said. He extended a hand to Laura with a mocking grin. "I’m Aiden. That’s my brother, Ethan."

Laura ignored the offered hand. She propped her chin up on one hand and swirled a fry in ketchup with the other. "So, they sent the pack bitches to pass along a message?"

The hand fell, along with the false smile. Both brothers looked caught off guard, either by her complete lack of fear or the cutting remark.

Darcy’s eyes widened. Well. Laura certainly wasn’t holding back.

Laura ignored the outright hostility from the two young men and reached for Derek’s fries. “I wondered who it would be," she continued. “Not someone too important, just in case this was a trap."
That means you two must be the newest and lowest pack members. New enough they thought it was worth risking our retaliation. How does it feel, to be offered as collateral?"

A low snarl.

“Hmm. Not great, then,” Laura said sympathetically. She picked up her fork and twirled it absently, studying the man across the table.

“Say what you came to say. I’d like to finish my lunch in peace.”

Aiden’s now unfriendly gaze turned to Darcy. “My Alpha would like to offer a trade. You for your friends.”

Darcy stared him down. “Who’s to say they’re not already dead?”

Aiden reached into his pocket for a cell phone, dialed a number, and handed it to Darcy. She warily held it up to her ear and promptly felt the blood drain from her face.

"Don't, Darcy, don't come!" There was a loud crack and Erica screamed. The line went dead. Derek met her eyes, her own shock mirrored in them. Laura very carefully didn’t react.

"They're alive. Mostly unharmed, for now. The big one took to the bite better than we'd expected.” Aiden's cocky smirk faded when the diner lights flickered and surged. Darcy knew her eyes burned gold. Her hands clenched in her lap.

Derek swore and grabbed his glass before it rattled off the table. Darcy distantly realized the diner was shaking, as though an earthquake threatened to tear the walls down around them.

She saw Blake reach slowly for his weapon. Allison and Chris were quiet and intensely focused, watching the Alphas with a thinly-veiled threat in their eyes. Darcy set her arms on the table and leaned forward to stare at the Alpha. "If you do anything further to hurt my friends, I will rip every. single. one of you. to pieces."

As if cued, Laura spun her fork around and stabbed it into Ethan's thigh in one smooth, violent movement. The pictures rattling on the walls and the diners' confused voices barely muffled the ensuing strangled scream from Ethan.

"Of course, we might do that anyway," Laura said cheerfully. Ethan yanked the metal fork out of his leg and effortlessly bent it in half, glaring hatefully at Laura.

"Warehouse district. Eight o'clock. You for your friends," Aiden said tightly. He glanced at the still-flickering lights. "All three of your friends will come to no further harm, unless you decide not to show." He stood, gripping his twin's shoulder and guiding the seething werewolf out of the diner.

"Was the fork necessary?" Chris asked a few minutes later, sliding into the empty chair. He looked like he was fighting back a laugh.

"He was in my space," Laura sniffed. Allison did laugh, then pressed a hand against her mouth as if to hide it.

Chris grew serious and turned to Darcy. "What happened?"

Darcy let Derek summarize the conversation, too distracted by the memory of Erica screaming. Laura interrupted. "Okay, did I miss something? Who's the third hostage?"
Allison and Darcy looked at each other in panic. Darcy snatched Derek's phone out of his hands and started dialing. "Lydia's fine," Allison told her a second later. She turned away, phone pressed to her ear as she murmured an explanation to Lydia.

Darcy's conversation was brief. "Scott is with Stiles at the Hale house." Allison looked over at that and visibly sighed in relief.

"Then who do they have?" Derek asked.

"I guess we'll find out," Laura said grimly. After a contemplative silence, she reached for Derek's half-eaten burger.

"Oh, for fuck's sake, we don't have time for this," Derek snapped. He slid out of the booth and dragged Laura with him. "Let's go, we need all the time we can get," he called over his shoulder.

Despite the following hours of meticulous planning, Darcy still felt unprepared as she stood alone between two buildings in Beacon Hill's empty warehouse district. Well, mostly alone. Allison crept along the roof above her, Chris on the opposite building. Both bore small runes on their skin that hid their scent and sound, courtesy of Darcy. Maya wore the same camouflage from her position, idling half a mile away in the car. To her relief, Talia arrived on schedule and slipped down the alleyway to stand behind her.

Darcy flexed her fingers nervously when a dark shape slid from the shadows and approached. Talia rested a hand on Darcy's shoulder, a reassuring warmth at her back. She felt less reassured when Talia sucked in a surprised breath at the sight of the tall, lanky man. He wore dark sunglasses and carried a cane.

"Deucalion," Talia said evenly. "I guess I shouldn't be surprised to see you."

"Was that a joke? How out of character, Talia," the man said pleasantly. "Please, call me Duke. After all, we used to be friends."

Talia snorted. "That's a stretch, don't you think?"

"No need to be rude." His voice was silky smooth, and far too smug. Darcy hated him already. "Speaking of, why don't you introduce me?" He turned to Darcy and focused unerringly on her face. She wondered if he was truly blind, if the glasses and cane were just props designed to throw people off balance.

"You know who she is." Talia's tone dared him to deny it. He didn't.

"And I know who you are," Darcy added. She saw no sign of Erica and Boyd. They'd expected on that, she reminded herself. Counted on it.

"Oh?"

"You're the bastard that kidnapped and tortured my friends," Darcy said. "I want them back, now."

"I'm afraid it's not that simple," Deucalion said regretfully. Darcy wondered if he took his inspiration from comic book villains. "You see, I approached your territory under the assumption that Darcy was not a member of your pack, Talia. Imagine my surprise in finding that you not only accepted a spark into your pack, but have also allowed a kanima to roam your territory at will?"

Darcy swallowed hard. This was not the approach they'd expected him to take. And besides that-a kanima? What kind of hellscape was Beacon Hills, anyway?
"It seems you're losing control of your town, old friend. Even your Emissary hesitates to defend your actions," Deucalion tutted. Darcy's head snapped back in surprise. What did Deaton have to do with this?

"As a Druid, Deaton isn't permitted to intervene on pack affairs unless they directly affect the land." Talia's voice was bored. "Something any sane Alpha knows well."

Deucalion shifted, just the slightest bit.

"We heard about your own Emissary," Talia crooned. "Sacrificed by a darach? That's unlucky."

Darach- a dark Druid who gathered power by sacrificing innocents to a nemeton. This was the first Darcy'd heard of a darach’s involvement.

Talia's eyes flickered red as a woman stepped out of the dark, snarling. She was tall, with long black hair and a mouthful of fangs. Darcy wrinkled her nose at the dirty claws extending from the woman's hands and bare feet.

"We initially came this way to find Kali's Emissary, as it turns out." Deucalion motioned to the woman- Kali- with the hand not gripping his cane. "Only to discover that Julia was murdered on your land hardly a week ago."

"Ah. Was she the darach, then?" Talia asked. "That makes more sense."

"She came to the nemeton for power," Darcy guessed. "Enough power to take you down, for killing your own pack." She eyed Kali with distaste. "As for your other assumption- I'm not in the Hale pack."

Deucalion started to speak but was interrupted by a roar, distorted by the hollow spaces in between the buildings. Darcy only had time to realize that it wasn't one of the Hales before Kali lunged for her. She whirled out of reach, snatching up her staff where it lay hidden behind a discarded pile of wood.

Talia shifted into her wolf, circling Deucalion warily as he began his own shift. Darcy watched in horror as he grew taller and taller, shifting into a twisted, demonic mockery of the werewolves' beta shift. Talia didn't give him time to finish- she attacked, driving him back. Allison and Chris wisely focused their attentions on Deucalion, firing wolfsbane-laced arrows whenever Talia separated from him.

Kali's claws sliced through Darcy's shirt. She choked on a cry as pain burned up her side; Darcy knocked Kali back with a jab to her chest, barely managing to block the 'wolf's returning kick. Darcy didn't dodge the following blow to the head. She was in no shape to continue this fight, so Darcy turned and ran for the street opposite of Talia and Deucalion's vicious battle.

Somewhere, if all was going to plan, the others were breaking Erica, Boyd, and the mystery hostage out of their prison. Darcy would meet up with them once she'd lost Kali- she just needed to get to Maya first.

Darcy gritted her teeth as she sprinted down the dark alleyway, pressing a hand to the deep wound in her side. Her head was swimming, vision blurring, and she could taste blood in the back of her throat. The relative safety of the street yawned ahead. A deep growl rumbled behind her, closer than she'd thought. Too close.

She wasn't going to make it.
Darcy heard the werewolf lunge with a final growl, saw the arms outstretched to catch her and pin her to the ground. Just before Kali’s claws touched her shoulders, a motorcycle screeched to a stop ahead. Its rider didn't hesitate, didn't waste a single second, but fired three rapid shots from the large pistol in their hand. Darcy felt the force of the bullets brush by with barely a hair's breadth of distance as she ran.

More importantly, she heard the impact when they reached their target. Kali collapsed into a heap behind Darcy, who risked a glance backwards. The Alpha climbed slowly to her feet, leaning heavily on the wall. Red eyes flashed with rage as she stared back at Darcy.

"Let's go!" The motorcycle's rider- a woman, Darcy could now see- hauled Darcy onto the bike. She didn't wait for Darcy to get secure, but floored it until they were too far away for Darcy to see the alley anymore.

Darcy sagged in relief against the stranger's back. Blood soaked her side. Now that she wasn't actively running for her life, Darcy could focus on working out which rune would be necessary to heal the deep wound. She'd just finished a mental drawing of it when her rescuer slowed to a stop.

The woman turned the engine off and twisted to peer at Darcy, who found herself blinking at a black visor. She carefully slid off the bike, watching Darcy sway dangerously on the back. After a long moment, she lifted the helmet off to reveal smooth brown skin and narrowed eyes.

“You okay?” The woman asked, frowning in concern.

“Uh huh,” Darcy gasped. “Can you reach the pen in my pocket, by chance?”

Warily, the woman obeyed. She watched closely as Darcy carefully traced the rune with shaking hands and showed no reaction when the rune glowed gold, or when Darcy sighed in relief and straightened.

“Thank you,” Darcy said sincerely. “Also, who are you?”

“My name’s Braeden, I’m a friend of Maya’s.” She tucked her helmet under an arm and glanced down the road.

“Yeah, she’s talked about you,” Darcy told her. She climbed slowly off the motorcycle to stand beside Braeden.

“I didn’t think I would make it in time,” Braeden admitted. She set the helmet on the seat and glanced at her phone.

“Well I, for one, am grateful you did.” Darcy peeled her shirt up to squint at the bloody but unmarred skin. No sign of the deep wound that had been there minutes ago. “She almost had me.”

“About that. Can’t you shield?” Braeden crossed her arms.

“Um. Yes. Yes, I can.” Darcy thought back to the moment Kali nearly caught her. “I guess I don’t think very well when I’m bleeding out.” She gestured to her shirt, still dripping with spilled blood.

Braeden eyed the shirt dismissively. “You should work on that.”

“Oh, I’ll get right on it,” Darcy muttered. “Because I’d really like to repeat those circumstances.”

Before she could answer, Braeden’s phone lit up with a call. Maya’s name scrolled across the top and Darcy stumbled closer, heart racing. Braeden set it on speaker and spoke first.
“I have her.”

“Thank fuck. She’s okay?”

“I’m fine,” Darcy called. “What about you? What happened?”

“The kanima showed up. It took me, Chris, and Allison to run it off, and by then one of the Alphas made it back to the warehouse so we had to go help with the escape.” There was a jumble of noise on Maya’s end and her voice was muffled as she spoke to someone else. Darcy wrung her hands anxiously. “We have them, Darcy, they’re safe.”

Darcy could have cried. “You’re sure?” She choked out. “Because it sounded like—”

“I’m sure. They’re a little roughed up, but they’ll live. Braeden, can you take her back to the Hale’s?”

“Yeah. I’ll meet you at yours later. I’ve got a few errands to run.” Braeden hung up and slid back onto the bike. Darcy followed, only accepting the helmet when Braeden scowled at her.

They made it to the Hale house just minutes before Stiles' Jeep rounded the corner, followed closely by the Argent's SUV. Darcy scrambled off the bike when Scott opened the back door of the Jeep for Erica to climb out. She was only absently aware of Braeden speeding off, too focused on Erica’s battered face.

Her friend was bruised and bloodied, clutching her broken arm to her stomach. But she was alive and whole. Erica fell against Darcy when she reached her and sobbed into her shoulder. Darcy couldn’t stop her own tears from spilling over.

"I thought they were going to kill you,” Darcy confessed, voice muffled into Erica's shoulder. She felt Erica's non-injured arm wrap around her waist in response.

"Me too," Erica whispered. Through blurry eyes, Darcy watched Derek and Laura help Boyd from the SUV. He caught Darcy's gaze and smiled weakly. She stumbled forward, dragging Erica with her, to clasp his hand.

"They turned you?" Darcy asked.

Boyd grimaced. "Yeah. That was not an experience I'd like to repeat."

"But they-" She stopped when her voice cracked.

"It's okay, Darce. I was going to taking the bite after graduation, anyway," Boyd told her. "At least now we know I'll survive it."

"That's not funny," Darcy sniffed. To her right, Scott was coaxing a long-legged boy out of the Jeep. The boy was tall, though he shrank in on himself under the eyes of the pack.

"Isaac Lahey," Erica explained. Isaac looked at them warily from across the yard, answering Darcy's question of whether he'd also been bitten.

"Apparently, one of the Alphas killed his dad and bit Isaac. When he turned, they..."

"Took him and used him as a punching bag, mostly," Erica finished quietly. "At least until we joined him."

"You're safe now," Scott told Isaac earnestly. Stiles snorted from where he leaned against the hood
of his Jeep, inspecting deep scrapes along his arms. Darcy couldn’t help but agree with his skepticism- none of them were truly safe, not with the Alphas still roaming the town.

Talia approached the boys, unmindful of the blood covering her skin. She'd found clean shorts and a shirt- Andrew's, by the look of it. "Isaac, my name is Talia Hale. I'm sorry to hear about your father." A strange expression crossed Isaac's face, but he accepted Talia's words with a jerky nod. Scott hovered at his side in silent support. Isaac didn't seem to know what to make of him.

"Is there someone we can call for you?" Talia asked. "Family who may be missing you?"

"No." Isaac's eyes drifted to the ground. Scott looked uncertainly at Talia, who was frowning thoughtfully.

"He can stay with me!" Scott blurted. Stiles rolled his eyes behind them.

"Scott, he's technically wanted for questioning," Stiles said dryly. Isaac flinched. "And your mom might want a heads up that you're bringing home another werewolf."

"I'll take care of the police," Talia reassured Isaac. Stiles looked slightly alarmed at that.

Scott looked nervously at Talia. "I think I'm going to tell my mom everything." The Alphas apparently made thinly-veiled threats against Scott's mother when they’d come for Erica and Boyd.

Talia nodded. "We can help with that, if you'd like. For now, though, let's get everyone inside. Darcy, can you start assessing injuries?"

Darcy nodded. Wounds inflicted by an Alpha took longer to heal- and it looked like everyone present needed a various extent of first aid.

By the time she'd finished her rounds, Erica, Boyd, and Isaac were asleep in a pile of blankets in the den. Derek and Laura dozed in nearby chairs. Exhausted, Darcy waved to the Argents as they slipped out the door. She was so not going to school tomorrow.

She considered collapsing on the couch when Stiles appeared at her side. He tilted his phone screen to show her a text from Lydia. "My phone broke," Darcy explained after reading the message’s first angry line. She’d forgotten all about that, actually.

Darcy squinted at the screen. "Wait, what does Lydia know about the murders? I'm confused. And also concerned."

"She says she'll explain in the morning."

"But-"

"I'll pick you up," Stiles said cheerfully as he left. Scott, Talia, and Andrew waited for him on the porch. It looked as if Melissa McCall would be getting an explanation tonight, then.

Darcy watched them go with a tired groan.

Damn it. Now she had to go to school tomorrow.

She was still wired from the adrenaline and the night's events. Between that and the nightmares her friends experienced, Darcy didn't sleep much. Erica gave up on sleep eventually and curled up beside Darcy. They watched the hours pass and the sun rise, brightening the room enough to wake the others.
True to his word, Stiles arrived an hour before school to pick her up. Darcy blearily climbed into the car, clutching a coffee cup close to her chest.

"You look like shit," Darcy told him. It was true- the circles around his eyes were as dark as her own. "Sleep any?"

"No more than you, by the looks of it," he shot back. Darcy's only response was a middle finger as she chugged her coffee.

"Did you hear about what the Deucalion guy said?" Darcy asked after a long silence.

Stiles nodded. "Allison told Scott. I was up all night researching."

"A fucking kanima," Darcy said. She went boneless in the seat and sighed up at the roof. "I'm a good person. I don't deserve this." Stiles laughed.

He then grew serious and motioned to his half-zipped bookbag. Darcy squinted at the crumpled papers spilling out of it. "Everything I found said kanimas were essentially impossible. Abominations, even."

"It's likely the Alphas bit somebody else on their little murder spree. But the odds of one of those people turning into that ..." Darcy blew out a breath. "We are the unluckiest fuckers in the universe."

"Kanimas are supposedly weapons of vengeance," Stiles said. "Who the hell wants vengeance enough to control a homicidal shapeshifter?" He pulled into the deserted school lot and parked beside Lydia's car. It was empty, meaning they'd have to go find her in the empty halls.

"When all this is over, I'm going to sleep for a week," Darcy grumbled as they climbed the steps.

"Agreed." Stiles hesitated inside the school, eyeing the dark hallways suspiciously. Darcy rolled her eyes and flicked the light switch. The lights clicked on. Stiles relaxed, rubbing a hand over the back of his head with an embarrassed smile.

"About time."

Stiles startled badly, smashing his elbow into a locker. He doubled over with a pained groan, clutching his bruised arm; Darcy looked down the hall to see Lydia standing outside the teacher's lounge, arms crossed. She tapped her foot impatiently as they approached.

To Darcy's surprise, Danny sat on the faded plaid couch inside the lounge. Stiles halted in the doorway, confused. Darcy looked to Lydia. "What's going on?"

Lydia shoved Stiles unceremoniously into the room and closed the door behind them. "Danny would like to share his concerns with the class."

Danny looked at them, nervous. "So, you guys really aren't subtle. Like, at all. And I decided to stay out of whatever the hell you're all wrapped up in, but Jackson was obsessed with figuring it out."

"We're aware of that, thank you," Stiles said sarcastically.

Danny narrowed his eyes at the other boy but didn't rise to the bait. "He's been acting weird all week."

Darcy frowned, recalling Jackson's odd behavior in the hall. "Weird how?"

"Your kind of weird."
"Rude," Stiles said.

"No, I meant-" Danny sighed in exasperation. "Disappearing for hours, not remembering where he'd been, crazy mood swings."

"Increased aggressive behavior," Lydia said quietly. Darcy looked at her closely for the first time since they'd arrived. Lydia was pale and subdued, as though there was a thin crack in her usual mask of confidence. Lydia met Darcy's questioning gaze and shrugged.

"He lost his temper. We broke up."

Stiles eyed her closely. "Lost his temper how?"

Lydia waved an impatient hand. "That isn't relevant. What matters is your conversation with our new guests last night, and what Allison told me they said." Danny cast his eyes to the ceiling, as if praying for patience with their bullshit.

"You think Jackson is the kanima?" Stiles asked incredulously. Now Danny just looked bewildered. "Kanima?" He mouthed.

"Isaac Lahey lives on the street behind Jackson's house," Lydia informed Darcy. "I understand Isaac was found with the others yesterday."

Darcy nodded and slowly sat down in a nearby chair. Her mind was struggling under no sleep and too much caffeine. Lydia’s suggestion was already giving her a migraine. But "It fits," Darcy admitted. "If Jackson was outside while the Alphas were at the Lahey house, he would have immediately been noticed."

"Plus, he has all the characteristics of a kanima," Stiles said. "Deep-seated emotional issues, plus the shift into a reflection of his outward behavior."

"Not helping," Darcy told him.

"Listen, he's been a grade-A dick to me and Scott from day one. I'm not saying I won't help," he added hastily when both Danny and Lydia glared over at him. "But I'm probably not going to be super nice about it, just so you know."

"We-"

"Because I hate him," Stiles finished.

"Moving on!" Darcy said loudly before Lydia or Danny could speak. "Danny, how much do you know? Or, I guess I should ask- how much do you want to know?"

"Whatever I need to know to help Jackson," Danny said firmly.

"Well." Darcy thought for a moment. Honestly, where should she even start?

Lydia sighed and turned to Danny. "Werewolves are real, Scott was turned last year, Darcy is magic, and I'm a banshee." Darcy dropped her head into her hands. "What?" Lydia said. "You were taking too long."

"This is a joke, right?" Danny looked between them, then to the door as he seriously considered leaving. He already regretted this entire conversation.

Lydia shrugged at Darcy again. "If I try to prove it, I'll shatter everyone's eardrums."
"Ugh, fine." Darcy slid up her sleeve and held her arm out towards Danny, who watched with evident concern.

"What the-" He leaned forward when Darcy's otter tattoo wound its way down to her wrist, circling lazily on her skin. Darcy turned her palm up and let just enough power rise to create a few threads of magic that wrapped around her hand like strings. They emitted a warm, comforting light.

"What..." Danny stared at the light in awe.

"I'm a spark," Darcy explained. "I have magic, a lot of it. The Hales took me in after my mom died. They're werewolves, too."

"Somehow, this actually makes more sense than what I had imagined," Danny told her. "I was thinking Beacon Hills had the world’s most extreme drug problem."

"Yeah, I get that. The light disappeared with a twist of her hand. The room seemed colder without it. "So, how are we going to find Jackson?"

Danny was silent for a moment and then glanced guiltily at Stiles, of all people. "I can track his phone," he finally admitted.

"How?" Darcy frowned. Comprehension lit in Stiles' eyes, but for once he kept quiet.

"I can hack it and use it to get a location," Danny muttered. He rubbed his hands together anxiously. Interested, Darcy sat up straight. Danny noticed and shook his head. "But you can't tell anyone. I've already gotten in trouble before."

"You were a minor," Stiles said dismissively. "It wasn't even a slap on the wrist."

"Yeah, but they kept a record of it," Danny retorted. "And you know about it, somehow."

"Please, my dad asked you to help beef up the station's cyber-security a week after you were arrested. You're not exactly on their most wanted list, dude." Stiles rolled his eyes.

"We're wasting time," Lydia reminded them.

"Right, let's go," Darcy said. The slipped out of the school as a few teachers arrived. Lydia agreed to drive follow them to Stiles's house. Darcy climbed in the Jeep with Stiles, frowning at him when he parked two streets over from his house.

"My dad's on shift," Stiles explained as they cut through the neighbors' yards. Danny and Lydia followed, unimpressed with the subterfuge. "But the neighbors might mention I was home early today if they saw my Jeep in the driveway."

"Whatever, James Bond." Darcy grinned, barely dodging his elbow. Stiles unlocked the back door and pointed them up the stairs. Darcy led the way to Stiles's surprisingly clean room.

Danny pulled his laptop out of his bag and settled in at Stiles’s desk. Darcy pulled up the extra chair and watched him closely while Stiles and Lydia spoke in low voices behind them.

“So, uh, I know this bad timing and all, but can you teach me?” Darcy asked hopefully.

Danny stopped typing and stared at her incredulously. "I’m sorry, were you not listening? I was arrested for doing this."

“Uh huh, got that. So, will you?” She clasped her hands together. “Please?”
He stared at her for another few seconds before caving. “Ugh, fine.” Darcy nodded along as he spoke, explaining about firewalls, coding, and algorithms.

“Found him,” Danny said twenty minutes later. He looked up at Lydia. “His phone shows him at home.”

“We’re going to need help, if Jackson really is the kanima,” Darcy said. “He might have to be subdued so he doesn’t hurt anyone.” She looked at Stiles. “Can you go pick up Derek and Laura and meet us there? I don’t want Danny and Lydia waiting at Jackson’s alone.”

Stiles nodded, reaching for his keys. “I’ll call you when we’re on our way.”

Lydia drove them to the Whittemore's mansion, tapping her nails anxiously on the wheel. Danny kept his laptop open to monitor Jackson's location. Darcy remained quiet in the backseat, wondering if she could get away with a brief nap after Lydia parked across the street to wait.

“So, a banshee?” Danny asked softly. Darcy cracked an eye open, curious.

“Evidently,” Lydia sighed. She glanced sideways at her friend. “You're not freaked out?”

Danny snorted. “We’re parked outside of my best friend’s house because we suspect he’s a homicidal shapeshifting lizard, and we had to bring Hermione Granger back there in case he tries to kill us.” Darcy kicked half-heartedly at his seat, but had to stifle a grin. "Harbinger of death is the least weird thing in this entire situation."

Lydia laughed quietly. It was Danny's turn to study her. "How are you dealing with that?"

"It’s... it’s been harder than I thought," Lydia confided. "The Fae are..."

"Horrible," Darcy finished for her. Lydia nodded. "You've still got the gates?"

"Oh, that? The gates are nothing," Lydia scoffed, as if wrestling the gates out of the Seelie Queen's grasp was an effortless task. "It’s the rest of it that's hard." She wrapped her arms around her middle and shivered. "I can feel when someone dies in this town. Other times I know when it’s coming and it’s all I can do to stop the scream.”

Troubled, Darcy turned to look at the other girl. Before she could speak, Lydia's phone rang. Lydia accepted Stiles's call through her car's Bluetooth system. "Stiles?"

"Get to the Hale house!" Stiles panted urgently. Darcy jerked upright at his panicked tone. "The Alphas, they're here!"

"They can't get through the wards!" Darcy said. "The wards are still- watch out!" She screamed. Darcy threw a shield up between Lydia and Danny and the front of the car. A split second later, a body landed heavily on the front of the car. The three of them stared, frozen in place, as the creature lifted its head to peer inside the cracked windshield.

It- Jackson?- was covered in dark green scales. Yellow eyes blinked at them, set above slitted nostrils and a mouthful of small, sharp fangs. The kanima hissed and struck, shattering the windshield with long claws. Lydia screamed. The claws bounced harmlessly off of Darcy’s shield, inches from Lydia. The kanima hissed angrily and leaped off of the car to quickly disappear into the preserve.

"We have to go," Darcy said, shaking off the shock. "Lydia."

The banshee shook herself and reached for the gearshift with a shaking hand. "Keep the shield up,"
Lydia ordered. She swallowed hard before peeling out of the neighborhood. Darcy obeyed, maintaining the barrier until they reached the Hale house. She dropped it as soon as Lydia and Danny were out of the car, wincing at the wave of glass that fell into Lydia's car.

"Go inside," Darcy told them, pointing to the door where Erica and Boyd stood with pale faces. "Go! Erica and Boyd will keep watch." She looked at her friends. "If the wards break, you get them out of here, got it?"

Erica nodded and stepped aside to usher Danny inside. Boyd tossed Darcy her staff, wincing when the rowan wood burned his palm.

Lydia scowled at Darcy. "If Jackson is the kanima, you'll need me there to stop him."

"He just tried to kill you!"

"I'm aware. If he tries it again, I'll scream until his brain melts out of his ears. How's that?" Lydia smiled tightly.

"You're insane," Darcy told her.

"That's not a no."

"I guess not. Keep up." She bolted for the sound of fighting, heart in her throat. Please, let her get there in time. The sound of the fight was louder now, and infinitely more violent.

She burst through the treeline and nearly tripped over Peter, unmoving on the ground.

Later, Darcy would only remember the next few seconds in brief, incomplete flashes.

Andrew, bleeding heavily and fighting back-to-back with Laura.

Stiles, breaking his bat over an Alpha's head.

Kali, darting forward to sink her claws into Derek's chest. Derek staggering back.

The kanima slinking down from the treetops above them.

Kali's bloodthirsty grin as she swiped her claws across Derek's throat.

Stiles's defiant scream just before they touched Derek’s skin.

The forest exploded.

Darcy staggered, barely managing to stay upright. She blinked away the too-bright light and gasped.

A bright gold shield hummed dangerously between Derek and Kali. Darcy laughed in disbelief—because the shield wasn't hers.

Stiles stared at the shield, just as stunned as the rest of them. But there was no doubt that it was his. The magic crackled around him in an extension of the shield covering Derek. Kali, who'd been
thrown violently back into a tree, climbed to her feet with an incredulous stare.

Darcy stepped forward to stand beside Stiles. She grinned at him, so excited she nearly forgot to watch the Alphas. They seemed uncertain of this new development, though, and faded slowly back into the preserve, red eyes hungry on the two sparks.

"Holy shit." Laura stumbled over to Derek, who was staring at Stiles with something undefinable in his eyes. "Derek. Are you okay?" She flapped a hand at Stiles when the shield remained up. "Stiles, let me through."

"Oh." Stiles blushed a splotchy red. The shield dropped a second later. "I don't understand," he told Darcy, shocked. "I've never... How did I-"

Darcy watched Laura shove Derek's head up to check his throat. The skin was untouched. She shook her head, awed. "I don't know, but you just saved Derek's life." Derek looked back at Stiles at that.

Darcy glanced up at a flash of movement, alarmed. The kanima crept towards them. Darcy started forward; Stiles followed her gaze and shouted a warning. They both prepared to fight, only to be knocked aside as Lydia shoved between them. "No! Don't!"

"Lydia," Stiles hissed. "Get back over here."

Lydia ignored him. She didn't flinch when the kanima turned its yellow eyes on her as she walked steadily forward. "Jackson," she said. Lydia halted less than a foot away. "Jackson, I know you can hear me." Darcy prepared to shield her at the first twitch from the kanima. Stiles looked ready to do worse.

Laura looked around, baffled. "I'm sorry, it has a name now? Did somebody's gecko take a bath in radioactive waste or something?" Stiles barely stifled a laugh.

"It's Jackson Whittemore," Darcy said, low enough for only the werewolves to hear. "He was bitten the same night as Isaac."

"And he turned into that?" Laura asked, horrified. She stayed crouched between the kanima and Derek, eyeing it with distaste.

Lydia continued to speak quietly to the kanima. Danny stepped through the trees, trailed by Erica, and approached them. The kanima watched as he halted beside Lydia. "Jackson?"

Erica spoke softly from behind Darcy and Stiles. "Danny said Lydia and Jackson might have a fucked up relationship, but that they're the only thing each other have. They found family with each other first, and that matters more." Erica wrapped her hand around Darcy's, who squeezed her fingers in return.

"So true love will save the day?" Stiles muttered.

"Isn't that what just happened?" Darcy asked with a suggestive glance towards Derek. Stiles abruptly stopped talking.

Erica sucked in a surprised breath when the kanima stood at its full height, only to start shrinking. Scales shriveled off, falling in heaps to the forest floor. Its features blurred until Jackson stood naked in front of Lydia and Danny. His eyes filled with tears and he lurched forward to wrap his arms around them both.
"I told you the gecko idea was wrong," Laura told her brother. Derek muttered something unflattering under his breath and stood. The deep claw marks on his chest still bled, so Darcy sketched a healing rune on his arm to close the wounds. He thanked her with a hug, then nudged her towards Peter. Andrew had moved to cover Peter at the kanima's approach. He smiled tiredly at Darcy when she healed them both.

"I gotta say, I'm getting real tired of this," Darcy told her foster dad as they watched his lacerations stitch shut.

He sighed. "Me, too, kid."

"Also, I'm not going to school tomorrow," Darcy decided.

Andrew laughed. "I'd say you've earned at least a day off."

The group limped back to the house. "What were you idiots doing outside of the wards, anyway?" Darcy asked Laura. The Alphas attacked barely twenty feet outside of the safety line.

"We smelled blood," Laura explained. "The Alphas killed a deer and dumped it right outside the wards."

"And you fell for that?" Darcy asked, incredulous.

"They used human blood to paint a spiral on the deer," Derek told her. "Fresh human blood."

“A lot of it," Laura gagged.

"That's just nasty." Darcy kicked at an acorn in frustration. "I'm so tired of these assholes."

"Well," Andrew said, lugging a still-unconscious Peter along, "now they know there are two sparks in Beacon Hills. They're not likely to leave now." Stiles's shoulders slumped at that.

"I texted Mom," Laura announced. "She’s meeting us at the house with Deaton."

Danny and Lydia pressed close to Jackson and didn't say anything. Darcy caught the worried glance they shared, though, and spoke to group.

"Good. Deaton can check out our reformed kanima back there." She looked at Jackson's guarded expression. "Is it gone?" Jackson nodded. "And you're left with just the 'wolf?" Another nod, this one less certain.

"Peter's going to wake up to another spark and three more teenagers in the pack," Laura laughed. "Also, real talk, are we starting a club here? A trend? Are baby werewolves the new thing?"

"God, I hope not," Andrew muttered as they approached the back porch. "My blood pressure can only take so much."

The afternoon devolved into chaos after that. Talia and Deaton showed up and, after finding Jackson a pair of pants, spoke in low voices to the three of them. Boyd and Isaac, as newly turned werewolves with tenuous control, retreated to the sound-proof basement to play cards. Erica joined them, still feeling stretched thin from her confinement with the Alphas.

Scott showed up with Allison in tow. He took one look at Stiles and said, "dude" with shining eyes. Allison found Lydia shortly after they arrived, curling up beside her on one of the large armchairs in the den. Danny stayed at Jackson's side on the couch, listening to Talia.
Cora followed Andrew closely, still upset she'd been left behind earlier. Peter and Chris sat in the kitchen, heads together.

Darcy found Stiles in the kitchen as well, seated at the kitchen table. He stared at his hands, frozen in place as a lanky fox tattoo padded along the inside of his arm. Stiles didn't look up when she sat beside him. "How could I not know?" He asked when she thought he wouldn't speak.

"I believe I have an answer to that," Deaton said. They looked up. "Your mother was one of the most brilliant women I've ever met. She was more creative with her magic than any other spark from her generation. I was unsure whether it had been passed on to you," Deaton explained gently. "It's very rare, for a spark to manifest so late."

"What does that mean?" Stiles asked hoarsely.

Deaton hesitated a moment. "It's possible that, when she became ill, your mother bound your spark to hide you. You've lived undetected for years, safe because she she had the foresight to know an untrained spark would be easy prey."

"That's true," Darcy said quietly. She remembered her mother's paranoia, and her flat refusal to teach Darcy anything about runes for fear she'd catch a hunter's attention.

Stiles looked over at that. He saw the expression on her face and nodded. "Okay. Yeah, that makes sense."

Deaton left them shortly after. Darcy tapped the fox tattoo with a smile, her otter curiously sliding along the outside of Darcy’s wrist. “We match.”

“It’s a patronus and nothing you say can change my mind,” Stiles said immediately. Darcy laughed.

“It’s a good thing you’ve been learning all those runes.”

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed. He looked at her thoughtfully. “It is.”

~*~

“We have a problem,” Allison announced the next afternoon as she stalked through the Hale’s back door and into the den. Scott followed her, looking troubled.

Darcy glanced up from where she was leaning against Boyd, her legs thrown over Erica’s lap as they filled out college applications. Isaac sat in front of the couch watching TV, slouched artfully against Boyd’s legs. Somewhere downstairs, Talia and Andrew coached Jackson in learning control and finding his anchor. Lydia and Danny took shifts babysitting the werewolf- supposedly their presence helped Jackson with his control.

“Yes, a well established problem,” Darcy said slowly, dreading what the grim set to Allison’s mouth could possibly mean. “As in, the problem of a psychotic, power-hungry Alpha Pack trying to kill us all.”

“Oh, this is worse,” Allison assured her. “Hunters have shown up in town. A lot of them.”

“Fuck.” Darcy set aside her laptop and sat up.

“My dad says between the murders, the kanima, and the Alpha Pack, too much attention has been drawn to Beacon Hills. And now there are already rumors of a second spark coming to power here.” Allison shook her head.
“The kanima is taken care of, though,” Darcy said. “He’s cured.”

“These hunters don’t believe there is a cure for a kanima.”

“We haven’t figured out who was controlling Jackson,” Boyd reminded them. When asked if he remembered anything, all Jackson could recall was a distinctly male voice in his head, giving him orders. “Could the hunters be distracted into looking for him, while we deal with the Alphas?”

“They blame the Hales for losing control of the territory,” Allison explained carefully. “And my dad doesn’t approve of any of the the hunting families that have come to town. Which means they’re probably… well. They’re probably like my mother’s side of the family.”

They looked over when a door slammed, followed by stomping feet and furious swearing. Derek appeared, eyes blazing. “They fucking smashed the Camaro windows in!”

A thump sounded from upstairs and they all winced at Laura’s snarl. “They what?”

“Who?” Erica asked.

“The hunters that cornered me at the gas station,” Derek said indignantly.

“Guys!” Stiles shouted from outside. He burst through the front door and skidded into the room, taken aback momentarily by the apparent tension. He visibly brushed it off and flailed his hands in the air in panic. “More hunters!”

“Oh, my god,” Darcy muttered. So much for her peaceful afternoon.

“They just dropped off their gun permits at the station. For deer hunting,” Stiles sneered. “Arrogant bastards.”

“So much for getting them arrested for carrying illegal firearms,” Boyd grumbled. Stiles sighed.

“Was that something we’d decided to do?” Erica asked, confused. “I must have missed that conversation.”

“Some of us have contingency plans,” Stiles growled. “For exactly this reason!”

“They have a whole binder of them,” Darcy told Erica with a long-suffering sigh. “God help us all if it falls into the wrong hands.”

Boyd and Stiles shared a smug look. “Not possible,” Boyd said.

“You’re forgetting the important thing here,” Allison started.

“Yeah, my fucking car!” Laura shouted as she stomped by.

“Why is everyone yelling?!” Andrew asked loudly from the basement steps. Cora peered around him, eyes wide. “You’re not exactly helping with Jackson’s peaceful environment, here!”

“Hunters, Dad,” Derek yelled and stalked out to prevent Laura from doing something drastic.

Darcy sighed and stood, temporarily giving up on her own plans for the future. The others followed, passing Jackson and Lydia on the stairs. “Where is everyone going?” Jackson asked uncertainly.

“War room,” Darcy called over her shoulder. “Which I’ve spent more time in lately than my own bedroom.”
“Fucking werewolves,” Stiles said in apparent agreement.

“I resent that,” Scott told him.

“Not you, buddy.”

Lydia made up her mind then and dragged Jackson along with them. Darcy was grateful- Lydia’s brain would be a major advantage for the following hours of extensive planning.

“Chris and Peter are trying to do some damage control,” Allison reported while they all settled around the massive round table.

“I’m going to do the same,” Talia said. She passed Darcy’s new phone to her. “Keep both me and Satomi in the loop. Don’t confront these hunters- they don’t care that you’re teenagers and will not hesitate to kill any of you.”

Six grueling hours later, only Darcy, Stiles, Boyd, and Lydia remained. Books covered the massive table, along with pages of notes and half-finished plans.

Erica left to spend the night with Sophia, concerned a hunter or one of the Alphas would target her aunt as leverage. Maya apparently agreed, so she’d stopped by long enough to pick up Erica and leave again. Jackson and Derek left for food, Laura tagging along as extra muscle. They planned to pick up Danny on the way back.

“Talia and Peter are running the perimeter,” Darcy said. She set the phone down and rubbed at her eyes.

Lydia hung up her own phone. “Allison, Isaac, and Scott are with Chris. Chris says to update him in the morning.” Darcy nodded. The adults would keep the town stable long enough that the rest of them could hammer out a plan to survive the next 24 hours.

“Boyd’s right,” Stiles said, picking up where they’d left off. He’d stripped off both his hoodie and flannel hours ago, leaving him in a thin white t-shirt and black jeans. “We’ve got two main problems here. The best, most efficient option is to split up and take them down separately.”

“There’d be too many variables if we tried to turn them against each other,” Lydia agreed. “Location, timing, collateral damage, not to mention the hunters won’t walk into a situation where they’d be outgunned.”

“It’d be so poetic though,” Darcy sighed and slumped over. Boyd chuckled.

“Nothing’s ever that easy for us,” Derek said as he entered, carrying two armloads of Chinese food. Jackson and Danny followed with more. “Is that what we’ve got so far?” Derek asked in concern. “What we can’t do?”

The four of them made eye contact, sharing a silent conversation. Finally, Darcy spoke. “We have a plan. It’s… risky.”

“Insanity, actually,” Stiles elaborated cheerfully. He shoveled sweet and sour chicken into his mouth, his bright fox tattoo curled up on the side of his neck.

“Explain.” Derek narrowed his eyes suspiciously at Stiles.

Lydia looked at the giant map of Beacon Hills taped to the table. She gestured gracefully with a chopstick at the jumbled markings. “We split up.”
Laura entered the room, uncharacteristically solemn, and joined them at the table.

“One group takes the hunters, the other the Alphas,” Lydia explained.

Stiles stood to point at the far side of town on the map. He swept a hand over the notes jotted along the edge. “Group One leads the hunters to this side of town. We have to assume they’ll figure out who the kanima was sooner or later.” Jackson paled and looked down at his rice, jaw clenched. “But that’s okay, because we can use that.”

Boyd sat forward. “We use Jackson to lure them across town. This area is heavily patrolled by police, since it’s a veritable drug smuggling operation. We lead them here—” Boyd pointed to a street on the map—“which is an abandoned meth lab that my mom helped bust six months ago. They think they’ve cornered a kanima. In the meantime, part of Group One splits off to plant enough evidence in their cars and hotel rooms that what happens next won’t seem like a set up to the cops.”

“Danny will make an untraceable call to dispatch as soon as the chase starts. If we time this right, they’ll bust in on the so-called deer hunters in former drug running headquarters, holding a teenager at gunpoint,” Stiles said with satisfaction.

“And if they decide to shoot him?” Danny asked unhappily.

“Then they’ll learn that the spark tied up in the back of one of their cars isn’t deterred by a little duct tape.” Stiles smirked at the group.

“And when exactly are they kidnapping you?” Derek raised an eyebrow at him, unimpressed.

“Oh, they aren’t. Scott and Allison will tie me up and lock me in one of their cars before they go plant the evidence. Scott will call my dad once they’re a safe distance away and tell him I stopped answering his calls after following the hunters out of town. I think kidnapping the Sheriff’s too-nosy son will be a nice nail in their coffin,” Stiles said decisively. “And that way we can be sure the police will be tied up- heh- on the opposite side of town as the Alphas.”

“Besides that,” Lydia interrupted their staredown. “Danny and I will be following Jackson in my car. I’ll shatter their eardrums if they touch a single trigger.”

“And further insurance are Maya and Braeden,” Darcy told Jackson, who still seemed a little pale. “Two mercenaries are more than capable of handling trigger-happy hunters if they deviate.”

“This is diabolical,” Laura said with a delighted laugh.


“I guess,” Stiles said warily.

“This plan sucks.”

“That is not constructive criticism.”

“You’re going to be tied up, helpless, in the trunk of their car while they run down a newly turned werewolf in Beacon Hill’s worst part of town?” Derek planted his fists on the table and leaned into Stiles’s space. “If one single thing goes wrong, they’ll kill you.”

“No,” Stiles said slowly. “I’m going to be tied up after they chase Jackson- who, like me, will have a number of protective runes activated for his safety and control- to prevent any slip ups by these rednecks terrorizing my town. Braeden will be monitoring from the building next door. I’m told she’s
a good shot.”

Darcy nodded enthusiastically.

“I hate this plan,” Derek said flatly.

"I love this plan." Laura spoke over her brother. She looked at Darcy. "And the Alpha Pack?"

Darcy returned her sister's wicked grin. "This time, we take the fight to them."

~*~

Group One left to start preparations minutes after the sun rose. Danny tracked the hunters' phones; Stiles, Scott, Isaac, and Allison separated from the rest to begin their appallingly illegal part of the plan. Satomi collected a tearful Cora soon after, promising to keep her safe with the Ito Pack.

Darcy watched from the war room table as the library filled with the second group. Talia, Andrew, Derek, and Laura. Erica and Boyd. Peter and Chris. Her family, willing to fight and die for each other. For her.

She thought about the ancient book hidden in her bedroom, a loan from Satomi, who'd been entirely too cagey when questioned about its origins. Lydia kindly did not ask questions when Darcy quietly asked her to translate the Latin text hours before dawn.

Darcy had her own plans for the Alphas, created quietly with Stiles and Lydia during the night. Chris met her eyes over Peter's shoulder and inclined his head in a subtle acknowledgement.

She studied the map on the table and wondered if she was finally crossing a line. Her eyes fell to Maya's reports- the total body count, the gruesome autopsies, photos of entire families that fell victim to the Alpha Pack.

Darcy brushed a hand over a document with tiny fingerprint stains used to identify remains in the slaughter of Kali's pack. The horrifying implications had bile rising in her throat. She turned away.

Anyone who had a problem with her execution of justice would meet the same fate, she decided. The Alpha Pack had been given far too much reign, and Darcy wouldn't forget those that sat back and let the Alphas massacre their way to the west coast.

Heads turned as Deaton entered the room. He looked past the Hales at Darcy. "It's done. They're set where you suggested. I was not seen." His usual neutral expression faded into something akin to regret. "I'm afraid that's also the extent of my permitted involvement.

"I understand," she told him. And she did, mostly. "Thank you, Deaton."

He left. Darcy looked around the room. Her family smiled back at her. "Let's go."

The night before, Danny discovered a recently purchased loft just outside of Beacon Hill's abandoned warehouse district. He tracked the purchase through two separate shell companies and just as many fake identities to find Ennis at the source of the transaction- the fifth and final member of the Alpha Pack.

The loft was their destination. This time, though, they slipped through the preserve rather than risk driving through town and potentially catching the attention of a rogue hunter before the second half of the plan was firmly in place.
Darcy watched closely as Talia shifted into the Alpha form with deceptive ease. It was an incredibly rare feat for any werewolf to manage that took incomprehensible control and power to achieve, making Talia one of a mere handful of 'wolves that could accomplish a full shift.

"You all know where to go?" Darcy asked lowly when they reached the edge of the forest. She strapped her staff to her back until it was held securely in place.

Peter came to a halt beside her and glanced back at their family. "Use the alleyways to herd them to the center of the district. Chris and Darcy will activate the traps once we're clear. Don't get caught up in a direct fight," he warned. "The goal is to lure them to our most advantageous location." Nods all around. "Be safe," Darcy finished for him, and watched as they bolted from the cover of the trees.

Chris bumped against her side. "Ready?"

"Are you?" Darcy couldn't cover the worry in her voice.

"Trust me, Darce, I won't be losing sleep over this," Chris said grimly. He slid the rifle on his back around and thumbed the safety off. "Let's get started."

They split up. Darcy ran straight for the first jar of mountain ash, sitting harmlessly at the mouth of the first alleyway. "Thank you, Deaton," Darcy mumbled as she poured it on the ground. The first growls echoed through the empty spaces between buildings, distorting the sound so thoroughly Darcy couldn't identify the origin.

Her movements became urgent at the crack of a gunshot. She grabbed a fistful of the mountain ash and started to run, imagining she grasped one end of a sparkly black string and let it uncoil from the pile as she sprinted through the outer ring of the warehouse district.

Mountain ash was all about visualization and belief. Envision the result, accept no other outcome, and it would obey the wielder's will.

Darcy reminded herself of this when she passed the first ploy- a container of pure bleach pouring out into the alley through a bullet hole. It would render werewolf noses ineffective and deter anyone from leaving- especially those with enhanced Alpha abilities.

Another gunshot. Darcy kept her pace steady. She would circle around the back as her family lured the Alphas deeper into the sector. When they reached the mountain ash line, Darcy would complete the massive circle and trap them all inside.

Then it would become a cat and mouse game in the winding alleys within the ash circle. They'd have to weaken the Alphas enough that werewolf healing wouldn't be capable of fixing a bullet wound, courtesy of Chris. A beta werewolf killing an Alpha meant that power diverted to them- and the very last thing Beacon Hills needed was another Alpha.

Darcy didn't know how long she ran, only that by the time the pile of ash came back into sight, her legs were rubbery and there was a sharp pain in her chest as she gasped for air. She let the last of the ash slip from her fingers, still inexplicably holding the same amount she'd started with despite the thick trail snaking through the dirty streets behind her.

She didn't waste time once the circle was complete, knowing it would hold. Darcy grabbed her staff and walked towards the raging combat. Halfway to her destination, unease trickled down her spine. Darcy obeyed the sense, halting as the ground trembled. She looked around in alarm and froze at the slim woman that detached herself from the wall ahead.

Darcy didn't recognize her, could only tell that, at some point, this woman managed to take control
over the Beacon Hills' nemeton. She also carried a staff, but she wasn’t a spark. Darcy felt the ground shake again and tried to slow her heart rate.

“And here I thought the Alphas murdered all of their Druids,” she called. The woman’s mouth twisted into a wry smile. Darcy’s guess was right, then.

“They like to keep a few cards close to the chest, just in case,” the woman answered.

“How’d you get the nemeton?” Darcy asked casually, judging the short distance between them and the center of the district, where she could hear the fight still raging on.

“Deaton always was too trusting,” the Druid shrugged. “Especially of family.”

Darcy blinked in shock. “Deaton has a sister?”

“Half sister,” she corrected. “My name is Marin Morrell.” She narrowed her eyes when Darcy showed no signs of recognition. “I see my brother is still keeping secrets, then.”

“I don’t understand. You’re a Druid. Aren’t you guys all about balance?” Darcy inched forward, barely containing her flinch when Laura cried out in pain.

Marin snorted. “You think I had a choice in this? I’ve done everything I can to maintain neutrality. Braeden got to you in time, didn’t she?”

Darcy faltered. “You sent Braeden? I thought Maya called her.”

“Maya tried to. But Braeden got a little too close to the Alphas a while back and they lost touch. You didn’t see the scars on her throat?” Darcy hadn’t, she realized. The mercenary kept her jacket zipped all the way to her chin every time they’d seen each other. “I saved her life and told her where we were going,” Marin said.

Darcy could feel the nemeton’s unrest somewhere low in her stomach, like a relentless tug just below her belly button. “Did Deaton ever tell you what happened my first night in Beacon Hills?” She asked, not willing to be distracted any longer. Darcy let her spark flow down her body and into the concrete, narrow threads of power only faintly visible as they spread like ink through water.

Marin was suddenly wary.

“No? I was young, only twelve at the time. The nemeton reached out, drew me to the Hales. It gave me all the power I needed to kill Kate Argent. We’re old friends.” Darcy smiled as the threads of her magic wound around Marin’s legs and up her body, binding her tightly. “We can discuss your involvement later. As for right now…” Darcy inhaled, closing her eyes. She felt the nemeton reach for her. Darcy reached back.

When she opened them a few seconds later, Marin flinched back at the gold fire burning in Darcy’s eyes. “Stay the fuck out of my way.” A brief flick of her fingers sent Marin flying into the closest wall, cocooned within the crackling spark.

Darcy stepped out of the alley and into the fray. Her spark felt like a live wire, thrumming beneath her skin. It was sunlight burning in the back of her throat, a lightning strike in her ribcage. The air grew heavy, like the pressure of a thunderstorm.

Threads of magic encompassed her, burning bright. Darcy looked at her family, bolstered by the nemeton funnelling its earth magic through her. They all fought as humans, but Darcy laughed a little breathlessly when she found the shadows they cast- shadows that were very clearly not human.
Darcy reached for the threads between body and lupine shadow, intricate ties she was just now able to see. She threw out her hands and shouted, letting the nemeton tug and merge those ties. The Hales reeled. Erica and Boyd lurched back.

The ties were solid now, human bodies and wolf shadows connected. Darcy watched them weld together, and finally, *finally* start to shift. Clothes shredded, ripping apart as their bodies twisted and transfigured.

The Alphas stumbled back, showing fear when the first wolf climbed unsteadily to its feet. Talia, already shifted through her own power, pressed against Darcy's legs as they watched their pack shake off the lingering effects of the transition.

Darcy laughed, embracing the wild power pulsating under her skin. A red wolf turned its massive head in her direction. Peter, she realized. He yipped at her in acknowledgment and then lunged directly for the closest Alpha.

Erica followed, slender under her yellow-gold coat. She looked especially bright beside Boyd's dark brown fur. Laura, a sleek and tall wolf with slate-gray fur, leaped into Kali. They tumbled in a heap of limbs, Derek nipping at Kali like an especially aggressive shadow. His coat was as black as Talia's; the Hale Alpha gave Darcy a wolf's lazy grin and attacked Deucalion with Andrew, who's enormous frame was covered in mottled gray fur.

Before, the Alphas outmatched them in speed and strength. But they couldn't withstand an assault from fully-shifted 'wolves of enhanced size and strength. Darcy watched them fall, one by one.

The scope of a rifle flashed in the sun. Darcy looked up as Chris settled firmly against the roof above them and fired once, twice, three times. Alphas fell and did not rise again. Kali and Deucalion fought desperately, now overwhelmed by the pack.

Darcy closed her eyes and reached for the mountain ash line. Bit by bit, she pulled it in, shrinking the circle and giving the remaining Alphas less room to run. Chris fired. Kali went down. Darcy turned in time to see Talia's final lunge. The wolf snapped her jaws closed around Deucalion's throat. His neck cracked with one vicious jerk of Talia's head, and then he was still.

The abrupt silence was disconcerting. Panting breaths replaced the roars and growling as they stared at the carnage. Chris climbed down a fire escape and hesitantly walked to Darcy's side. He couldn't seem to look away from the wolves.

"When you said you had an idea, this is not what I expected," Chris said faintly.

"I didn't know if it would work," Darcy admitted. Passages in the book suggested it was possible, but Darcy wasn't sure she could have done it without the nemeton's power.

"Can you change them back?" Chris asked as Peter trotted over, tongue lolling out of his mouth in a happy grin.

Erica danced over to them, graceful on her long legs. At first glance, Boyd could be mistaken for a small bear. His eyes were calm and bright, though, even as Erica nipped playfully at his heels.

Derek and Laura were already wrestling in the background, powerful jaws snapping.

Darcy grinned at them. "I just showed them it was possible. They have the power to shift on their own, now. If their control is good enough, anyway." Chris nodded and slipped away to where Talia stood over Deucalion's body, breathing hard.
They watched as he aimed at the dead Alpha's head and fired three times. "Just in case," Chris said when the reverberations faded.

They dragged the bodies to the woods, where the nemeton happily covered them. Trees groaned and creaked as their limbs crawled over the Alphas, purple flowers sprouting in thick patches until the bodies were invisible.

Darcy returned to Marin, still pinned against the wall. The Druid was white-faced and trembling.

"I'm going to let you go," Darcy told her. "After you swear to leave Beacon Hills and never interfere with the Hale pack again." She was quick to do so. Darcy released her and walked away, unconcerned when Marin immediately fled.

Chris wrapped an arm around Darcy's shoulders and tugged her into his side. "Let's go home." He smelled like gunpowder and traces of the sickly sweet strains of wolfsbane mixed into every Argent weapon.

Darcy experienced a brand new appreciation for the depth of life in the preserve. The nemeton seemed eager to show her the expanse of its conscious, sentient to an almost scary degree. The wolves chased each other through the woods, their joy infectious.

"I can't wait to give the nemeton back over to Deaton," Darcy said. She felt the blended magic of her spark and the nemeton pour out of her, like pot boiling over.

Chris looked at her, alarmed. "You have the nemeton?" Peter, still a large red wolf, separated from the group and joined them. He nudged urgently at Darcy's hand, whining.

"It's fine," Darcy said. She tugged gently on one of Peter's ears. "The last time this happened, I was fighting my spark, the nemeton, and my mom's spark. I'm older now, and the nemeton is playing nice."

The others waited at the Hale house, milling around on the porch. Stiles shouted when the wolves slipped through the trees, scrambling to his feet. His face was bruised and it looked as if he'd reopened a split lip.

"It worked," Darcy called to him as she and Chris broke through the tree line.

"I can see that," Stiles said in a strangled voice. Derek bumped his nose against Stiles's hip, tail wagging. "Oh my god."

Maya and Braeden stared at Darcy in disbelief. Maya found her voice first. "What did you do?"

"Long story. Also, someone should probably go find Deaton. I think his sister left him tied up somewhere." Allison brushed past them to hug her dad. Erica tackled an unsuspecting Scott to the ground. Isaac laughed quietly from safe distance.

Braeden chuckled and sauntered down the steps. Darcy finally saw the three pale scars that stretched across the dark skin of her bared throat. "As if you weren't notorious enough already," Braeden teased as she passed Darcy on the way to her bike. "I'll go rescue your Druid," she assured Talia, who sat quietly beside Andrew.

Darcy approached Stiles. "Everything went okay on your end?" She winced at the bruising on his cheekbone.

"We had to make it look realistic," Stiles explained. "But yeah. I have never seen my dad so pissed
"Those hunters won't see the light of day ever again."

"Jackson's dad is a lawyer," Lydia said behind them. "There's not a chance in hell they're slipping through the cracks."

Darcy stepped away from Stiles when Derek shifted back, standing naked in front of Stiles. Stiles promptly choked on his own spit.

"I never thanked you, for the other day," Derek said lowly. His eyes burned fever-bright as he crowded into Stiles's space. Darcy didn't hear Stiles's stammered reply as she deliberately turned to Lydia and asked about Jackson's whereabouts.

"He's at the station with his parents; the police wanted a more thorough statement. Danny's with him. But I was curious about how that translation worked out for you." Lydia studied the wolves with a satisfied smile. "It looks like your ingenuity and my brilliance saved the day."

“We can’t just rely on wards, anymore,” Stiles agreed, having separated from Derek in an entirely undignified fashion that left Derek looking pleased with himself. “Not with creeps like Deucalion hanging around.”

“So what now?” Lydia asked, prepared to take on the world. Darcy deliberated for a brief moment. Stiles leaned in eagerly.

"Now, I’m going to take the longest nap in the history of the world and then finish finally my fucking college applications."

Darcy traipsed inside to do just that.

Chapter End Notes

The "constructive criticism" line is shamelessly stolen from that tumblr post about Tolkein & whoever because it makes me laugh every time.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This was the quickest chapter I've written (in respect to length) so far. I've had it planned since the very beginning, so it wrote fast. So here you go, a scheduled weekly update that is actually (mostly) on time!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I see the bad moon rising
I see trouble on the way
I see earthquakes and lightning
I see bad times today

- Mourning Ritual, Bad Moon Rising cover

~*~

"I'm starting a website!" Stiles announced as he burst into the Hale house.

Darcy looked away from Danny's laptop and wrinkled her nose at Stiles.

"Please, tell me more," Erica purred, eyes bright with laughter. Derek snapped his pencil in half and very deliberately did not look at Boyd's judgmental expression. Danny cast a slow, considering gaze down Stiles's lean, muscled frame; Jackson scowled over at his friend.

Stiles did a double take. "What? No! Not that kind of website!" He rolled his eyes. "Honestly, is your mind ever not in the gutter?"

"Nope," Erica said cheerfully. She turned back to the poker game. Boyd, Isaac, and Jackson played with her, practicing lie detection with an array of increasingly aggressive card games. Lydia was currently destroying them all, only half paying attention.

Derek sighed despondently at his sketch book and broken pencil, setting them aside to give Stiles his reluctant attention. Darcy was impressed with the charade- as if Derek was ever not one hundred percent focused on Stiles when the spark was in the vicinity. "What kind of website, then?" Derek asked warily.

"A site for supernatural questions and consultations!" Stiles beamed. "Because I, for one, am tired of sifting through porn every time I need to know literally anything werewolf related."

Jackson glanced up lazily from the floor. "Lie."

Stiles flushed. "The point is," he said loudly, "that right now people have to make fifteen phone calls to find out how to kill a kelpie. If we have a database online- give it a mythology and folklore front-
we can cut half of the bullshit calls Darcy and I get about helping supposedly capable people deal with their problems."

"A pack in Montana asked me to help them hunt down a Yeti loose in their territory last week. It was just a bear," Darcy said, disgruntled.

"See?" Stiles said excitedly. "If we had a website, we could answer their stupid questions without having to travel out of the state just to tell someone they're an incompetent moron."

"I thought it was fun," Erica argued.

"You left their Alpha in tears," Darcy reminded her.

"Yeah, exactly."

"It's a good idea," Lydia said. The room turned to stare in surprise that Lydia, of all people, supported one of Stiles's ideas. She shrugged at the sudden attention. "I've considered something similar. Between the Fae, shifters, Druids, and everything else Beacon Hills has seen, we could really use a comprehensive source of information."

"Combine the bestiaries, personal experience, and lore," Derek nodded.

"Plus, we could get out of that pathetic email chain," Erica added. Isaac laughed.

Danny sighed at Stiles's beseeching look. "We could create a general site, just basic information that wouldn't get too specific for the public. If someone needs further information, like how to catch or kill something, they'd have to reach out to a consultant." He frowned thoughtfully at his computer. "And if I give us total access to the database, anyone one of us could answer their questions."

"We're all experts on homicidal supernatural creatures at this point," Boyd grumbled. He was evidently still bitter about his (accidental!) near drowning courtesy of a lost and confused Selkie on Tuesday.

"It'd be a good way to network," Lydia chimed in. "We'd make connections, compile future favors."

"Darcy and Stiles could travel when needed," Jackson said. "For the serious shit."

"I'm in," Darcy told Stiles. "It is a good idea."

"I still like the camera boy idea, but this will do," Erica said. Derek dropped his head into his hands.

"That was never on the table!" Stiles squawked.

Darcy rolled her eyes and stood. "Danny, can you get started on that?" He nodded. "I have to go get my letter of recommendation from Sophia, so I can pick up some of Deaton's books on my way home."

"Soph is working at the school today," Erica reminded Darcy. She bumped Boyd's arm and they both abandoned the poker game. "We'll ride with you. Isaac, wanna come?" The quiet teen shrugged and trailed them out the door.

Darcy appropriated Andrew's Range Rover for the drive to the school. "It feels weird to be finished with high school," Erica said, resting her feet on the dashboard. Darcy swatted them back down. "I never thought we'd live to graduation, to be honest."

"Some of us still might not," Isaac griped. He was sulkier lately. Likely because Scott was too busy
pining after Allison, visiting her mother in New York for the entire summer, to pay him any attention.

"Hey, if we made it, you'll make it," Boyd told him. "It's only a year. What's the worst that could happen?"

"Boyd!" Darcy yelped. "That's like daring the universe to do worse!"

Boyd held up a hand and ticked off his fingers, one by one. "Fae. Kanima. Alpha Pack. Hunters. Selkie. What exactly could be worse than all of that?"

"The Selkie was nice," Erica protested. "She was just scared."

"She dragged me to the bottom of the lake!" Boyd said incredulously. "I almost died!"

"Yeah, but she said sorry!"

The argument remained unresolved as Darcy pulled into the school’s parking lot and around to Sophia’s open garage. She and Isaac shared an exasperated look and left the other two behind at the car.

"Are they always like that?" Isaac asked as they stepped into the garage.

"It’s their version of foreplay," Darcy told him. She grinned when he mimed puking.

Sophia glanced up, elbows deep in the principal’s sedan. She brightened. “Darcy! Here for your letter?”

“And to see you,” Darcy admitted when she was close. She’d miss her mentor like the loss of a limb.

Sophia wrapped her in a tight hug. “I’m going to miss you. Don’t you dare forget me and Maya when you go off to college.”

“Never,” Darcy promised.

“I have your letter in my office,” Sophia told her. “Are you sure you don’t need more than three copies?”

Darcy shook her head. “I’m only applying to three internships, so your letter and Deaton’s should be more than enough. Thank you, again, for writing it.”

“Have you decided where you’re going?” Sophia asked, motioning for Darcy to follow her to the office. Isaac wandered around the garage, bored. Darcy glanced outside as they passed the open door to see Erica and Boyd making out against the side of the car. She rolled her eyes.

“Culver, I think.” Darcy chewed anxiously on her lip. “They have a kickass political science program, one of the best in the country.”

“It’s far,” Sophia commented neutrally. She shuffled through a stack of papers on the desk.

“I know.” Darcy sat on the edge of Sophia’s desk and sighed. “I don’t want to be so far from everyone but… well, a little distance couldn’t hurt, politically speaking.”

Sophia stopped flipping through another stack and scowled. “Politically,” she scoffed. “We’re your family. What does politics have to do with that?”
“To start, it would show the rest of the supernatural world that I’m not loyal only to the Hales and Satomi, and that they haven’t made me pack.”

“Sounds like the supernatural world will only be happy when you’re alone,” Sophia told her.

“Hmm.” Darcy had the same thought, too. She just wasn’t sure what to do with that information quite yet. “Besides, now there are two sparks in Beacon Hills, both affiliated with the Hales. That’s bound to draw the wrong attention.”


“I was welding earlier,” Sophia told them.

Isaac shook his head. “This is too strong for that.”

“Hey, what are you guys burning in here?” Erica called from the garage. “Soph never lets me set stuff on fire.”

Darcy walked out of the office. She set her hands on her hips and studied the garage. “What the hell are you two talking about? There’s nothing on fire in here.” Isaac hovered anxiously at her shoulder, blocking Sophia from exiting the office.

Boyd stepped through the door connected the garage to the school. “Nothing in the school,” he said to Erica.

Darcy observed their genuine concern and scanned the garage again. Nothing. It was empty. Last week Maya "borrowed" the Mustang Darcy and Sophia rebuilt over the last year and had yet to return it. A scattered assortment of other projects littered the garage, including a pile of unidentifiable objects on Darcy’s old workstation.

Her gaze skimmed past it, then darted back at a ripple of movement in the air behind her workstation. Darcy narrowed her eyes and stepped closer. Erica and Boyd tracked her gaze and warily followed.

“Isaac, stay with Sophia,” Darcy murmured.

“What is it?” He whispered, nudging Sophia insistently backwards.

“Ugh.” Erica covered her nose with a grimace. “It smells- oh, holy fuck. Back, back!” They froze when the ripple pulsed and then yawned open. Darcy took a breath of heavy smoke right before a monster stumbled through the opening with a furious roar.

“What the fuck!”

Chaos ensued.

Panicked screaming as they all scrambled away from the fire-breathing monster. Metal tools clattering to the ground in their haste to climb over tables to safety. Yelps when someone was singed. Sophia’s angry shouts when Isaac slammed the office door in her face and broke the doorknob off.

“Ohmygodohmygodohmygod,” Erica chanted. She ducked just in time as the monster’s tail swung around. Darcy yanked her down when it whirled back again. “It has a snake tail!”

“It breathes fire,” Isaac moaned from underneath the neighboring table, clutching his arm. Boyd stood and hurled a massive table at the monster, sprinting across the room towards them while it tried
to unearth itself. He slid under the table like he was running bases to join them in their hiding spot. Darcy pulled a pen out of her pocket and scribbled runes along her arm as quickly as she could.

“Tell me that’s not what I think it is,” Boyd panted. His shirt was smoldering; Erica patted at it urgently to snuff it out. The monster screamed in fury and stalked around the room in search of them.

“Down!” Darcy shouted, and winced when the snake tail slammed into her shield.

“What do you think it is?” Erica asked, peering warily out of her hiding place.

Boyd glanced at Darcy. “Chimera?” He cringed when the monster screamed again and something crashed to the ground.

Her mouth fell open. “No fucking way.” She leaned out from under the table.

The monster was tall, about six feet at the shoulder. The body was that of a lion, as was the primary head. A thick, scaled tail tapered to a snake head with venomous teeth. And worst of all- the goat head protruding from the back of the monster. This head was the source of the never-ending fire that had them all sweating profusely.

Darcy jerked back under the table. “It’s a fucking chimera,” she said in disbelief. Boyd groaned.

“As in the Iliad’s chimera?” Isaac asked doubtfully. “Those actually exist?”

Erica thrust a hand out at the burning room. “What do you think, Isaac?!”

“How do we kill it?” They turned to Darcy.

“Why are you all looking at me? This is well beyond my expertise!”

Sophia shouted then from inside the office. They looked over to see the chimera clawing at the door. Erica paled and darted out from their cover, shifting halfway across the room. Seconds later, a blonde wolf dragged its claws deep into the chimera’s side, drawing it away from the office- and Sophia. Darcy belatedly threw up a shield in front of the office.

“Go!” Darcy ordered the rest of them. Erica barely managed to dodge a heavy stream of fire. “Isaac, shift and help Erica keep it distracted. Boyd, drag that table over here. No, no, the metal one!”

Darcy stood while he did so and shielded the others from the fire. Isaac, shifted into a long-limbed wolf with a tan coat, nipped at the chimera’s heels and narrowly avoided the snake tail. Erica snarled at the lion’s head, darting around the swinging paws to bite at its throat.

The chimera screamed, blood spraying. Erica was thrown aside. They all ducked when it whirled, breathing fire so hot Darcy couldn’t breathe.

“Break off one of the legs,” Darcy told Boyd. She clawed her way to her knees and squinted through the burning garage. “Aim for the heart,” she coughed. “We’ll keep the rest of it distracted.”

Boyd nodded and ripped the long metal table leg off, gripping it like a spear.

Darcy stepped around the table and barely managed to shield Isaac from the next blast in time. Erica snarled, her massive jaws wrapped around the tail behind the snake’s head. It thrashed in her grip, spitting venom. Isaac gathered himself and lunged at the lion’s head, ducking under its huge paws as the chimera tried to swat him away.

Darcy furrowed her brow in thought and then wrapped a shield around the goat’s head. It blasted
fire; Darcy shivered at the heat felt through her magic but didn’t let go. It screamed in anger, trapped with its own fire licking at her shield.

Boyd sprinted past Darcy and leaped off of a pile of smoldering tires and into the air. Isaac glanced up; he clawed at the chimera’s lion head, sinking his teeth into its scruff and dragging it to the side to give Boyd an open target. Erica clung desperately to the tail. Darcy doubled down on her shields, sweat dripping down her forehead.

Boyd plunged the blunt metal spear into the chimera’s chest. The monster screamed, thrashing violently. Darcy bit her lip until it bled and formed another shield between Erica and the venomous fangs of the snake tail when the wolf’s feet slipped. Boyd shoved the weapon further into its chest, gritting his teeth with the effort.

Tires screeched outside, followed by shouting. They didn’t dare look away as the chimera fought its oncoming death. Lydia, Jackson, Stiles, and Derek skidded to a halt inside the still-burning garage.

“Why is everything on fire?” Stiles yelled, trying to peer through the thick smoke.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” Darcy called back. “But we’ve got it under control.”

The others tentatively stepped through the garage, following the muffled snarls and groans of the chimera.

“HOLY-” Stiles shoved the others back, hands spread in preparation to create a shield of his own. “Darcy, what the hell?!” Derek stepped against Stiles’s back, white-faced.

“Chimera,” Boyd said grimly. He remained beside the dying monster, blood-splattered and sweating.

“I felt the gate open,” Lydia told them. Her eyes were wide on the chimera. Jackson kept a hand on her arm, ready to pull her away at the first sign of danger.

“The chimera came through a Fae gate?” Stiles asked, inching over to Darcy’s side. Derek stepped aside to call Talia.

She nodded. “I’m guessing it’s because we left on such friendly terms with the Seelie Queen.” Darcy watched as the chimera took its final breath and went limp. Erica pried her jaws open, stepping back from the tail. She hacked a few times, wrinkling her nose in disgust at the lingering taste. Isaac stepped away from the lion head and sat down heavily, winded.

Darcy cautiously lifted her shields and sighed in relief. She glanced around the garage and cringed. Stiles was right- everything was on fire.

“You jinxed us,” Darcy accused Boyd.

He looked around the room and shrugged. “I’d say we can add chimera to our list.” Sophia shouted angrily from the office. Boyd left to break her out, Erica trailing behind him.

Derek hung up the phone and joined Darcy and Stiles in staring at the dead, mythic creature. “Mom’s sending Chris and Peter for clean-up.”

Lydia edged around the chimera, much to Jackson’s dismay, to stand in front of the gate. “I thought I remembered another gate,” she murmured.

Darcy moved to stand beside her. “I found you in here before you were disappeared. You were staring at that spot.”
“A developing Fae gate,” Lydia determined. “Which is why I didn’t feel it in the Fae realm, because it didn’t finish forming until just now. The Queen must have immediately sent the chimera through.”

“Can you take control of it?”

Lydia raised an eyebrow in response.

Darcy held up her hands in surrender. “Of course you can, what’s one more interdimensional portal in your pocket?” She muttered.

Darcy looked around the garage and sighed. Stiles and Derek moved on to putting out the fires. Sophia stood gaping between her ruined garage and the massive, limp chimera bleeding all over her floor.

Darcy glanced back at Lydia, working intently behind Darcy’s old workstation, and couldn’t stop the bubble of hysterical laughter.

Everyone turned to stare at her with varying levels of concern. She pointed at the empty space beside Lydia, nearly doubled over in laughter. “All those warnings about the dangers of the Fae realm, and I’ve been practically sitting on a Fae gate for two years,” she hiccuped.

Erica shifted back, unconcerned with her nudity. She eyed Darcy for a moment. “Did you hit your head?”

“Probably,” Darcy admitted. “But you have to admit there’s a certain sense of irony here.” She giggled at the exasperated look Lydia gave her.

“Uh huh, sure,” Erica said. “How ‘bout you heal whatever needs healing, and then help Isaac.”

Isaac shifted as well, lying flat on his back. He seemed entirely unconcerned with the dead chimera inches away. Darcy winced at the burns on his chest.

Stiles peered down at him. "I think the chimera singed your eyebrows off." Erica cackled at Isaac’s responding growl. Darcy moved to start drawing the necessary healing runes on whatever unmarked skin was left on Isaac’s upper body, smiling at Isaac’s grateful sigh.


Isaac blearily accepted the pink crop top- Laura’s, by the looks of it- and black sweatpants. Erica happily pulled an XXL sweater over her head and declined pants. She went to stand with her aunt, who was visibly panicking.

"I'll call Maya and tell her to come pick you up," Erica said soothingly, patting Sophia reassuringly on the arm. "We'll take care of the clean up." Erica looked around the ruined garage. A large table groaned, swayed, and collapsed in pieces. Sophia covered her eyes with one hand. "And the cover story."

"Possessed microwave?" Stiles suggested. He poked at the destroyed microwave from the faculty lounge.

"Spontaneous combustion?" Darcy warily stepped around a still-burning piece of drywall that had crumbled to the floor.

"Portal to hell?" Jackson said, eyeing the Fae gate.
"That's too close to the truth, we can't use it," Darcy told him.

Maya arrived seconds before Peter and Chris. She surveyed the damage, sent Darcy an impressed nod, and led her girlfriend out of the small war zone. She peeled out of the parking lot like it had done something to offend her.

Peter and Chris stood over the chimera and stared in stunned disbelief.

"A chimera," Peter said with deliberate calm. He pinched the bridge of his nose between two fingers and closed his eyes. "An honest-to-gods chimera, stomping around in the high school shop class and trying to fry my child alive." Darcy looked up at him from across the room, startled.

"We really have to stop pissing off so many people," Chris sighed. He glanced around the room. "It's going to take most of us to transport and bury this thing far enough that nobody will find it."

"Shouldn't we burn it?" Erica asked. "It'd be a fitting end and all; plus it would prevent some poor, unsuspecting dumbass from digging it up one day."

"We'd have to take it out of town," Derek said. "The police might want to know who's setting fires in the preserve if we tried to do it here."

Darcy hovered at the edges, but between Chris and the six werewolves, her help wasn't needed. Lydia grabbed Stiles by the front of his shirt and dragged him to her car when he lingered at the edges, too. "We're going to do some research on Banshees," she told Darcy. Stiles looked nervous and offered a short protest about his Jeep, which was parked haphazardly in the lot with the front doors still hanging open. Lydia snatched the keys from his hand and threw them at Darcy.

"They'll need the space in the Range Rover, anyway," Darcy said with a shrug. Boyd, wrestling with one of the chimera's huge paws as they lifted it into Chris's car, nodded distractedly at Darcy when she pointed to Andrew's keys. "I can take your Jeep to the Hale house," she told Stiles. "Lydia can drop you off later to pick it up."

"It may be a while," Lydia said sweetly. "I need to practice."

Dread crossed Stiles's face. Darcy sympathized - she'd helped Lydia last week by giving the banshee a target to direct her lethal scream at. Darcy's ears bled for hours, even with her shields.

"It's getting dark," Stiles protested weakly.

"That's exactly why we're going," Lydia told him sternly. "I need to perfect my aim. You said you'd help me."

"It was nice knowing you," Stiles told Darcy mournfully. Darcy laughed at him. Lydia made an annoyed noise and hauled him out the open garage door.

The others were still trying to cram the chimera into the back of Chris's SUV. Darcy waved at Peter, mouthing 'home,' and climbed into Stiles's ancient blue Jeep. She leaned across the console and closed the passenger side door before cranking the car.

"Jesus, Stiles," she mumbled when the engine sputtered aggressively before finally turning over. She'd take a look under the hood when she got home. Darcy scooted the seat up, straining to reach the pedals. She squinted out the windshield and reached over to turn the headlights on; night was falling fast.

Darcy pulled out of the lot, driving slowly and carefully. She had a feeling the Jeep would dissolve
into rusted parts and chipped blue paint if pushed too hard.

She made it halfway home before the Jeep coughed and died.

Groaning, Darcy cautiously drifted to the shoulder and put the Jeep in park. She stared at the thick smoke drifting from underneath the hood. "Typical." Darcy turned the engine off and sighed, rubbing her eyes. "I'm too tired for this shit," she muttered, swinging the door open and hopping out.

Headlights pierced through the dusk. A car approached from behind; Darcy lifted a hand to shield her eyes from the glare. She heard their car door open, saw a tall shadow walking towards her. Darcy reached for her spark, wary.

"Darcy?" The man stopped beside the Jeep, squinting down at her.

"Blake," Darcy said with relief.

The hunter looked between her and the Jeep with obvious confusion. Darcy could now make out the police car behind him. "Why are you in the Stilinski kid's Jeep?" He asked. Darcy suddenly remembered that Stiles's father, the Beacon Hill's Sheriff, was technically Blake's boss.

"Oh! Um, well, there was an incident at the school, and then Stiles was unwillingly conscripted to help Lydia with her research," Darcy explained. "I told him I'd take the Jeep home, but- well." She waved a hand at the smoke trailing up to the faintly visible stars.

"You shouldn't be out here alone," Blake told her. He shifted on his feet and glanced around the dark, empty road with a frown. "It's not safe."

Darcy tried not to let her annoyance show. "Uh huh. I was just about to pop the hood to see what's wrong. It shouldn't take long."

"I'll stay with you until you're finished," Blake told her. He followed her to the front of the car and stayed just barely in the corner of her vision. Darcy tried not to let it distract her, though she had to stop herself from fidgeting uncomfortably. She eyed the shadows in the preserve warily. Something didn't feel right.

When she had the hood up and the smoke cleared enough to see, Darcy studied the engine closely to find the source of the problem. Something caught her eye. She frowned. "What the hell?"

"The radiator's cut," she murmured, leaning in to see better. She studied the long, thin slice down the hose. Unease trickled down the back of her neck. "Deliberately, by the looks of it. Who would-" There was a quick movement behind her, followed by a sharp pain in her head, and then nothing at all.

~*~

Darcy woke when the car veered onto a gravel road. She blinked a couple times, trying to clear her vision before realizing she was locked in the small, dark trunk of a car. Darcy then realized she was gagged and bound- she clamped down hard on the initial surge of panic, counting her breaths until she was calm enough to think again.

Her hands were bound by what felt like a set of thick, metal handcuffs. They rubbed painfully against the sensitive skin of her wrists. She felt blood dripping down through her hair, found the
source to be a throbbing wound on the back of her head.

It was hard to focus. Darcy remembered stopping the Jeep, headlights shining too brightly in her eyes, and… Deputy Blake.

Deputy William Blake, whom she’d been on hunts with, had trusted to watch her back more than once. Blake, who had hit her over the head hard enough to knock her unconscious. Who evidently gagged and bound her and locked her in the trunk of his police car.

Blake, who supposedly had connections to the Stane family.

Darcy swallowed back her fear.

The gag rubbed at the corners of her mouth, tied so tight she’d never get out of it without the use of her hands. Darcy had a brief moment to wonder why Blake had bothered to cuff her- knowing the extent of Chris’s training- before her fingers trailed over the deep inscriptions on the metal cuffs.

She whimpered. Her spark was unreachable, blocked by the runes engraved into the handcuffs. Tears burned at the back of her eyes. Darcy blinked them away, trembling uncontrollably.

The car slowed, then stopped. Darcy yanked uselessly at the cuffs, terrified of what would be waiting for her outside the car. Her breaths came faster and faster. She looked wildly around the trunk, praying for something to pick the locks on the handcuffs. Nothing.

Darcy froze when the front door opened and then slammed shut. Low voices drifted through the trunk. She strained to hear, but could only catch bits and pieces of the conversation. More importantly, she could only identify Blake’s voice in the mix.

“-long enough.”

“-complications…”

“What kind-”

“Not Stilinski’s-”

“-the other one?!” A number of approving and impressed sounds followed. Darcy felt sick. They-Blake, probably- must have sabotaged Stiles’s Jeep in order to get him alone. Instead, Blake found Darcy, alone and vulnerable.

The lock on the trunk clicked and it swung open. Darcy flinched back from the light as much as the crowd of hunters standing around the back of the car. Her eyes darted from face to face. She recognized only Blake, who stared down at her with an unreadable expression.

He pulled her out of the car with a bruising grip on her arms. Darcy didn’t fight him. Wait, Chris’s voice whispered in her head. Wait for the right moment to make your move. This wasn’t it, Darcy knew. Too many hunters leering at her, no escape route, and no spark to defend herself with.

She kept her head high as Blake dragged her past the jeering hunters. Her head wound throbbed painfully, and her heart beat so loud she could barely hear anything else. Darcy studied the building that Blake pulled her towards.

It was derelict and abandoned, adorned with graffiti and broken windows. Worn brick and faded paint, creeping vines and collapsing infrastructure marked the months and years this place remained untouched.
No one would find her out here, Darcy realized with dismay. Blake wasn't stupid enough to stay within Beacon county, not with her family able to track scents and heartbeats. Blake shoved her through the crumbling door frame and into the dark building.

Darcy scanned the empty room, grateful for the light leaking in from the numerous holes in the roof. Thick, rusted pipes stretched up one wall. Blake shoved her roughly to her knees. He tugged another set of handcuffs out of his belt and snapped one end shut on her wrist. The other end went around a pipe, high enough that it was a strain on her shoulders.

He stepped back. Darcy stared accusingly at him. Blake glanced over his shoulder before speaking lowly. "I'm sorry. It wasn't supposed to be you in the Jeep."

"That's not any better," Darcy tried to say around the gag.

Blake paced anxiously across the room, throwing concerned glances at the group of hunters milling around outside. "But this will make him happier," he said quietly to himself. Darcy furrowed her brow, confused. Blake noticed. "I'm just following orders," he told Darcy. "Victoria Stane is my second cousin. I owe my loyalty to them first." Darcy could only stare in shock.

Blake rubbed at his mouth. "You... You shouldn't exist," he said. "What you are is not natural. Like that day at the diner? You almost pulled the whole building down. Or what you did to the Alpha Pack?" He shook his head. "You're a danger to all of us."

*You weren't saying that when I saved your life,* Darcy thought viciously. She regretted doing so, now. The deputy looked away.

"You've proved your loyalty after all, William." The voice came from the back of the building. Darcy craned her neck to see who was approaching. She could only hear slow, deliberate footsteps. Blake straightened, coming to attention. "I wasn't sure you would go through with it."

"Of course, sir."

"No regrets?" He was closer now.

"None, sir." Blake carefully did not look in her direction. Darcy seethed.

"Excellent." Gerard Argent stepped out from the shadows.

Darcy's blood froze. Chris and Kate's father- Allison's grandfather. Missing for years. The loose end, not heard from since the night Kate died.

Gerard studied Darcy dispassionately, taking in her bloody, matted hair and clothes, torn and charred from the fight with the chimera. "Remove the gag, William. Miss Lewis and I have a lot to talk about."

Darcy didn't take her eyes off of the hunter, even when Blake's knife nicked her cheek. Her jaw ached in relief when the gag dropped to the ground.

She thought about Gerard's careful approach from the back of the house- an intentional dramatic entrance. The urge to laugh made her feel a little braver. "We'd hoped you were dead," Darcy rasped. She cleared her throat, mouth dry.

"I'm sure you did." Gerard smiled. It didn't reach his eyes. "I wasn't going to let you off that easy, though." Darcy braced herself. "Not after what you did to my daughter."
"She tried to burn the Hales alive."

"Kate was doing her job," Gerard said.

"You have a Code."

"Yes. 'We hunt those who hunt us,'" Gerard quoted. "The Argent Family Code. Look where it's gotten us. My daughter, murdered by a spark." Darcy flinched. "My son, in bed with one of the monsters he should be hunting. And me, an outcast from my home."

Darcy glanced pointedly outside, then at Blake. "Looks like you landed on your feet."

"The Argents and the Stanes remain allies, despite my son's best attempts to sabotage it. Victoria returned to New York, but she stays in touch. Allison spends a lot of time with her mother, did you know?" Gerard strolled around the room, studying the dirty walls. "You see, Argents train our sons to be soldiers. Our daughters, though, they're the leaders of this family. And Allison shows promise."

Uncertainty kept Darcy quiet. Allison talked to her mother a lot, sure, but she'd also fought with the Hales against the Alpha Pack. She'd gone to the Fae realm to save a banshee, had willingly sent other hunters into a trap. Hell, she was dating a werewolf. Allison wouldn't turn on them. Would she?

"Her graduation ceremony is approaching, and then Allison will take her place at the head of the family," Gerard told her. Darcy didn't like the satisfied gleam in his eyes.

"Graduation ceremony?" Darcy asked reluctantly. She didn't really want to know, but she probably needed to know.

"When she kills Scott McCall, of course."

Darcy blinked in surprise. "When she does what?"

"Every hunter in our family has to earn their place. And Scott is a perfect choice. Allison will finish what I started."

"What you started?" Darcy repeated slowly. She wondered if the head wound was getting to her.

"You never found the Alpha that bit Scott, did you?"

Understanding dawned. "You did that?"

"Well, the feral Alpha I set loose did. It was meant to kill him, and others, to destabilize the Hale's hold on the territory. Until William killed it prematurely." Gerard's voice was displeased.

"I didn't know," Blake murmured in apology.

"That is true," Gerard conceded. "And you were quick to pledge your loyalty to me that night."

If Gerard's goal was to threaten the Hale's control of Beacon Hills, then- "The kanima," Darcy guessed. Jackson could only recall a male voice giving orders, but...

"Was not intentional," Gerard admitted. "We'll call it a happy accident."

"But how..."

"Julia Baccari made it quite easy, I'll admit. I'd heard the rumors of an Alpha Pack, but finding their
Druid at the Beacon Hills nemeton was a gift I couldn't pass up."

"You killed her to draw the Alphas to Beacon Hills."

"You think they would have risked going up against the Hales otherwise? I made sure they were well within their rights to challenge Talia." He cocked his head in thought. "The kanima was easily spotted, and even easier to control."

"We got him back," Darcy reminded him. "He's cured."

"Cured?" Gerard spat. "He's still a monster in human skin, parading around town with the other werewolves like they have nothing to fear."

"Feral, kanima, hunters, Alpha Pack... Sounds to me like all your plans failed," Darcy said.

Gerard smiled down at her. "Oh, but you're not getting out of this one." He handed Blake an object from his pocket and stepped sideways on Darcy's knee until she screamed. "Drug her."

She barely felt the needle slide into her skin. Gerard crouched beside her to speak quietly in her ear as the drug took effect. Darcy's head swam, suddenly too heavy to lift. "I've been pulling the strings to the Hales' downfall for years." He watched her eyes lose focus. "But I've been planning your death for longer."

Darcy lost consciousness.

She woke hours later in a drug-induced haze. Darcy felt the cold metal bite of the cuffs first, then the chill of the bare concrete room. She cracked her eyes open and stared at the blurry figures in the corner. Gerard stood with his back to her, speaking to a tall, broad shouldered man with mean eyes.

Darcy jerked against the ropes binding her to a sturdy metal chair. "Stop," Blake said from behind her, too low for anyone else to hear. Darcy stopped moving. "These guys are worse than-"

"You?" Darcy growled lowly.

Blake was quiet for a long moment. "Just don't draw attention to yourself," he finally said, and took a step back.

One of the two doors to the room opened, revealing a short man with a wiry build and friendly face. Two more men followed him into the room, armed to the teeth.

"Mr. McAllister," Gerard said, offering his hand. The other man shook it briefly.

"Argent. Been a while."

"Yes, I've been busy."

McAllister eyed Darcy. "I can see that." Darcy shied back from the interest on his face.

"A gift," Gerard told him. "I understand your family has a special procedure for hunting magic users. A... unique approach."

An inhuman scream echoed from deep into the building. McAllister smiled slowly at Gerard. Darcy shivered.

"Let's talk business." He clapped Gerard on the back.
"I need hunters..." Gerard's voice cut out when the door slammed behind the two men. Darcy, Blake, and two of McAllister's hunters remained in the room.

Another scream, this one louder. Darcy took a shaky breath. "Chris is going to rip you apart," she told Blake. He inhaled sharply.

One of the hunters scowled at her. "No talking."

"And that's only if Peter doesn't get to you first."

"I said no talking!" The hunter stepped forward and cracked his pistol across her face. The chair tilted dangerously, only kept upright by Blake's hand. Darcy breathed through the pain. Blood dripped onto her shirt, leaking steadily from her nose. Her cheek burned, scraped raw by the metal. Satisfied, the hunter stepped back.

"I hope you get everything you deserve," she said, so quietly she wasn't sure Blake heard until he stepped back from her chair. They sat in silence, interrupted only by the other-worldly screams.

Some time later, Gerard and McAllister stepped back into the room. McAllister looked Darcy over and shook Gerard's hand again. "I'll be in touch."

"Excellent. And I'll send someone by soon, to get a feel for your operation here. I have a feeling we're going to do a lot of business together." Gerard turned to leave. He smiled at the bruise on Darcy's face and stepped around her. "Let's go, William." Darcy turned her head to watch them go as best she could. Blake stared at her profile for a long few seconds before following Gerard out the door.

Darcy swallowed, left in the room with three hunters with violence in their blood. She'd never felt so cold in her life. She felt empty without her spark. Her otter tattoo was still and lifeless against the back of her neck- likely headed towards her head wound when the cuffs bound her magic.

"Let's get started. Bring her." McAllister left the door open while the two men cut the ropes from her, not being particularly careful with their blades. Darcy bit the inside of her mouth to keep silent. The men grabbed her by the arms and marched after their boss. She could already feel the bruises forming.

The hallway was long and dark, complete with stereotypical flickering lights. That didn't make her feel any better.

They turned a corner, and Darcy's eyes widened in horror. Large, thick glass windows offered views of various supernatural creatures caged within the rooms. Darcy saw werewolves, selkies, Fae, and others she wasn't able to identify as the men dragged her past them.

The hunters stopped at an empty room, this one long and narrow. Chains hung down from the wall, bolted securely into place. The hunters snapped the thick, heavy cuffs over the ones she already wore. These were also engraved with runes, designed to keep magic at bay. She sat flat against the wall, hands pulled awkwardly over her head by the heavy metal.

"Druid designed, witch made," one of the hunters grunted when she squinted at the runes. "You ain't getting out of these anytime soon." They pulled her boots off then, and the handful of pins in her hair. Darcy kicked out when the other hunter started patting her down, gasping when his boot slammed into her stomach a second later.

She curled in on herself once they were finished checking her for weapons, tucking her knees up tight to her chest. Her knee twinged painfully, as did her stomach. Darcy felt a part of her slip away,
detaching from the events of the past 24 hours and from what was likely worse still to come.

"When can we start?" The hunter who patted her down asked.

McAllister pursed his lips in thought. "Later. We'll see if she lasts the night."

Darcy watched them go. The door slammed closed and she gingerly rested her head back against the wall. The last few hours—days? she couldn't tell how much time had passed—caught up to her and Darcy's chin quivered. She caught sight of a camera, no, two, in the room and took a deep breath. She would not let those bastards see her cry.

Darcy wondered how long ago the Hales realized she was missing. The chimera would have taken hours to completely dispose of, and who knows how long Lydia and Stiles worked for. Blake could have taken her halfway out of the state before anyone realized what happened.

But no—the McAllisters were maybe a day's drive out of Beacon Hills. Maya and Braeden thoroughly wrecked the McAllister's bar a while back, and Maya made it home soon after. Darcy brightened. Maya would think to look at the McAllisters. She would eventually remember their interest in Darcy years ago, and she would come. They would come.

Darcy just had to stay alive until then. Or, she thought as she studied the chains, she'd have to break out and meet them halfway.

She scanned the room, frowning at the dark stains on the floor by the wall across from her. Deciding not to dwell on it, she looked for any nails, anything that she could use to pick the lock on the cuffs. No dice. Frustrated, she tugged at the chains. They held fast, not budging from the concrete wall. She grimaced at the shower of rust. Then she frowned and peered closer at the chains. Darcy scraped a nail over the metal. The rust flaked off easily, drifting to the ground by her socked feet.

Darcy leaned in for a closer inspection, then jerked her head up to look around the room with urgency building in her veins. Splatters of something dark decorated the walls. Darcy realized the dark stains were actually pools of dried blood, a sickening patchwork across the concrete floor.

The same creature from before screamed, only this time it was much, much closer. Darcy squinted across the room, heart racing, and saw the track marks for a sliding partition across the room. She closed her eyes and tried not to throw up.

Something was locked behind that metal partition. Something that, by the looks of the room, killed many people before her. She jumped when that something slammed against the partition and screamed again.

The hairs on her arms prickled, standing on end. Darcy watched the partition with a sick dread. She felt a terrible certainty about what paced behind that door.

Darcy flinched when there was an electronic crackle, and then a voice from over an intercom she hadn't noticed. "As you can tell, you won't be the first to die this way," McAllister said. Darcy’s fists clenched. She glared at the tinted window, where McAllister and his little band of psychos likely stood, eagerly waiting her brutally violent death.

She stood painfully, breathing hard. Darcy would face the demon on her feet, for all the good it would do her. A matter of pride, she told herself. It was all she had left right now. That detached part of her watched quietly, empty of all emotion.

Darcy looked back to where Death lurked. And held her breath when the door opened.
The Ak'ma surged forward across the room, triumph gleaming in its lidless, too-large eyes. Darcy braced herself for unimaginable pain, for the bite designed to devour the spark from her bones, her soul.

It closed the distance. Ten feet away, six feet. And then, when it's outstretched talons were less than a foot from Darcy's face, the Ak'ma slammed to halt. Iron chains held it in place, burning the creature's body where they wrapped tightly around it.

The Ak'ma snatched its arm back and whirled, furious, to claw at the chains. It screamed, so loud tears sprang to Darcy's eyes and she wished she could cover her ears. The demon slowly turned back towards her, snarling. Darcy stared at its bottomless eyes, the long, slit nostrils flaring. Fangs the length and circumference of her forearm curved down from an intensely powerful jaw. Darcy watched paralytic saliva drip from a long, forked tongue that lolled out of its wide mouth.

Both spark and demon jerked in surprise at the sound of the intercom. "We caught this one last year and decided to keep him for all the magic users we came across. He puts on quite the show." The Ak'ma growled and swiped its talons over one of the speakers. Its claws slid through it like butter, leaving only one speaker behind Darcy's head. McAllister's voice was distorted now, thin and reedy.

Darcy watched the Ak'ma pace angrily in front of her, lunging every few minutes as if testing its boundaries. It walked on four legs, moving with feline grace and reaching a little over six feet high. The demon's arms were almost as long as its height, tipped with razor-sharp talons the length of Darcy's hand. Its body was lean and muscled, built for long-distance running with flexible shoulders and powerful hind legs. The Ak'ma had leathery skin that looked to be changing color in the weak light. It shifted from the pale gray-white of the concrete to a dirty brown, then to a deep gray and back again.

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Darcy's fingers shook in their tight hold on her own chain when clarity hit. She watched the Ak'ma change the color of its skin with each pass over a different background. Gray-white on the concrete, dirty brown with the dried blood, deep gray for the iron chains around its body. No wonder sparks never saw these demons coming.

No one had ever seen this and lived to tell of it, she knew. The stains on the ground proved that beyond a shadow of a doubt.

"We haven't caught many sparks," McAllister continued. Demon and spark snarled in response. "One or two, some that just wouldn't admit it. But that thing will eat just about anyone, including witches and druids." Darcy flinched back at its next lunge. "It's not the same, of course. They want the real thing. The others just make them that much hungrier."

The Ak'ma spun away again. It clawed at the wall encasing its chains, shrieking in rage when the iron burned its hands. "He'll break free eventually. He always does." The intercom cut out with McAllister's chuckling.

Darcy remained standing. If she sat down, she'd be within reach of those long, wicked talons. So she stood, tucking herself tightly against the wall while the Ak'ma paced. It growled at her occasionally in frustration, a deep, rumbling sound she could feel all the way to her bones.

Hours passed. Darcy fell asleep standing up, a mistake she made only once. The Ak'ma sliced her thigh open with the very tip of its talon when her knees buckled, bringing her legs within its reach. The wound burned so badly Darcy couldn't stop her scream of pain as she scrambled back against the wall, scraping her arms in her desperation.

She lost track of time, lost track of anything but the pace-lunge-pace-lunge of the Ak'ma. The iron
chains creaked across the room, weakening with each violent surge. Her leg, cut from midway up the back of her left thigh and around to the top of her knee, showed no signs of clotting. With any luck, she would bleed out before the demon ever got a hold of her, Darcy thought hysterically, watching the blood trickle down her leg.

The Ak'ma showed no signs of tiring, despite the fact that it had to have been at least a full day of this pattern. The intercom buzzed again. Darcy stared blearily at the window, exhausted and feverish. She shivered and could only close her eyes when the demon lunged for her again.

Darcy opened them again right as the window tint cleared, revealing Allison Argent on the other side.

Shock crossed Allison's face for a split second before she covered it with neutral indifference. McAllister stepped into the room to stand beside her, gesturing proudly. Allison nodded along to whatever he was saying, observing the Ak'ma with clinical interest. She met Darcy's eyes and said something to McAllister that made him blink in surprise. Allison turned to him, brows raised, when he didn't immediately comply. McAllister hesitated only a second more.

Soon after, the iron chains holding the Ak'ma reeled in. The demon growled as it slid backwards, leaving deep gouges in the concrete. Darcy blinked back tears of relief when the partition closed, leaving her alone.

She didn't sit, in case it was a trick. Somehow it was harder to stay upright now, though, and she swayed. Her body protested the brutal treatment from the past... two days? Darcy couldn't tell how long ago she'd stood in Sophia's garage.

The door to her left opened. Allison stepped through it with a hard expression. She closed the door behind her and looked away from Darcy to study the room. Darcy saw McAllister watching from the window with his arms crossed.

"Nice place," Allison said casually, toeing a bloodstain on the floor.

Darcy laughed, then winced at the rough sound. Her throat ached. "I wouldn't recommend it, personally." She slid to the ground, groaning quietly. McAllister wouldn't be stupid enough to kill an Argent. Darcy was safe from the Ak'ma- for now.

Her arms stayed twisted above her head and she could feel the metal cutting into her wrists. A thin line of blood trickled down her arm. Allison watched its progress.

"So," Darcy coughed. "Come here often?" She kept her eyes steady on Allison's face.

"My first time," Allison told her. Her eyes darted up to the cameras, then over to McAllister. She missed nothing.

"What'd you say to get in here?" Darcy asked, tipping her head at the hunter.

"I told him we had unfinished business," Allison said softly. Darcy couldn't read her expression.

"Do we?" Darcy asked.

Allison shrugged, strolling around the room. It reminded Darcy of Gerard so much that she had to look away. "You kind of took over my life, you know."

"Your aunt kind of murdered my mother," Darcy shot back. "And then tried to kill the Hales. I didn't exactly ask for any of that."
"You killed Kate in return," Allison countered. "Which started my family's separation."

"Gerard ran away after Kate died to lurk in the shadows, and your dad remembered he didn't want to be married to a Stane because they're all fucking psychotic!" Darcy yelled. She didn't know what Allison's game was, which side of the field the other girl was playing. But Darcy wasn't exactly in the mood to reminisce.

"My parents had different upbringings, that much is true," Allison admitted. "But my dad was so focused on you that he forgot all about his own daughter."

"I didn't ask for that, either," Darcy said.

"I know." Allison approached, sliding a knife out of her pocket. Darcy watched, tense. Allison crouched in front of her and let her hair cover their faces from McAllister and the cameras. Something dropped into Darcy's lap. She froze.

Allison touched the knife to Darcy's throat. "I've been trying to find an in with Gerard through my mother to figure out what he's up to," she said so quietly Darcy had to strain to hear her. "I swear, I had no idea he was planning this. But I'm going to help you get out. Look scared, okay?" She tilted her head to the side so McAllister could glimpse Darcy's expression. "My lock picks are in your lap. Don't let anyone see them. I'm leaving in thirty minutes to meet with Gerard about alliance with the McAllisters. They'll watch me go, so I can only give you a short window to leave through the east doors, where they brought you in. Get to the highway. These guys will trail me out of town, but I'll call Dad and the Hales as soon as I get to my car. Can you stay safe until then?"

"Yes," Darcy breathed. She had a set of professional lock picks and a ten minute window of time. Darcy could do anything.

Allison stood gracefully and made her way out the door. She spoke to McAllister briefly, shot Darcy a look through the window, and left. Darcy saw McAllister reach for a control board and hurriedly stood back up, pressing her thighs tightly together to keep the lock picks hidden between them. She pressed against the wall just in time as the Ak'ma surged through the half-open partition.

It hit the end of the chains again, the iron creaking dangerously. Darcy risked a glance at the window- left clear by McAllister, to her relief, so she could see them empty room. She eyed the Ak'ma, back to clawing at the chains in the wall, and quickly sat. She leaned down as far as she could, arms screaming in pain, and caught the lock picks between her teeth.

The Ak'ma whirled. Darcy scrambled back to her feet, barely making it back against the wall before it lunged again. Heart racing, hands shaking, she reached down as far as she could with the thick cuffs. Darcy stood on her toes, head tilted up, and managed to brush her fingers against the case. She stretched until she thought she'd die and reached again. Her fingertips snagged the case, curling the picks into her palms.

Weak with relief, Darcy ripped the velcro to open the case. She idly wondered why the world's loudest material was used for a set of lock picks as her fingers worked on the cuffs chaining her to the wall. The first one fell free with a clank. The Ak'ma screeched at her, yanking against its own.

Darcy's hands worked fast even as she watched the wall across the room. The chains wouldn't hold it back much longer. She worked steadily on the second set of cuffs, the ones holding back her spark. Even with one hand free, she could create a shield.

The cuff sprang open and she gasped as her spark surged to the surface. Darcy was forever grateful for the long life of Sharpie ink; runes from the fight with the chimera remained intact underneath her
sleeve. The shield hummed to life as the Ak'ma lunged again.

To Darcy's shock, its talons passed through the shield as if it weren't there, though it still crackled dangerously between them.

"They are the antithesis of sparks," McAllister said from the doorway. He looked amused, like her escape attempt was nothing but a joke to him. "Your magic won't work on them." Darcy panicked for a second, and then remembered she was halfway free.

"No, but it'll work on you," Darcy said, and used her shield to shove the hunter into the Ak'ma's reach. She felt the blood drain from her face at the man's cut-off scream, the sickening, wet crunches as the Ak’ma tore him apart. Darcy very deliberately did not look.

The third cuff fell. She scrambled out of the room, glancing back in time to see the Ak’ma notice her escape. It screamed in fury and leaped.

The iron chains broke.

Darcy slammed the door closed and skidded down the hallway, panting. She heard the thick wooden door splinter apart behind her. Darcy ran faster. The fourth and final cuff dangled from her wrist, the runes engraved on it only slightly hindering her progress.

She turned a sharp corner and sprinted down the same hallway from earlier. The rooms and cages were empty now. Darcy tried not to think about why.

A shout rang out behind her, followed by a spray of bullets. Darcy kept running, ducking and covering her head, but no bullets hit her. Instead, the demon on her heels roared and began tearing apart the hunters that stood between it and its prey.

Darcy grasped the lock pick tightly in her right hand and worked as she ran. She rounded another corner, dropping the cuffs, and came face-to-face with the hunters from earlier. Darcy didn’t stop running. She dropped to her knees and slid between them on the concrete floor. It tore her legs to shreds, but also got her past both of their outstretched arms. The Ak’ma reached them seconds later.

Darcy ran towards the closed doors ahead. Her wound ached, her head throbbed, and Darcy wanted scream in frustration when she saw the thick metal chains binding the doors shut. She slammed into the doors, holding back a desperate sob.

The Ak’ma snarled. The floor shook with its approach.

Darcy closed her eyes and fervently wished she could remember how it felt to be safe. Her fingers tightened into fists. Darcy’s breath came in great, heaving gasps. She had a flash of a thought- no, a memory- of pressing darkness and a tug low in her belly.

Something flickered deep inside Darcy, and the world disappeared.

The tug in her belly she’d recalled was a firm yank this time, but the darkness was no less intense. Darcy felt it pressing in, in, in, until she thought she would scream or pass out- and then it lifted.

Darcy staggered a few weak steps and collapsed, barely catching herself before her face hit the ground. She stared at the grass between her fingers in confusion. The air was light. Birds chirped happily above her. The sun was warm on her skin.

She pushed herself up, arms protesting more strain, and looked around. Enormous trees stretched so tall above Darcy that it made her dizzy. She knew this place. Peter took her camping in the Redwood
Forest last month, to celebrate her graduation. He shifted back and forth from his wolf and they’d explored the forest for three whole days.

Darcy gasped in relief as tears finally flooded over. She looked wildly around again, but couldn’t detect anything lurking in the shadows. Not that she’d know, Darcy reminded herself bitterly. She gave herself a moment to cry, to be swamped with emotions over the whole ordeal, and then used a nearby tree trunk to climb back to her feet.

She wasn’t safe yet.

Darcy found a trail- wide and well-marked all throughout the forest- and limped along. She only had to walk a mile or so before two hikers stumbled across her, a young couple that stopped and stared at her in shock.

“Please help me,” Darcy said evenly. She had a good idea of what she looked like. Matted, bloodied hair. Deep scrapes and bruises all over, including her face. Cuts around her wrists. The deep wound on her thigh, still seeping blood. Barefoot, her clothes ripped.

The woman approached slowly, carefully, as if Darcy were an injured animal. “Honey, what happened?” She reached Darcy and hesitated. “Is it okay if I touch you? I want to take a look at some of your wounds.”

Darcy nodded. The woman helped her sit, waving her husband over. “Give her your jacket, and call the police.” He nodded, offering Darcy a reassuring smile as he handed his jacket over. She took it, grateful for the small kindnesses of strangers. It swallowed her form, but she shrank into its warmth. Darcy shivered despite the warmth of the day.

“I’m a school nurse,” the woman said quietly. Dreadlocks fell over her shoulders. Her eyes were dark and honest. “So I’m somewhat familiar with bumps and bruises.” Darcy saw poorly disguised horror on the woman’s face as she assessed Darcy’s body. She noticed the cut on Darcy's leg and immediately shed her own jacket to apply pressure to the wound.

Her husband spoke softly a few feet away, glancing back at them every so often. A brown-skinned hand entered her field of vision and Darcy flinched. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you,” the woman said softly. “I’m just going to look at your cheek, okay?” Darcy nodded. “My name is Jordan,” she continued as she pressed gently around the bruise. “Can you tell me your name?”

“Darcy Lewis,” Darcy rasped. “I- They hit me a couple times, but I don’t have any memory loss or anything.”

“You remember what happened?”

“Yes.”

Jordan didn’t push when Darcy stopped speaking, just continued her gentle examination. “You’re going to need stitches in your leg, so keep that pressure on,” she said eventually. “The rest seems more superficial.”

Jordan’s husband approached them, crouching down to peer into Darcy’s eyes. “Is there someone we can call for you?”

“Yes,” Darcy croaked. She reached for his offered phone. “Thank you.” Darcy dialed the number with shaking hands. She dropped the phone once; Jordan picked it up and handed it back to her without a word.
The line rang twice before he answered. “Hale,” Peter said tightly.

“Peter,” Darcy sobbed.

“Darcy?” She heard shouting in the background, cut off by Talia’s distinctive growl. “Darcy, where are you? Are you safe?”

“Yes, I got away, I’m safe.” She closed her eyes. “Remember the Redwood trails?”

“The Redwood- why are you in the Redwood Forest?” Despite his obvious confusion, Darcy could hear car doors slamming, the engine of Peter’s Jaguar growling in the background.

“I don’t know. I’ll explain later. Just please come get me,” she begged.

“I’m coming, Darce. We’re on our way. Where are you, exactly?”

“I don’t…” she lifted her head and met Jordan’s gaze. “Where are we?”

Jordan’s husband reached for the phone. “I’ll tell him.” Darcy returned it to him wordlessly and leaned into Jordan’s arm around her shoulders. She drifted off, only to jerk awake in panic when the police and EMTs arrived. Jordan shushed her gently and stayed by her side during the questioning and examination.

“Gerard Argent,” Darcy told them when asked. “He kidnapped me from Beacon Hills and…” she stopped talking, afraid to accidentally let something slip. Jordan held her closer. The EMTs expressed their concern over the steady flow of blood from the cut, making noises about taking her to the hospital. Darcy kept everyone away from her head, knowing she could heal the wounds with a rune later, and informed them that she would go to the hospital when her family arrived. The cut on her leg would likely scar, she knew. Her magic shied away from the wound, curling in on itself after the first curious touch.

Peter burst through the trees soon after they finished the stitches. Darcy shot out of her seat and stumbled towards him, crying again. He wrapped his arms around her and didn’t let go, even when the police tried asking more questions. The rest of her family arrived seconds after, crowding around her.

Darcy tucked herself into Peter’s tight grip and didn’t think for a long time.

Chapter End Notes

"Darcy can teleport?!” Yes she can just don't ask me how it works. I'm still figuring that part out. So far it's: not something she can control (currently), only short distances, and only to places she has a connection with.

"Gerard escaped again?” Yeah, sucks he didn't die painfully, but he'll be back (probably in later parts) (maybe to die painfully).

Hope you liked reading it as much as I liked writing it!
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Posting early because you guys have been so nice with your comments :)

This chapter is just Spark magic. So much magic. Fair warning, it starts out a little dark. Darcy’s got some PTSD, obviously.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I know it hurts
It’s hard to breathe sometimes
These nights are long
You’ve lost the will to fight
Is anybody out there?
Tell me it’ll all be alright

You are not alone
I’ve been here the whole time singing you a song
I will carry you, I will carry you

- Carry You, Ruelle ft. Fleurie

~*~

Darcy curled up under her wards and stared at nothing. Fading light from the window cast long shadows on the walls of her bedroom. She watched them lengthen until the room fell to darkness.

A lamp clicked on beside her bed, chasing the shadows back. Peter stood outside the wards, frowning in concern. He glanced at the pile of wolves on her bed. Isaac sighed and rested his chin on Darcy’s ankles. Boyd lifted his dark head, blinking at Peter; Erica cracked an eye open from her position at Darcy’s back.

Peter set a plate on the nightstand, swapping it out with the untouched plate from lunch. “Darcy,” he murmured. He rested a hand on the shield set firmly in place around her bed, not backing away even when the raw magic set his hair on end and teeth on edge. “You have to eat.”

She turned away from him and curled her fingers into Erica’s thick fur.

“It’s been a month,” he reminded her gently. “You can’t survive on a few mouthfuls of food every
Darcy couldn’t bring herself to care. Nothing felt real anymore. Food turned to ash in her mouth. She flinched at every sudden movement, couldn’t bear to feel confined. Darcy couldn’t remember how it felt to be *awake*, present in the current moment instead of walking around in a haze.

Peter sighed. She could feel his eyes burning into her back. He’d hardly left her side since the kidnapping. The other ‘wolves took turns staying with her at night, her own personal guard. Most of them treated her like glass, as if she’d break apart at the first sign of danger. It infuriated a small part of Darcy, but that part of her was buried underneath apathy.

Her leg ached. She closed her eyes. Peter left the room a minute later. Hours passed. She didn’t sleep, just listened to her friends’ steady breathing. “It’s still out there,” she whispered to the silent room. “It knows what I look like, what my blood tastes like. It’ll come for me again.”

Boyd lifted his lip in a silent snarl, as if to say ‘*Let it try*.’ Erica growled low in her throat in agreement. Darcy shivered. She’d never let them get close enough; the Ak’ma would rip through her family in seconds.

Darcy woke when the wolves slipped from her bed and filed into the hall. She cracked an eye open to see Lydia sitting in Darcy’s plush reading chair in the early morning light, reading an ancient latin book as thick as her head. Lydia glanced up, red curls tumbling down her back.

“It’s suggested that Fae, even part-Fae, have some effect on the Ak’ma,” Lydia told her matter-of-factly. Green eyes flickered with otherworldly power. “I’d be happy to scream the house down to prove it.” Darcy huffed a laugh. Lydia turned back to her book, the barely-visible corner of her mouth curling upwards.

“Don’t you have classes?” Darcy asked roughly, flopping onto her back and rubbing her eyes. If she remembered correctly, Lydia enrolled in summer classes at the local college.

Lydia snorted. “Please. I could skip every day for the rest of the summer semester and still be top of my class.” She flipped a page over. “Besides, I’ve finished this month’s schoolwork already.” Darcy sat up and looked tiredly around the room.

“I brought you a greek yogurt parfait. It’s on your nightstand. I paid five dollars for it.” Lydia’s tone suggested that refusing would be bad for her health. Darcy reached for the yogurt, which did look appealing. “I also brought you a book.”

Darcy picked up the book on the bedside table. *Trauma and Recovery,* she read through a mouthful of yogurt and fruit. “Really, Lydia?”

Lydia shrugged. “It’s a good book. Informative, very thorough analysis of trauma. I read it this morning.”

“It’s six a.m.,” Darcy said, bewildered. Lydia looked at her as if to say, ‘*so?*’

Stiles flailed through her door just then, his blue and orange plaid catching on the doorknob. Stiles gaped down at the new hole in his shirt. Darcy rolled her eyes.

“What are you wearing?” Lydia asked, staring at the plaid shirt with distaste.

“What?” Stiles said indignantly. “What’s wrong with my shirt?”

Lydia decided not to answer. She turned back to her book, muttering something unflattering under
her breath. Stiles narrowed his eyes at her. Darcy set the empty yogurt cup back on the table, drawing his attention.

“Hey, Darce.” He tapped his fingers anxiously against his leg. Lydia cut her eyes at him, annoyed. “Feeling better?”

“Just spit it out,” Darcy sighed.

“They haven’t found him,” Stiles blurted. “Gerard or Blake. My dad is ten kinds of pissed. But, uh.. They’re a little distracted with everything else.”

Everything else—meaning the trail of burning buildings and bodies Maya left behind her on her search for Darcy. Between Maya, Chris, and Peter, the number of hunters under McAllister’s authority shrunk to single digits. The survivors went meekly into police custody. The Stane and McAllister hunters involved in Darcy’s kidnapping disappeared almost immediately, many devoured by the liberated Ak’ma before it, too, vanished.

Darcy looked at her hands. She traced the edge of her blue comforter and said nothing. “Allison says Gerard went crazy when he found out,” Stiles continued.

“He won’t trust her anymore,” Lydia warned.

“She knows,” Stiles reassured her. “Allison cut ties with Gerard and her mom. Some of the Argent hunters even followed her. Apparently, they were sick of taking orders from a maniac.”

“Gerard is responsible for nearly all of our problems the past few years,” Darcy said quietly. “He’s not going to just go away.”

“No,” Stiles admitted. “But now we actually know he’s a player in the game. We can prepare for whatever he tries next.”

“It’s not a game!” Darcy shouted. “This is about our lives. He won’t stop until we’re all dead.”

“Then we just have to get to him first,” Stiles told her, unfazed. He took a frustrated breath when she looked away, dismissing him. Stiles sat on the edge of her bed. “Darcy. You can’t just hide in your room the rest of your life. He wins if you give up.” He leaned forward, intent. “So get up. Get mad. Get out of bed, and figure out how to stop this from ever happening again.” Darcy bit her lip when it trembled dangerously.

Stiles ran his long fingers through his hair. “Do you… Do you blame me? I mean, I was supposed to be in my Jeep, it was supposed to be me-”

“Don’t be stupid,” Darcy said. “You had nothing to do with that.”

Stiles was quiet for a long moment, then hesitantly spoke. “I’ve been talking to Satomi…” He trailed off when she turned away again. “Okay,” Stiles sighed. He glanced aside, then frowned at the book in Darcy’s lap. “Hey, that’s my book.”

“I borrowed it,” Lydia said casually.

“Stole it, more like,” Stiles grumbled, but stood. “I’ll see you later.”

“I’m going to burn that shirt the next time we’re at his house,” Lydia said once the engine of Stiles’s Jeep faded. Darcy laughed despite herself.
A few days later, Darcy looked up at the sound of rapid footsteps on the stairs. Darcy’s bedroom door burst open seconds later. Erica leaped off the foot of the bed at Stiles as he bounded through the door. He yelped, barely dodging the giant she-wolf lunging for him. “Erica! I know you heard me coming, damn it!”

Erica sneezed in his hair, tail waving. Stiles slumped against the floor for a minute longer, collecting himself. “Jerk,” he muttered as she trotted out of the room. He turned to Darcy. “You. Go shower, you smell.”

Offended, Darcy glared at him. Stiles glared right back. “I’m only going because I want to,” Darcy told him imperiously. She did kind of smell.

To protest, Darcy took an extra long shower. She stepped out of the bathroom forty five minutes later, drying her hair with a towel. Scott loped past her in the hallway, shifted into a brown wolf with a permanent grin. He bumped into her amiably and continued down the stairs. Low voices drifted from the kitchen. Darcy couldn’t make out the conversation.

She wandered back into her room. Her sweatpants slid dangerously down her hips, despite Darcy rolling them several times. A gray v-neck shirt hung loosely on her frame. Darcy grimaced at her reflection.

Erica, shifted back into a human and wearing Boyd’s shirt, stepped out of Darcy’s walk-in closet with a large duffle bag in hand. Darcy frowned at her. “What is that?”

“Your bag,” Erica said. The ‘duh’ was heavily implied.

“Okay, but why?” Darcy said slowly. Erica didn’t answer, just slung the bag over her shoulder and left. Curious, annoyed, Darcy followed her downstairs and to the front door, where she handed the bag off to Stiles, waiting impatiently on the porch.

Stiles beamed at Darcy. “Road trip! No, I don’t care if you don’t want to go. Get in the car.” He pushed her insistently out the door and towards his Jeep.

“Wait, what?” Darcy protested. “Road trip? To where?”

Peter joined them, blue eyes uncharacteristically serious. “We thought it might help you to get out of Beacon Hills for a little while.”

“Trust us, Darce,” Stiles said earnestly.

“You know, the last time I went anywhere in your Jeep, it broke down and I got kidnapped,” Darcy reminded him.

“If I were smart, I’d bring along a mechanically-inclined friend,” Stiles agreed cheerfully. Darcy gave an exasperated huff.

“Fine,” she said. Peter wrapped her in a tight hug. “I can’t believe you agreed to this, you mother hen,” she teased weakly.

Peter chuckled, more out of relief than humor. “Satomi and Maya gave their stamp of approval. I was emphatically not invited along, but I won’t be far.” He pressed a kiss to her hair and released her.

She made it half a step before Erica threw her arms around Darcy. Darcy spit out a mouthful of her friend’s wild blonde hair. Boyd pulled them both into a hug, ignoring Darcy’s squirming. “Be safe,” Erica told her. They stepped back. “I love you,” Erica sniffed.
“I love you, too,” Darcy said. “Both of you.” Boyd smiled down at her and nudged her towards the car. Stiles honked the horn. The group turned to glare at him.

“What? You guys are taking too long. C’mon, Darce, we gotta get going.”

Darcy smiled at her family one last time and climbed into the Jeep. Stiles pulled out of the driveway and pointed to a bag at her feet. “Bagels. Pass me one. No, two!” She sighed but acquiesced. Stiles bullied her into eating one before they made it out of town. Darcy watched the preserve recede in the side mirror, confused when Stiles turned the Jeep north.

“Where are we going?”

“Oregon,” Stiles said cheerfully.

“Oregon?” Darcy stared at him. “What the hell is in Oregon?”

“A friend, I hope,” he said, evasive.

“Cryptic,” Darcy accused. He pointedly turned the radio up. “And rude!”

She fell asleep an hour into the drive, dozing fitfully. The Jeep rattled along the highway. Stiles only stopped for gas; they drove through an In-n-Out for a late lunch. Raindrops plopped onto the windshield, faster and faster until the skies opened up. Darcy sat up when Stiles turned off the highway and drove along the coastline, winding slowly into a spacious forest with brightly colored leaves. He glanced down at a piece of paper with Maya’s hurried writing, squinting at the directions.

“Maya writes like a third grade boy,” he complained. Stiles slowed the Jeep, scanning the road ahead through the downpour. “Do you see a driveway?”

“I see a road in the middle of nowhere,” Darcy told him. “And no civilization for the past hour.”

“No, that’s good,” Stiles said. “Means we’re going the right direction. Hey! There it is!” He turned down a narrow, well-disguised driveway. The Jeep bumped along the rough, twisting path. Darcy gripped the door to keep from sliding around and stared out the window at the trees flashing by.

“Where are we?” She asked worriedly. “Stiles…”

“There.” Stiles pointed to lights ahead, shining brightly from the porch of a small cabin. He parked near the house and took a deep breath. “Let’s go.” Darcy reluctantly followed him into the rain.

They climbed the porch steps, soaked even from the quick sprint through the rain. Stiles shook himself in the shelter of the porch. He glanced at Darcy once and then nodded to himself. Stiles knocked on the door.

They waited. Over the steady downpour, Darcy heard the crash of waves against the shore from somewhere behind the cabin. Stiles lifted his hand to knock again when the door swung open. They stepped instinctively back.

A tall African American woman stood in the open doorway. She had a wide, expressive face and wary blue eyes. Darcy’s eyes trailed over the woman’s shaved head, the curling ivy tattoo up the left side of her neck, her muscled frame.

She looked extremely unimpressed to find two baby Sparks on her doorstep.

“Damn you, Satomi,” she muttered. They watched her with wide, uncertain eyes. “Well?” She
demanded. “Get inside, before you both catch a cold.”

~*~

Darcy held the towel that was shoved into her hands.

“Dripping on my floors,” the woman griped to herself as she stomped into the kitchen. She slammed a teapot onto the stove and turned it on high. “Show up out of nowhere, hardly old enough to drive.”

“Uh, Naomi?” Stiles asked carefully, holding his own thick towel. The woman turned to raise an eyebrow at him. “Satomi sent us-”

“I know Satomi sent you. No one else knows where I am,” Naomi interrupted. “Dry off, there’s no healing a common cold.” They obeyed. Naomi eyed them closely from the kitchen. Darcy didn’t know what she searched for, but Naomi was less gruff when she said, “There’s tea, if you’d like.”

Darcy and Stiles walked across the dark hardwood floor and into the kitchen. The kitchen was open and bright, with splashes of color and scattered plants. The massive floor-to-ceiling windows drew her attention and Darcy stepped closer to peer through the rain. Slender white-barked trees framed a winding path down to the coast, where the ocean lapped at the shore.

“That view never gets old,” Naomi said as she poured the steaming tea into three mugs. “Here, drink.” Stiles sniffed suspiciously at his cup. Darcy accepted the warm mug, breathing in the tea’s floral scent. She watched Naomi nudge the teal cabinet closed and sip her own drink through the window reflection.

“So,” Naomi said after a few minutes of peaceful silence. “Want to tell me why you came all this way?”

“Because we need help,” Stiles said quietly, staring into his drink. He looked up to meet her cool blue gaze. “Help that only another spark can offer.”

Darcy whirled in surprise, fumbling her drink. Naomi pressed her full lips together and watched the rain. “You’re a spark.” Darcy stared at her, hope clearing her mind for the first time in a month.

“For what it’s worth,” Naomi said finally. She set her mug down on the white and gray marble counter. “Which is not much.”

“We’ve been working in the dark,” Stiles told her quietly. “Going off guesswork and suggestions in books older than all of us combined. Druids telling us what is and isn’t possible, but never anything concrete. Our ignorance will get us killed faster than any hunter or Fae out there.”

“I’m not...” Naomi trailed off and sighed. She took in Darcy’s pale, thin frame, Stiles’s thinly veiled exhaustion and seemed to reach a decision. “I can only tell you what I know. The rest will be up to you.”

Stiles nodded. “Thank you,” he said. Darcy couldn’t tear her eyes away from Naomi- another spark, alive and willing to teach them what she knew.

“Might as well rest tonight,” Naomi said. “We can talk in the morning.” She showed them to a small guest bedroom with bunk beds against the far wall. More plants hung from the ceiling, cascading to the floor in a tangle of leaves and vines. “Don’t touch the plants,” Naomi advised and left them to it. Darcy eyed the plants warily.

“I’m going to get our bags from the Jeep,” Stiles told Darcy. She nodded and claimed the bottom bed
after deciding the top bunk rested too close to the ceiling. Stiles returned a few minutes later, damp from the rain and holding their bags. “Naomi said the bathroom is next door,” he said.

Darcy curled up under the bohemian patterned bedspread and closed her eyes. She slept surprisingly well, even with Stiles snoring in the bunk above. Darcy slid out of bed the next morning, moving quietly so as not to wake Stiles.

Naomi sat on the back porch, staring out at the water. Darcy hesitated for a moment then stepped through the open sliding glass door to join her. “Tea’s on the stove,” Naomi said without turning around. Darcy sat in the wide deck chair beside the other spark.

Birds swooped through the trees, chirping happily. Darcy watched a tiny hummingbird flutter in front of a feeder, quickly joined by two more. Waves broke gently against the coast. Darcy breathed in the tranquility and sighed, tension lifting from her shoulders.

A small robin landed on the arm of her chair and Darcy stilled in surprise. The colorful bird whistled and hopped closer, cocking its tiny head at her. “He wants food,” Naomi told her, amused. “There’s a bowl of berries beside you.” Darcy reached carefully for the bowl and scooped up a handful of blueberries. The bird watched, unafraid. She offered the pile, smiling as the robin picked its way through the fruit.

“You look like you’ve had a rough time of it,” Naomi commented, tucking a foot underneath her thigh.

“That’s one way of putting it,” Darcy muttered. Naomi stayed silent, letting Darcy decide whether to continue or not. “Gerard Argent had me kidnapped and used me to broker a deal with an extremist hunting family.”

“Fucking hell.” Naomi rubbed a hand over her head. “I see things haven’t improved for sparks any.”

“Not really,” Darcy admitted. “After Kate Argent killed my mom, the Hales took me in. I’ve lived with them since, but I’m not pack. I hate having to be separate from everybody all the time.”

“Werewolves,” Naomi snorted. “So concerned with their petty power struggles.” Darcy blinked at her. “Sparks used to have a choice, you know. Whether to join a pack or convene with as many sparks as they wanted.”

“What happened?” Darcy asked. The robin pecked impatiently at her empty palm. Darcy obediently gathered another small handful.

“Hate happened,” Naomi said tiredly. She rested her head against the back of the chair and watched clouds drift through the blue sky. “Hate and jealousy.”

The little bird chirped insistently, demanding more berries. “You’re going to get too fat to fly,” Darcy scolded. Disgusted with her, it flew off.

Stiles stumbled onto the porch just then, hair sticking up in every direction. “Wards?” He asked hopefully.

“You’re tenacious,” Naomi commented. He watched her with wide, hopeful eyes. “Alright, fine. We’ll get started.” Stiles sat cross-legged on the porch in front of them. “Tell me what you know.”

Darcy started first, detailing her lessons with Deaton and the absolutes he’d shared with her regarding her power. Stiles chimed in occasionally with insights from the books they’d scavenged. Their collective experiences, the runes they knew and used.
Naomi stayed silent throughout, gaze distant on the water. She looked between the two of them when they’d finished. “Everything you’ve been told is wrong.”

“I knew it,” Stiles hissed triumphantly.

“What do you mean?” Darcy asked. “The runes work exactly how we were told they do.”

“Yes, but you’re a spark. You don’t need runes to make something happen. Druids,” Naomi said scornfully, “are too caught up in their precious rules. They want everything in its nice little place, all neat and organized.” She set her cup down and leaned towards them. “But that’s not how magic works, especially not for sparks. What we have is raw, unfiltered magic. It doesn’t play by anyone’s rules, or the laws of nature or physics we try to apply to it.”

“So we don’t need runes?” Stiles asked.

“They’re a crutch, if that’s the only way you use your power. Sure, they’re necessary for wards or specific protection. But in terms of actual power? We have very few real limitations.”

“So offensive runes…”

“Are very useful,” Naomi admitted. “In a tight spot, or when you need to do something very definitive with your magic. Runes are used to define your intentions, but they aren’t the only way to control your spark. You have a raw power that is invaluable, but only if you have the ability to wield it.”

“Deaton said offensive runes don’t exist.” Darcy shifted into a more comfortable position.

Naomi rolled her eyes. “Druids. Listen, the runes are a language. Languages change, they evolve over time. Saying there’s no such thing as prospective offensive runes is like denying the existence of every war-related word in the English language. Of course they exist.”

“So you’ll teach us?” Stiles asked eagerly.

“Those are for you to discover on your own. You earn and create runes like this; they aren’t passed along freely.” Her lips twitched into reluctant smile when Stiles wilted in disappointment. “You wouldn’t give a toddler a hand grenade and set him loose, would you?” Darcy smothered a laugh at Stiles’s offended expression.

“Won’t it draw the attention of hunters?” Stiles asked carefully. “Sparks using offensive runes?”

Naomi laughed. “Kid, I’m a black transgender woman that grew up in Texas. Hunters don’t scare me.” She noticed Darcy’s blank eyes. “And they shouldn’t scare you, either. They’re bullies with assault rifles, nothing more. You have more strength in your little finger than they do in their entire bodies.”

“How do you fight hate?” Darcy asked quietly.

“Without relenting,” Naomi told her. “You be who and what you want to be, no matter what happens. And you tell them all to go to hell.”

“And send them there if necessary,” Stiles added, eyes hard.

Naomi looked at him, exasperated. “Sure, or you can resort to homicide.”

Darcy leaned back and watched the water for while. “So how do we use our magic without runes?”
She asked after a peaceful lull in conversation.


“Where are we going?” Stiles asked, clambering to his feet.

“I am going to weed my garden. You two are going to stay here and meditate.”

“But what about the runes?”

Naomi shook her head. “You’re not ready.” She left them on the porch. Stiles and Darcy looked at each other.

“I hate meditation,” Stiles said glumly.

“Me too,” Darcy sighed.

They sat in silence for a couple of minutes. Darcy braided her hair while Stiles traced patterns on the wood. “You’ve used your spark without runes before, haven’t you?” Stiles asked. He sprawled out in a patch of sunshine on the deck.

Darcy nodded. “But I was connected to the nemeton for the really big stuff. Like Kate and the Alpha Pack.”

“How’d you do it?”

“I just… saw what I wanted to happen. And the magic knew what to do.” She shrugged. “It’s hard to explain. How’d you make the shield that saved Derek?” Stiles shrugged, cheeks flushing a splotchy red.

Naomi came back hours later to find them playing slaps. She stood over them with hands on her hips. They squinted up at her. “This doesn’t look like meditation to me.”

“We got bored.”

“Kids these days.” The spark sighed and disappeared into the house, returning with an armful of yarn and needles. “Here’s something more hands-on, then.”

“Knitting?” Stiles asked skeptically.

“Knitting helps improve focus and attention to detail,” Naomi explained. She reached for a couple of needles and slowly guided them through the steps. Once they grew more comfortable with it, she went inside to make them grilled cheese and tomato soup for lunch.

Stiles’s fox tattoo crept down his shoulder and padded across his arm, black-tipped ears pointed forward curiously. Darcy’s otter swirled somewhere around her ankle, teasing the birds watching from the rail. Naomi’s sharp eyes saw it all, though she said nothing.

“How come everything is so bright and happy here?” Stiles asked eventually, scowling down at his lopsided pattern. “It’s like a freaking Disney movie.” He snatched his yarn back from a persistent raven, who only hopped closer in response. “Quit it, you dumb bird.”

Darcy looked around, having had the same thought. Animals showed no fear of the humans gathered on the deck, the forest grew thick and wild. Plants bloomed everywhere around them, inside the house and out.
Darcy inhaled sharply. “There’s a nemeton here? I thought…”

“That I was the world’s best gardener?” Naomi finished, amused. “I’ve always had a knack for earth magic,” she admitted. “But the nemeton needed a conduit for its power. There wasn’t a nearby Druid, so it reached for the next best thing. It’s a healthy and stable power source, so the forest is thriving now that it’s power can be appropriately directed.”

Naomi eyed Darcy. “I felt both times you connected to the Beacon Hills nemeton. Shocked the hell out of me, all the way out here.”

“You did?” Darcy asked, stunned.

“I did. The land is connected for thousands of miles, and you sent the equivalent of a nuclear strike down the channels that first time.”

“Why didn’t you come find her?”

Naomi shrugged at Stiles’s question. “Seemed to me she was doing just fine.” She rolled her eyes when Stiles frowned, displeased. “Satomi would have reached out if it were critical.”

“She didn’t when Darcy needed help last month.”

“You beat her to it, apparently.”

Darcy poked Stiles with her foot. He dropped the slight hostility and sighed. “Sorry. We just… we’ve felt pretty alone, I guess.”

“I understand.”

“What happened to your husband?” Darcy asked hesitantly. She instantly regretted it when pain crossed Naomi’s face.

“Hunters,” Naomi said shortly, and left.

Darcy and Stiles practiced their knitting over the following week, and, reluctantly, their meditation. Naomi worked in her garden, shooing them out whenever they tried to follow. Stiles peppered the spark with questions, some of which were actually answered.

“But would it work?” Stiles asked Naomi late one night. He waved a piece of paper around, filled with potential rune concepts. Naomi slapped it to the kitchen counter, annoyed.

“Doubtful, and no, you may not test a fire rune in my house. Or my woods!” She clarified when he made for the door.

Darcy only half-listened to their arguing, curled up on the faded couch and blankly staring at the TV. Shaky news footage of Iron Man played, red and gold flashing through the sky. The reel cut to a news anchor, discussing recent updates in the Stark Industries and Tony Stark’s bizarre press conference post-kidnapping.

“I feel you, dude,” Darcy muttered.
Obadiah Stane stepped up to the podium beside Stark. Darcy slowly leaned forward, all of her focus now on the man’s smarmy grin. The blanket dropped from her shoulders. Behind her, Naomi glanced up when the interior lights flickered. Darcy’s hands shook with anger as he joked and laughed with journalists after shuffling Tony Stark out of the picture.

“Snake,” she said under her breath.

“He has a lot to answer for.”

Darcy jumped, turning to see Naomi standing beside her. She stood unnaturally still. Darcy opened her mouth to ask a question, then thought better of it. The fire in Naomi’s eyes told her everything she needed to know.

There was a small pop! from the kitchen. Darcy twisted around to see a thick puff of smoke rise to the ceiling and Stiles’s manic grin. “Goddammit, Stiles!” Naomi growled, snatching a dish towel as she stomped over to him. Another argument, and Stiles was expelled from the kitchen. Darcy rolled her eyes and turned back to the TV.

More footage of the unidentified Iron Man. She heard the whine of his repulsors, watched the powerful blasts from the suit. Thunder rolled outside. Lightning arched across the sky, briefly illuminating the cabin.

Darcy’s attention sharpened. She narrowed her eyes, focusing on the footage again. Another lightning strike reflected in the window. Darcy looked at her hands, to the storm outside, then back to the television. An idea nudged at her, just outside of her grasp.

Naomi drifted by, so quiet Darcy didn’t notice, and set a notebook and pen down on the arm of the couch. She retreated to her bedroom with a small smile.

Darcy called on her magic, let it twist around her hands with its usual vibrant intensity. The storm raged outside, rain beating on the windows. Darcy heard the crack and sizzle of a lightning strike, remembered the blasts from the Iron suit, wondered how many other girls out there suffered at the hands of men with far too much power.

She picked up a pen and got to work.

Darcy paced impatiently along the deck the next morning. The possibilities of what she’d created bubbled underneath her skin. She ran a hand through her messy hair, hissing when her fingers caught in the tangles.

“You didn’t sleep at all, did you?” Naomi sighed from the door.

Darcy skidded to a stop. She sucked in a huge breath. “No. But I made something.”

Stiles shuffled through the door, yawning. He scratched tiredly at his stomach. “Darce? Did you ever go to bed last night?”

“Who cares!” She yelled. “That’s not important!”

“What is, then?” Naomi asked calmly, leaning against the side of the house with her arms crossed. Stiles edged back from Darcy, wary of her manic energy.

“I’ve never been able to fight back with my magic,” Darcy said. She paced again, hands waving as she spoke. “I’ve always had to rely on hiding behind a shield, or sneaking away. Which meant I was totally helpless when the hunters had me. They knew that, and they enjoyed it.” Her sense of security
had shattered after the kidnapping.

“Well, fuck them,” Darcy snarled. “They aren’t going to scare me into hiding.” She slammed the notebook down with the completed rune design facing up. “And the next time a hunter comes after me, I’ll make damn sure they regret it.”

Naomi stared at the rune, blue eyes wide. Stiles peered over Naomi’s shoulder and whistled. “Holy shit, Darce. This is lethal.”

“Not unless I want it to be,” she said with confidence.

“Have you activated this yet?” Naomi asked. She’d lost her casual stance and now stood solemnly over the rune. Darcy shook her head. “Do you know what it’s supposed to do?” Darcy nodded. “Good, because I don’t.” She saw Darcy’s face wrinkle in confusion. “I’ve never seen a rune like this before, and I certainly have never seen the result of these combined concepts.”

“Do it,” Stiles said immediately. Naomi pinched the bridge of her nose and prayed for patience. Darcy grinned and placed her palm over the sigil.

“Ready?”

“Wait.” Stiles took a deep breath and closed his eyes. A second later, a shield hummed to life between Darcy and the other sparks. “Just in case you accidentally blow us up.”

“That’s not funny,” Naomi told him.

The page burned hot under Darcy’s palm. Her spark reached eagerly for the rune. Darcy let it. She gasped and staggered when magic met sigil. Darcy’s heartbeat thundered in her chest. The air felt thick and hot. Her ears were ringing. Darcy felt blood dripping out of her nose.

She lifted her hands. Darcy’s veins pulsed gold underneath her skin, thrumming with power. The energy remained charged in her blood, like something hot and bright was clawing its way out of her. Darcy thought she might burn alive.

“Let it go!” Naomi shouted. Stiles’s shield grew. “Darcy, you have to release it!”

Darcy nodded, swallowing thickly. Holy shit, this was a lot of contained power. She tried to remember which way was up.

She turned towards the coast, aimed for the sand fifty feet away, and promptly blasted a nearby tree to smithereens.

“Oh, for-” Naomi watched as Darcy shook splinters of bark out of her hair.

They stood in shocked silence until Stiles exploded into laughter, doubling over to clutch his stomach. His shield dropped as he lost focus. Darcy dissolved into uncontrollable laughter with him. Naomi stood over them, irritated, as they rolled around the deck in hysterics. “I’m too sober for this shit.” She stomped inside.

Darcy’s next attempt went no better than the first. The surge of power caught her off guard again, leaving her body achy and struggling to remember right side up. Stiles shook his head at her when another tree exploded.

“Stop blowing up my trees,” Naomi barked.
“It’s hard,” Darcy whined. “There’s so much magic, it makes me feel like I’m holding power lines or something.”

Naomi dragged a hand over her face, grasping a large, half-empty bottle of rum in the other hand. “I might have a way to fix that,” she admitted. Stiles and Darcy pivoted to gawk at her. She sighed heavily and stood, somewhat unsteady.

Darcy and Stiles watched as she turned, unbuttoning her shirt and letting it drop to her waist. “Oh, wow,” Stiles breathed. They crowded forward, jostling each other aside to see better.

Across the dark brown skin of Naomi’s back was a gold hawk. Its wings unfurled across her shoulders and along the back of her arms. The head tipped back, beak open in a silent cry at the base of Naomi’s neck. The bird’s body practically glowed against her skin, its tail feathers brushing just below the small of her back. Naomi waited another minute, letting them stare in wonder, and then pulled her shirt back on.

“Tattoos,” she began, “can help anchor some of that excess power.”

“How?” Darcy asked, fascinated.

“You’re a living, breathing creature of magic. It means that the ink you put on your skin will be altered by your spark. It’ll help bind that extra surge of power, to keep it contained to what you want instead of scattering all over the place. You use it as a filter of sorts, your anchor, to avoid being overwhelmed.”

“Can you tattoo us?” Stiles asked, eyes shining.

“It has to be something individual to each of you, something you create. But yes,” she conceded when they stared at her impatiently. “I can do it.” Naomi took another swig of the rum as they darted inside, scrambling for paper and pens.

They grilled chicken and vegetables on the deck for dinner, sitting in the cool night air with candles burning softly around the porch. Darcy let the sound of the waves wash over her as she sketched pages and pages of ideas. Stiles muttered to himself beside her, crumpling up another page and tossing it aside.

“Naomi?” Darcy asked after they’d eaten. She traced the lines of her final drawing, satisfied with the result.

“Hmm?” Naomi kept her eyes closed.

“Something weird happened to me when I was escaping the McAllister compound.” Stiles glanced up, eyes whiskey-gold in the soft light. He’d urged Darcy to ask Naomi for days—after pestering her with a million questions, of course.

“ Weird how?” Naomi asked.

“I… I was chained up in a room,” Darcy started. She licked her lips nervously. “And they had an Ak’ma chained up with me.” Naomi’s eyes snapped open. “I got free just a couple seconds before it did.”

Darcy flipped the page back to rub her thumb along a second tattoo idea. “I ran down the hallway towards the exit, and I was so close to getting out. But they’d chained the door shut at the end of the hall. The Ak’ma was running towards me and I had nowhere to go.” She shivered, glancing anxiously around at the dark. The candles burned a little brighter in response. “I closed my eyes
“And what?” Naomi asked, voice low as she leaned forward to rest her elbows on her knees.

“And it’s like the dark just swallowed me up. I opened my eyes after and I was miles away. I remember wishing I was somewhere safe and then the next thing I knew, I was.”

“She teleported,” Stiles said excitedly.

“I’ve been calling it shadow-travel in my head,” Darcy confessed.

“Much cooler,” Stiles agreed.

“Because that’s what it felt like.” Darcy rolled her eyes at him. She glanced over at Naomi, who watched her with a curious expression.

“Had you ever done it before then?” Naomi asked.

Darcy hesitated. “I think so?” Naomi cocked an eyebrow at her. “My mom used her spark to keep me hidden from Kate Argent. She was using all of it for that when Kate killed her.”

“It latched onto you,” Naomi guessed with a grimace. Darcy nodded.

“We were somewhere in Texas when it happened. But we’d been all over the country, trying to lose them. I don’t remember a lot, to be honest. But I felt that same darkness then, and I’d wake up somewhere else. In little towns we’d been through before, but this time closer and closer to Beacon Hills.”

Naomi nodded thoughtfully. “Sometimes powerful sparks can develop unique abilities. It’s a lot of raw magic in one person, and it can manifest in different ways.”

“Do I have a unique ability?” Stiles inquired. The fox trotted excitedly across his collarbones.

“You tell me,” Naomi said wryly, watching his tattoo.

“Do you have one?” He asked. Darcy looked at the older spark, also interested to know.

“None of your business.” The flat reply was mitigated with a fond ruffle of Stiles’s hair as Naomi walked to the kitchen.

Bright and early two days later, Naomi dragged them both out of bed. She ignored their protests and herded them into the kitchen, shoving Stiles into a seat at the table. He blinked tiredly down at the stack of books, all detailing the plants and herbs the older spark grew. Naomi stabbed a finger at the pile. "Because you refuse to keep your grubby little fingers out of my garden, you get homework on plants."

Stiles perked up and reached for large, illustrated book at the top of the stack. "What're you guys doin'?" He yawned widely and stared sleepily up at them.

"We're going to the river," Naomi told him. She approved Darcy's running shorts and the large t-shirt she'd found in her bag; Darcy honestly couldn't recall who the original owner was at this point.

"Why do you recognize it as his?" She shot back. Stiles flushed and glared down at the book. Naomi's lips quirked.
"Let's go." Naomi nudged Darcy out the front door. "It's like herding cats," she grumbled under her breath when Darcy ran back inside for her shoes, then back a second time for a muffin.

"You live beside the ocean," Darcy reminded her through a mouthful of cinnamon muffin. "What river are you talking about?"

"The Coquille River mouth dumps into the ocean less than a mile from my house," Naomi explained. "Or, at least, a small part of it does. The actual river mouth is massive." Naomi led them through the woods, stepping confidently through the undergrowth. Darcy managed fairly well for someone who routinely tripped over air.

She slowed when the forest thinned. Darcy heard the river before she saw it, the low roar of the water reaching her ears from where river met ocean. Naomi steered them upstream, eyes scanning the water as they walked along the bank.

Darcy could just barely see the other side of the river bank- or at least this small part of it. "It splits off a little," Naomi told her when she caught Darcy standing on her tiptoes to see better. "This is like a little stream compared to the rest of it. C'mon, further this way. They're playing with us this morning."

Darcy dropped back down. "They?" She asked, alarmed. Naomi didn't answer. A splash caught her attention, and Darcy glanced over in time to see a large shape with bright green scales flash just underneath the water's surface. "Um. Naomi." Naomi rolled her pant legs up, kicked her shoes off, and waded into the water. "What are you doing?" Darcy hissed. "There's something in there!"

"Come on, you big baby." Naomi waved her forward. Darcy edged closer, wary. The shape darted through the water, brushing against Naomi's long legs. The spark was waist deep now. Further out in the water, a head broke the surface. Darcy gasped when two more followed.

Scales of varied green shades covered every inch of their bodies, reflected beautifully in the warmth of the sun. The fins behind their ears waved gently; Darcy saw translucent-webbed fingers when one of them offered an awkward wave. The had no eyelids, only deep-set blue-green eyes so bright Darcy could see them from ten feet under the somewhat murky water. Thin lips stretched across a mouth of sharp fangs. Long slits stretched across the sides of their necks and ribs, opening and closing steadily.

"Naiads," Naomi said, grinning when one playfully spit a mouthful of water in her face. "River nymphs. Fae, if you want to get technical."

Darcy waded carefully over to Naomi's side, eyes wide with awe. "You didn't want to show Stiles, too?"

Naomi shook her head. "They don't like men. Refuse to come out if they're nearby."

"How did you find them?" Darcy asked. One of the nymphs reached out to touch Darcy's skin, curious. It twisted to peer at Naomi's dark brown skin, then back to Darcy's. Naomi chuckled when others swam over to do the same.

"My mom is a marine scientist. Her mother was part Fae, descended from some sort of water shifter. Neither of them could shift, but my mother always knows when nymphs are close." To Darcy's surprise, one of the nymphs signed to Naomi, the motions wide and sweeping. The older spark signed back, hands moving in patterns Darcy didn't recognize as ASL.

"I was thirteen when I approached my parents about being transgender," Naomi shared. "They didn't
bat an eye. My dad- he’s an archaeologist- was thrilled to tell me about every transgender person in history, which of their dig sites he’d personally overseen.”

Naomi showed Darcy one of the nymphs’ signs, nodding in approval when Darcy quickly mastered it. “I struggled a lot with my identity, with body dysphoria during those first few years before the hormone treatments. And then one night at the river near my parents’ house, my mom asked if I remembered her stories about the river nymphs who hated males. I did, of course, but that night they came right out of the water to greet me.”

Naomi smiled at the river nymph tugging on her watch, tapping a claw-tipped finger on its shiny face. “I’ve always loved the water. But that night I fell a little in love with the creatures within it, too.”

“It looks like they return the feeling,” Darcy said, watching how they crowded around Naomi.

“I came across these nymphs not long after we found this place.” She stopped for a moment, rubbing the heel of her hand against her breastbone. “My husband was half Fae.” She snorted at Darcy’s incredulity. “His mother was Fae, but his father was a human from Hawaii. Alec was a water-bound shifter, similar to a Selkie. We built our house by the water so that he could return to the sea when it called, because he couldn’t bear to leave me behind when it did.” Naomi's blue eyes swam with tears.

"I'm sorry you lost him," Darcy said softly.

"Such is our lot in life, I guess. Sparks don't have it easy, especially with romantic relationships. I was lucky to have Alec as long as I did."

"I've been too busy trying not to die to have time to date," Darcy said with a frustrated sigh.

Naomi chuckled. "Sounds about right."

"And I live with the Hales. They take overprotective to the extreme."

"I'm aware," Naomi said dryly. "I've had wolves pacing the bounds of my territory for days." She shook her head at Darcy's concern. "Nothing dire. They're just pining. Would you like to learn the naiad's sign language?" Darcy nodded eagerly. They returned to the house late in the afternoon, Darcy swearing at her sunburned skin.

"I told you to wear sunscreen," Naomi scolded.

"Yeah, yeah."

"Where have you guys been?!" Stiles hollered from the back deck. He leaned over the railing and glowered down at them. "I'm having a crisis here!"

"What the hell have you done to my porch?" Naomi asked, exasperated. They climbed the steps and stopped dead, mouths gaping. Darcy clapped a hand over her mouth to stop the laughter from bubbling over.

"I read all those books, took a nap out here, dreamed about your stupid garden that I'm not allowed to touch. And then I woke up to all this," Stiles said helplessly, throwing his arms into the air.

Small rows of plant seedlings cropped out of the deck's smooth wood, a few just barely at the budding stage. The plants settled firmly onto the surface of the wood and dug deep, roots growing into the deck as if it were the soft, fertile soil on the ground below.
"Aw, look, this one's lavender," Darcy cooed, crouching down and brushing a gentle finger against the tiny flower.

"Growing out of wood," Naomi said flatly. "The beautiful, hand-crafted, solid wood of my back deck." She stared at the impossible garden, spread out in a small rectangle by the wall of windows, four feet by two feet in size.

"It wasn't on purpose," Stiles said defensively.

Too defensively.

Naomi narrowed her eyes at him. "What else have you done?"

Stiles squirmed, guilty. "There's maybe, possibly, a small chance that I grew a tree in your living room." Darcy scrambled into the house to see; her voice carried out to the two other sparks facing off outside.

"Oh, it's so cute!"

Naomi stabbed a threatening finger at Stiles and stomped inside to see for herself.

~*~

"So, not to revive a sore subject or anything, but I have my tattoo design ready," Darcy said over dinner that night. "It's a tree." Naomi sighed in defeat.

"Mine's not," Stiles said hastily. He glared across the table at Darcy when she snickered into her bowl.

"Hey, I'm not the one that grew a rosewood tree in the middle of a cabin, Professor Sprout." They all looked over at the young, gangly sapling in the center of the living room, stretching eagerly towards the ceiling.

"Tomorrow," Naomi told them.

"I have to go home soon," Stiles said quietly. "My dad's been out of town for a convention, but he gets back next week."

"I guess we should start tonight, then." Naomi rose and started clearing the table. Stiles and Darcy stood and started cleaning the kitchen.

"Do you think we're ready?" Darcy asked her once they'd finished. Naomi kept her back turned as she rinsed off the plates in the sink.

"You've both managed to knit extremely ugly sweaters-"

"Hey!" They chorused.

"-create an entire notebook of offensive runes without maiming yourselves, and use your sparks without relying on a rune." Naomi turned the sink off and faced them. "You've both come very far. Too far, really," she said, scowling at the tree.

Naomi studied them both for a long minute. Finally, she said, "Show me."

Darcy and Stiles obeyed, collecting their respective artwork. The three of them huddled over the drawings late into the night. Naomi made suggestions for some of the concepts, both for style and
purpose. Darcy and Stiles stayed up after Naomi went to bed to compare their designs and quietly
discuss the intended function.

"Have I ever told you how happy I am, that you're a spark, too?" Darcy asked around one o'clock in
the morning, chin in her hand.

"Only all the time." Stiles smiled down at his paper as he adjusted the lines of a drawing.

"It's nice, not to be alone anymore," Darcy said softly, watching Stiles's little plants outside the
window sway in the night breeze.

"Yeah," Stiles murmured. "I don't know what I'd do without you, Darce, seriously."

"I had an idea," she confessed after a long, comfortable lull in the conversation. "It's kind of stupid.
And cheesy."

"Tell me," Stiles demanded, setting his notebook aside.

"I just thought, after everything that's happened, that maybe it'd be nice to have a reminder. You
know, that we- sparks- aren't alone. Or we don't have to be," she amended. She flipped to the very
last page of her sketchbook and slid it across the table. "A reminder that we always have each other,
no matter where we go, no matter how many people want us dead or worse."

She watched a slow smile spread across Stiles's face. "A reminder to be the spark," he finished
quietly.

Naomi found them slumped over the kitchen table the next morning, fast asleep with assorted pages
of potentially explosive runes scattered across the table. "I never wanted kids," she mused as they
followed her down the stairs to the basement. "And I should thank you two for reminding me why."

"You're mean," Stiles said, grumpy.

"Like that's news," Naomi shot back. "Besides, you grew an impossible garden out of my wood
floors during your nap yesterday. Finding you asleep on top of exploding rune drawings was the last
thing I wanted to see this morning." They shuffled into a clean room Darcy hadn't seen before. It was
also the only one in the house without any windows. "It's a damn miracle this house is still standing."

Naomi motioned to the small cot in the center of the room. "This is going to take a while," she
warned, stepping over to a sink and washing her hands. "Who's first?" Darcy eyed the tattoo gun
nervously. She glanced at Stiles, watched his face whiten dramatically, and sighed.

"Me, I guess." She tied her hair in a bun on top of her head, elbowing Stiles as she did so. "Pull
yourself together," she said out of the corner of her mouth. Naomi started setting up.

By the time she had the ink ready and her gloves on, Stiles was chewing anxiously on his thumbnail.
"Tree first?" Naomi asked Darcy.

She nodded. "Then arm. Then leg."

"And wrist," Stiles reminded her.

Naomi looked between them. "Wrist?" Darcy showed her the drawing. Naomi touched a finger to it,
almost unconsciously. "Because we shouldn’t have to be alone anymore," Darcy said softly.
“And we don’t want to forget that,” Stiles added.

They stared at the older spark pointedly. She reluctantly tore her eyes from the paper. “I don’t think I can ever forget, after what you did to my living room.”

“You gotta let that go.”

“It’s been 12 hours.”

“Point.”

Darcy turned her back to Stiles and stripped off her shirt. She climbed carefully onto the table, laying face down, and reached behind her to undo her bra strap. Her back bared, Darcy tucked her arms under her head and got comfortable.

“Ready?” Naomi asked.

“Ready.”

Stiles’s legs wobbled. Darcy sucked in a breath when the needle touched her skin and Naomi got to work. Stiles looked like he might puke, even though Darcy was the one in pain. To distract him, and her, she asked, “Hey, Naomi, how come Stiles was able to break through the binding on his spark?”

Naomi paused. “How come he what?”

“We were fighting the Alpha Pack,” Darcy explained, wincing when Naomi started up again. Where was a werewolf when you needed one? “He didn’t know he had any powers before then, right?”

“No. Well…” He cocked his head in thought. “Remember when you put that rune on my arm? In the library?” Darcy nodded. “It was all itchy, even after I washed it off. And I kinda felt weird after that.”

“Your spark likely reacted to Darcy’s, woke up a little,” Naomi said over the buzz of the machine. “She’d feel weird if you used your spark on her, too. Doesn’t mesh.” Darcy bit down hard when the needle buzzed over her spine. “Who bound you?”

“My mom,” Stiles said quietly. “Before she died, I guess.”

“Probably saved your life,” Naomi commented. Stiles nodded, staring at his shoes.

“How’d you break it, then?” Naomi asked.

Stiles flushed. Darcy grinned. Naomi raised an eyebrow. “My brother,” Darcy said. “One of the Alphas… well. Derek almost died. Would have died, if Stiles hadn’t shielded him.” She had nightmares about that moment, sometimes.

“I didn’t think,” Stiles admitted. “I didn’t even know I could do that, until the shield was up.”

“Desperation, life threatening situations, high stress. Sounds like a good way to break a binding to me,” Naomi said.

Stiles and Naomi continued their discussion; Darcy slipped into a haze, feeling the tattoo start to take hold. She lost track of time, just drifted until Naomi lifted the tattoo gun and rolled her chair backwards. Darcy felt a crackle of energy along her spine and gasped, eyes flying open.

“What? What is it?” Darcy asked, panicking a little. She craned her neck around, trying to catch a glimpse. Naomi held up a mirror for her, and they all watched in amazement as the silver tree with a twisting trunk started to move. Delicate branches and roots unfurled across her shoulders and the small of her back, respectively, until they reached from shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip.

“Oh my god,” Darcy breathed. The tree was graceful, elegant, an unnatural silver that shone brightly on Darcy’s skin.

“You chose well,” Naomi said with certainty.

“Is it supposed to be so… active?” Stiles asked, peering closer as a branch split off and slowly grew longer.

“This tattoo was made for someone with magic, inked by another with magic. That makes it a little different.” Naomi watched, satisfied. “Maybe now you’ll stop destroying my woods.” Darcy groaned.

“Let’s take a break,” Naomi said. “We’ll do the next one after lunch. Besides, you’ll need to add a rune to hide the tattoos when needed.”

Naomi inked Darcy’s armband next. Two inches wide, from a distance it just looked like an intricate pattern of swirls and dashes, lines and dots. It was actually a band that wrapped all the way around her forearm, just below her elbow, made up of runes. No more pens, no more hurried scribbling in the heat of the moment. Now, Darcy would activate a shield with a thought, or blast someone with her spark if the need arose.

“Peter’s gonna have a conniption,” Stiles murmured the next day as Naomi worked on Darcy’s leg tattoo. “His little girl, off to magic camp, coming back a tattooed, armed, and dangerous.”

“Shut up, Stiles.” Her tone was fond. The vice grip she had on his hand was an entirely different story. Naomi worked carefully, gingerly, around the still-aching scar left by the Ak’ma. It didn’t matter. Darcy could feel the torment of the wound with every touch, remembered the searing agony of the demon’s claw splitting her skin apart.

“You’re magic doesn’t want to touch this one,” Naomi told her.

“That’s okay,” Darcy croaked. “I just hate looking at the scar.” Naomi fell silent in understanding, quickly finished the lightning strike that expanded over the scar and across the back of Darcy’s thigh.

Darcy’s wrist went last. Naomi worked slowly, almost reverently. A thin outline of a diamond, left open at the top left side. And inside, a burning flame.

Her work complete, Naomi sat up and sighed in relief. “Try the camouflage rune.” Darcy obeyed, grinning in delight when her tattoos faded, leaving blank skin behind. “Great. I’m going to sleep the rest of the day, and then you’re up, kid.” Stiles gulped.

They started early with Stiles, predicting nerves and half-hearted protests. He didn’t disappoint. The two women wrangled him onto the table and waited for him to quit babbling. Finally, he fell silent and tugged his shirt off.

“If I pass out, just keep going.”

“I will not.”

Stiles’s tattoos took three days. Naomi started with the spark tattoo above his ankle. When that went
smoothly, she moved on to his own band of runes. Stiles requested his band wrap around his upper arm, where shoulder and bicep met. The runes in his band were thicker, with more aggressive lines.

From his right wrist to elbow stretched a thick forest. Trees swayed in a non-existent breeze on his freckled skin, inked with incredible detail. His fox tattoo slipped between the trees, delighted.

And finally, Naomi inked the phases of the moon along Stiles’s spine, extending from the base of his neck the small of his back. They glowed with the same silver-white sheen as Darcy’s tree. The full moon in the center rotated slowly in place.

“Badass,” Darcy said. Stiles grinned back at her.

~*~

They spent their last morning together on the deck, quietly watching the waves lap at the shore. Pressed shoulder to shoulder, studying the flickering fire on Darcy’s wrist, Stiles turned to stare at Naomi’s profile.

“You haven’t used your spark once since we came here,” he said softly, ever observant. Darcy frowned, realizing he was right.

“I gave it away,” Naomi said simply. Stiles inhaled sharply. Darcy’s heart thudded hard in her chest. “To the nemeton. To this land. To my home.”

“Why?” Darcy whispered.

“Because what’s the point of all that power if you can’t protect the ones you love?” Naomi looked wistfully out at the sea.

Darcy blinked back tears and threw her arms around the woman, sniffing. “Thank you, Naomi.” Naomi gradually lost the stiff set to her shoulders and she returned the hug.

“It’ll be quiet around here, without you two wrecking my house and blowing up the woods.”

Darcy laughed wetly into the spark’s shoulder. She stepped back and let Stiles hug Naomi goodbye. “We’re going to miss you,” Stiles said roughly.

Naomi smiled. “You know where to find me.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said. “Also, I stole your phone and put our numbers in there. Expect messages. A lot of them.”

Naomi snorted a laugh. “Why am I not surprised?” She walked them to the door, watching from the porch as they climbed into Stiles’s Jeep.

Stiles looked at Darcy, eyes bright. “Ready?”

Darcy smiled. “Let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes
Naomi was just living her life, enjoying the peace and quiet in the cabin she’d built with her bare hands, and then the next thing she knew, two disaster children are crashing through her house, eating all her food, and blowing up her forest.

She didn’t sign up for this shit.

Link to Naomi’s backstory
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Dear GOD I meant for this chapter to be so much shorter. But here it is, the final chapter! I never imagined this story going so far when I started it. I'd planned a handful of chapters and wrote this 100,000 word monstrosity of a fic instead.

I can't thank you guys enough for the kudos and comments. Your support has kept me going.

Don't worry, Darcy's story isn't even close to being over- Part 2 will be up in a week or so. I can't wait, because it starts the official Marvel crossover. I'm excited to hear what you all think about it :)

A mess of beautiful contradictions

make her whole,

she wears fire for skin

but a storm lives in her soul.

- Nikita Gill

~*~

Darcy's mother had taught her to be afraid, but it was Naomi that taught her to survive.

Darcy made a mental note to send the woman a thank-you gift if she made it home unscathed. She swatted aside the clawed hand pressing her into the dirty brick wall and ignored the werewolf's angry growl. "I told your Alpha from the start," she said firmly. "Our transaction was a one-time deal. I built your wards, you paid me a lot of money. If your pack would like to request another service, your Alpha can call me and we can draw up another contract."

"Yeah, well, my Alpha would like to renegotiate the terms of our deal," the first werewolf said with smug superiority. "He feels we paid enough for two jobs, not one. That means we're owed."

"And I am in the process of making them," Darcy said patiently. The two werewolves scowled, at her and each other. "Look, I don't give a shit about your territory disputes. That's between your two packs." She sighed when they continued glaring. "Consider me an independent contractor. One that doesn't like either of you, honestly, so there's no need to worry about me playing favorites."

"Yeah, well, my Alpha would like to renegotiate the terms of our deal," the first werewolf said with smug superiority. "He feels we paid enough for two jobs, not one. That means we're owed."

Darcy bared her teeth in a smile. "Is this how he'd like to negotiate, then? Sending second-rate betas to threaten me in an alleyway?" The air around them grew thick, charged. Darcy funneled her spark through the lightning rune tattooed on her arm and watched the 'wolves eyes grow wide with fear as
the power crackled to life.

"You don't scare me," Darcy told them, letting the lethal threads of her magic dance between her palms. "Here's what's going to happen. You-" she nodded to the second werewolf, who had stepped as far back as the alley would permit- "will go home and tell your Alpha that I'll finish her wards by the end of the week. Until then, I suggest you leave me the hell alone." The man nodded and walked quickly away.

"And you." She turned to the first werewolf, who'd lost his bravado when the first snap of lightning appeared between Darcy's hands. "Consider your pack blacklisted. You don't contact me again, and I'll be sure to put the word out about how your Alpha likes to make deals."

"You can't-"

"Apparently, he's a bully, and it seems his pack is no better. I'll let the wards hold for now, but- per our contract- the next time he pulls a stunt like this, I will drop my wards and send Laura Hale in to deal with him. I'm a peacemaker above all else," Darcy reminded him when his eyes widened in outrage. "Which means I’m not going to let your Alpha hide behind my wards while he tries to throw his weight around."

She waited as he weighed his options- leave or die a painful death, basically. The dual threat of spark and Laura Hale usually did the trick with egotistical Alpha werewolves.

Law school was giving Laura a lot of pent up aggression issues. Word got around.

Finally, the man nodded. Darcy didn't drop the lightning until he was well and truly gone. She sagged against the wall and rubbed at her eyes, grateful for the runes that hid her rapid heartbeat. She still didn’t handle tight spaces well.

"That was nicely handled," said a deep voice from the shadows.

Darcy groaned. "Dude, it's past my bedtime." And, since she didn’t recognize the voice- "I'm off duty as of right this second."

The man stepped into the dim light cast by a battered streetlamp at the mouth of the alley. Darcy blinked. "You must be another creature of the night," she said casually, pressing her thumb to a nasty defensive rune on the armband. "Because no human has a face as pretty as yours." He looked pleased with her description, at least until she kept talking. "Just curious, though, did you get dressed in the dark?"

He instinctively looked down at his clothes, frowning. "What's wrong with what I'm wearing?"

"If you have to ask..." Darcy's gaze dropped unintentionally to the man's full mouth when he sulked. She dragged her eyes back up, past the strong nose and sharp cheekbones, to find his gray eyes watching her closely. He smirked, just a little. Darcy narrowed her eyes at him.

"So, what's a nice boy like you doing in a place like this?" She asked breezily.

He chuckled. "I've come to make your acquaintance, Sentinel Lewis," he said formally. Darcy's faint smile slid from her face.

"Not many people remember that title, much less use it."

"I remember. You're the first spark in a long time to deserve it, though."
"I doubt that."

"Oh? I seem to recall all the other sparks going into hiding," he said distastefully. "You’ve been making powerful friends and taking down even more powerful enemies for years."

"It’s not the same and you know it," Darcy shot back. "People weren't too invested in alliances with a spark once the Fae got involved. I was lucky enough to have the Hale and Ito Packs extend their protection while I trained."

"I'm well aware." He leaned casually back against the wall opposite her, making a show of noticing her hand, still pressed against the rune underneath her right sleeve. "I've been told the new generation of sparks are an unpredictable force of nature. I wanted to see for myself."

"And?" Darcy asked, eyes hooded as she copied his pose. She let her hand drop- her spark would react with half a thought. Touching the rune was unnecessary.

"And I have a feeling the description was a vast understatement." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a business card. Darcy kept her eyes on his face when she stepped forward to accept the proffered card. She stepped back a safe distance to read it.

"Julian Reneux?"

"At your service."

"Is that so?" Darcy drawled. "And what, exactly, do you in return?"

His eyes slipped over her body, lingering in a few choice places over her dark jeans and jacket. Darcy snorted. "I'm eighteen, dude." Not that she wasn't tempted, because damn, he was pretty.


"Friends," Darcy repeated flatly.

He shrugged, looking pointedly around the otherwise empty alley. "Looks like you aren't making very many on your own. Besides, it’s always important to have friends in unexpected places. You may need a favor one day."

"And what kind of favors would this friendship entail?" She asked skeptically, fingering the business card.

"Nothing like that," Julian said dismissively. "Tell you what. Come by that address sometime, if you’re interested. We can talk more about our new friendship." He stepped backwards towards the end of the alley where he’d first appeared.

"Wait! What are you, anyway?" Darcy called after him.

“I’ll wait to tell you that, I think. Old prejudices and all.” He gave her a charming grin and faded into the dark.

Darcy waited a moment to see if someone else would slink out of the shadows. When no one bothered her, she heaved a tired sigh and started the long walk home.

The New York streets were teeming with people, despite the late hour. Darcy slipped through the crowds, carefully monitoring the other supes on the street. They were easy to spot- most got a whiff or caught sight of her and outright blanched.
She made it back to Derek and Laura’s apartment unaccosted. Derek, buried in his thesis, hardly noticed her creep through the door. Darcy tossed her keys on the kitchen table and threw herself onto the enormous leather couch with a sigh. She kicked her feet against Derek’s thigh until he caught them both in one hand, trapping them.

Derek’s face twisted and he turned towards her. “Why do you smell like vampire?”

“That bastard!” Darcy seethed, sitting upright in righteous fury. “I knew he was shady!”

“Who’s shady?” Laura asked, padding out of her bedroom to join them. Darcy squirmed around, awkwardly trying to pull the business card from her back pocket.

Laura’s eyes nearly bugged out of her head when she read the name on the card. “Julian Reneux?!” She said, voice strangled. “You met Julian Reneux?” Darcy traded an uncertain look with Derek, who shrugged.

"Yeah, so?” Darcy said. She squinted up at her sister.

"So? So?" Laura waved the business card vigorously. "Julian Reneux is one of the richest men in New York! He owns real estate on nearly every street in the city- he has supernatural nightclubs!"

Derek saw the interested gleam in Darcy’s eye. "We are not going to a supernatural nightclub."

"Oh, yes we are," Laura said determinedly. "Law school makes me want to die. A party is just what I need! A party with a very attractive, very rich man."

"He's a vampire," Derek said flatly.

Laura spun around to stare at her brother. "He's a what?"

Derek gestured to Darcy. "Smell her."

"No, do not smell me," Darcy protested, leaning away when Laura shoved into her personal space. "I hate you both." She ineffectively batted at Laura.

"Yeah, that's vampire all right," Laura confirmed, wrinkling her nose. "Smells terrible."

"Fucking werewolves," Darcy griped to herself.

"You should go take a shower," Laura said. Derek nodded in agreement.

"Why? Because you don't like the smell of vampire? Well, get over it! And stop smelling me, dammit, Laura!" Darcy climbed hurriedly over the back of the couch to get away, landing on the floor with a heavy thump.

Laura peered over the back of the couch at her. "You smell like other 'wolves, too. I don't like it." Laura’s green eyes narrowed. "Why do you smell like other werewolves?"

"That dick from upstate sent a beta to try and threaten me into working for him again," Darcy told her, adjusting until she was more comfortable on the floor. Laura helpfully passed her a pillow. "I had to threaten to send you in to deal with him."

"When do we leave?" Laura asked, a violent grin spreading across her face.

"You have three exams tomorrow," Derek reminded her. "You're not going anywhere." Laura growled at him.
"It might be good for her to work off some of her aggression," Darcy told Derek. Laura scowled at her.

"After her tests. She's bitched about them nonstop- I didn't put up with that for two weeks straight for her to skip out." He raised a brow at Laura. "You're stalling again. Go study."

Laura snarled viciously at him, but stood from the couch and stomped into her room. Derek shook his head when her bedroom door slammed. "She's the one that told me to make her study," he sighed.

"Honestly, she makes me really glad I took a year off before going to college," Darcy said.

"You aren't going to law school, you'll be fine," Derek laughed. "Besides, you're over halfway finished with your degree already and you haven't even stepped foot on Culver's campus yet."

"Hooray for AP classes and transfer credits," Darcy cheered. "I don't have the time to waste in college. I've got shit to do." Like sort out the shitshow that was New York City.

"Uh huh," Derek said absently. Darcy clambered to her knees and pressed herself against the back of the couch, arms crossed along the top. She rested her chin on her arms and stared at Derek.

"You're coming with us, I hope you know." He looked up from his textbook and blinked at her. "To the nightclub," she clarified.

Derek looked pained. "The rich vampire's nightclub?"

"He's pretty, too."

"I'm not encouraging this," Derek told her firmly.

"Okay, but don't you want to know what he wants?" She tugged the pillow closer for her knees to rest on.

"Probably something creepy," Derek muttered under his breath.

"Nah, I didn't really get that vibe," Darcy dismissed with a wave of her hand. "Besides, it might pay off to have him as an ally. Oooh! He's probably super old, I bet he knows all sorts of stuff!"

"He's still a vampire." Derek wrinkled his nose.

"Dude, of everything that's tried to kill us so far, vampires aren't even on the list."

"Not yet, they aren't" Derek grumbled. He squinted over at her. "Seriously, go shower. You smell." Darcy made sure to smack him on the back of the head as she left to shower. Stupid werewolves.

"*~

"'Sup, jailbird?" Laura drawled at Darcy two days later. Her eyes were bright with barely-contained laughter.

Darcy scowled furiously at her sister, hackles up. "Do not start with me." She snatched her belongings back from an officer on their way out of the police station. The early evening light slipped from the sky, leaving the city to its screaming sirens and overflowing sidewalks.

"This is the best thing that's ever happened to me," Laura decided, throwing an arm over Darcy's shoulders and half-dragging her down the sidewalk. "I will treasure this memory for the rest of my
"Shut up, you weren't even there." Angry, Darcy shoved her hands into her pockets and glared at people passing by.

"A fact I will forever regret." Laura elbowed a harried businessman out of their way. Out of the corner of her eye, Darcy saw someone freeze in panic at the sight of her and disappear.

"Do not speak of this ever again," Darcy warned Laura.

"Oh, it's way too late for that. I already told every single person I know," Laura said cheerfully.

"Goddammit, Laura," Darcy growled. Her phone rang. She answered it with dread, Erica's name flashing across the screen. "I don't want to hear it," she said immediately upon answering. The only response was Erica's loud, hysterical laughter. Darcy waited to see if her friend actually had something to say. The laughter didn't stop. Darcy hung up.

"I hate you," she said to Laura.

"You got arrested for 'tasing' a pushy werewolf in the balls. Ten feet away from a cop."

"How was I supposed to know tasers are illegal in New York?" Darcy cried. "Besides, it's not like I used an actual taser to drop the guy." She ignored the frantic buzzing from her phone as the many group texts she was in apparently caught wind of her adventures.

"Yeah, but what are you gonna tell the cops? 'Officer, it wasn't a taser. I electrocuted him with my magical powers'?" Laura snorted. "Then I'd be breaking you out of the loony bin."

"The cop thought I tossed the taser before he got to me; he didn't see a thing. Just heard the screaming." Darcy scrubbed her hands over her face, annoyed. "They told me it would just be a fine," Darcy said. "Did you pay it? And the bail? They didn't say anything to me about either on the way out."

"I tried, but they were already paid," Laura said, narrowing her eyes dangerously at a man who tried to stand between Darcy and Laura at the curb. He backed away slowly. Satisfied, Laura turned back to Darcy. "The bail and the fine."

"What the hell? How?"

"More like who." Laura shoved her impatiently through the door to their apartment building when Darcy stopped to stare at her. She herded Darcy up the stairs, likely recalling Darcy's inconvenient panic attack the last time they'd tried to use the elevator, and burst into the apartment. "She's a free woman once again!"

Derek sighed from the kitchen. "She was detained for thirty minutes at most." He grinned over at Darcy. "Mom is very proud. She's called twice to tell me since Laura texted everybody." Laura cackled.

"I'm finding a new family," Darcy muttered. Her eyes fell on a large assorted flower arrangement on the island. A small, neatly wrapped package sat beside it.

"Those came for you about ten minutes ago," Derek told her.

"Who sent them?" Darcy asked, touching a finger to the soft petals. She couldn't help her pleased little smile.
"A friend," Laura read off the card she pulled from the bouquet. 'Initialed JR.' She perked up and wriggled excitedly in place. "Is that who I think it is?"

"It looks like it," Darcy said. She ripped the wrapping paper off of the small gift and couldn't stop the reluctant snort of laughter. "He sent me a taser. How the hell did he find out so fast?"

"Let's go ask him." Laura didn't wait for their agreement. She darted off to her room. "We're going clubbing!" She shouted, her voice echoing off the high ceilings of the apartment. Derek tried to slink over to the door. "Oh, no you don't! Get back here!"

Caught, Derek heaved a despairing sigh and trudged back to his own room to get ready. Darcy watched, amused until Laura yelled at her, "Darce, you smell like sweaty, electrified werewolf. Go shower!"

"How do you assholes live in this city, anyway?" Darcy shouted back, aggravated. "I can't take a shower every time somebody breathes next to me on the street!"

"Shower!"

"Ugh!" Darcy stalked to her bedroom and slammed the door. She stared at her room- the massive gray bed, the soft blue of her comforter, the clothes littering the carpeted floor. Darcy kicked aside a stray boot and moved towards the shower, stripping off her clothes as she crossed the room. She threw the shirt into the trash- Laura was right. It did kind of smell like fried werewolf.

Darcy assessed the bruises on her arm- courtesy of the werewolf- and sighed in relief as the healing rune on her armband glowed. The bruises faded as she watched.

Laura blew through her door as Darcy dried off from the shower. The 'wolf made a beeline for Darcy's closet and started shuffling through the clothes. Darcy scowled at Laura's disgusted noises, insulted. "Don't you have anything slutty enough for a club?" Laura complained.

"No, Laura." Darcy rolled her eyes.

"Are these leather pants?!" Laura exclaimed a second later.

Dread pooled in Darcy's stomach. Erica had stuffed them into Darcy's bag when she packed for New York, declaring Darcy needed city-appropriate clothing. Darcy promptly shoved them to the back of her closet upon arriving. "No?" Darcy tried.

"You're a terrible liar. Go, get ready. I'll lay out your clothes."

"Simple, Laura!" Darcy yelled after her. "I want it kept simple!"

"You'll wear what I say and you'll like it!" Laura shouted back.

"I'm moving out," Derek muttered as he stalked down the hall, away from all the yelling. "Somewhere peaceful, all by myself. You two aren't invited."

Darcy rummaged around her makeup drawer for her mascara and red lipstick. She had to steal her eyeliner back from Laura again, easily done as the werewolf swiped angrily though her own clothes. Darcy curled her hair in soft waves, drew a neat cat-eye line across her lids, and applied mascara. She left the rest of her face bare, other than the killer red lipstick- also a gift from Erica. Reluctantly, Darcy went to find her clothes.

"Wow, this isn't terrible," Darcy said in surprise, staring at the leather pants and thin white shirt laid
out on Laura's bed. Black and gold-buckled ankle booties rested on the floor. "I'm impressed with your restraint."

"Wear that strappy gold bra," Laura commanded from the closet. She stepped out, holding a pair of black heels. "It'll look good— that shirt's an off-the-shoulder and comes down low enough to highlight your assets." She winked salaciously.

"Never mind, back to hating you."

Laura just laughed at her, looking like a runway model in a form-fitting red dress than had a sharp V neckline extending almost to her belly button. She slipped her four inch heels on, bringing her height to well over six feet tall. Darcy craned her neck up to stare at her sister in exasperation. “Honestly, Laura.”

“Not my fault you’re such a shrimp,” Laura said smugly. “Go change, I’m ready to drink something that will actually affect me. I heard they had wolfsbane-infused Starburst shots,” she told her brother. “I’m drinking at least ten.”

“Guess we’re babysitting,” Derek told Darcy as she walked by holding her outfit. Darcy exchanged a despairing look with him- drunk Laura was very combative— before stepping back into her room.

Darcy reached for her gold bra first, as instructed. It did look good, she had to admit. The intricate straps glowed warmly against her skin, emphasizing the unnatural shine to her tattoos. The leather pants went on next, covering the lightning tattoo down her left thigh.

Darcy reached for the shirt and tugged it on, pleased with how soft it felt against her skin. The material was thin enough to see the straight through, but it would keep her cool in the summer air. She realized a second later that the back of the shirt was completely sheer, exposing her back entirely from neck to the waist of the pants. The bright silver tree stretched across her back, graceful and sweeping through the shimmering fabric. "Laura," Darcy said in warning.

Laura appeared in the doorway, grinning. "It looks great," she said. "Oh, wow, turn back around." Darcy obeyed when Laura pushed insistently at her shoulder. "It looks fucking fantastic with your tattoo. And the armband's pretty badass."

"I can't just leave them uncovered," Darcy protested. She reached for her spark, preparing to disguise the tattoos. The spark tattoo on her wrist flickered.

"You should. Why hide?" Laura asked. "Cover 'em until we get to the club, so you don't traumatize a human with your moving tatts." She poked at the otter zooming along Darcy's shoulders. "But the club is supernaturals only, and some in-the-know humans. Let 'em stare. Maybe they'll think twice about starting shit later on."

Darcy activated the rune but carefully turned over the suggestion in her head as Derek hailed a cab. They piled in the back, Darcy shoved into the middle seat. "You're the smallest," Laura said when Darcy objected, trying to fold her impossibly long legs into the backseat. "Tough shit."

"If you think I'm walking four miles in these heels, you're delusional," Laura told him. She twisted around and held up her phone. “Darce, do the thing.” Darcy complied, ensuring the werewolves’ eyes wouldn’t flare in the camera lense and ruin the picture. “Smile!” They leaned in obediently,
having learned fighting was not worth Laura’s anger. “God, we look good. I’m sending this to everyone I know, too.”

They piled out of the cab twenty minutes later. Darcy stared up at the massive building, music thumping and bright lights flashing through the wide tinted windows. She eyed the line wrapping around the block and then the two bouncers guarding the doors.

Darcy choked off the power fueling the camouflage rune. The cover dropped, revealing the band of runes on her arm and the tree glowing on her back. She approached the door, Laura and Derek close at her back.

The bouncers watched them approach, brows raised. Darcy stopped a foot away and felt her otter tattoo flash across her skin to hover at the side of her neck. Surprised murmurs sounded in the line-some fearful, others excitedly craning their necks to see better.

"Darcy Lewis," she stated. She jerked a thumb over her shoulder. "Laura and Derek Hale." More anxious murmuring. The Hale name carried weight, even this far from home- especially after news spread of the Alpha Pack’s demise.

“Mr. Reneux is expecting you,” the guard on the right told her. Darcy didn’t miss the slightly raised voice, casually sharing the information with half of the supes in line. He opened the door and waved them through. “Welcome to Inferno.”

“Pretentious,” Derek muttered. Laura elbowed him viciously in the ribs, delighted with the club’s interior. Darcy scanned the crowds, the dancers, the bar, and finally the winding staircase that led to an upper level.

“Swank,” Laura said approvingly. Derek snorted. “Let’s go get a drink.” Laura threw her shoulders back, smiled her wolf’s smile, and stepped gracefully through a crowd that parted immediately for her. Derek followed, shaking his head. Darcy stayed between them, her claustrophobia rising.

Derek hovered at her back, either hearing the skip in her heartbeat over the music or just knowing she wouldn’t like the crowds. He flashed his eyes at the interested parties at the bar, who hurriedly looked away from the group. Darcy twisted until her back was to the bar to watch the crowds, trusting Derek to watch her back.

Laura leaned over the bar, grinning when the bartender snapped to attention. “Six wolfsbane shots, the pink ones.” She glanced over her shoulder at them. “What do you guys want?” Derek huffed in disbelief, but ordered a beer. Darcy shook her head- alcohol and anxiety sounded like a powder keg to her right now. She wouldn’t make any friends blowing the roof off of the club.

Darcy took a deep breath and let her eyes burn gold. This time when she looked out into the crowd, she could identify some of the supes dancing and drinking. New York was a mixing pot, in more ways than one. She’d never seen so many different supernaturals coexisting in one space.

Laura knocked back three of the shots immediately, shuddering. “Damn, that’s good,” she rasped.

“You must be Laura Hale,” a deep, amused voice said. Darcy glanced briefly over to the tall man standing by the bar, grinning at Laura. Her sister’s eyes flashed a red-gold in the dark club- the eyes of an Alpha heir. Talia’s heir, coming into her power already.

“Obviously. Who the fuck are you?” Laura slammed the fourth shot to the table.

“Nathan, but you can call me Nate,” he said, eyes steady on Laura’s. He was tall, Darcy thought, but not as tall as Laura. Brunette curls fell to his ears, matched by warm brown eyes and a well-muscled
“Can I call you Nate?” Derek asked sarcastically when the man seemed too entranced by Laura to look away.

Nate leaned casually on the bar and flashed him a grin. “Sure thing, buddy.” Nate finally turned to Darcy, careful to keep out of her space when Laura and Derek bristled imperceptibly. “Julian heard you were here. He’s wrapping up a meeting and then he’ll be down.” He watched Laura down another shot, impressed, then turned back to Darcy. “Heard you fried one of Bennett’s ‘wolves. I thought Julian was going to piss himself laughing when he heard.”

Darcy didn’t know how to react to that, so she said nothing. Nate didn’t seem to expect a response, because he turned to ask Laura a question Darcy couldn’t hear over the heavy bass. A face in the crowd caught her attention and Darcy tensed. She glanced over to see if Derek or Laura had noticed, but they couldn’t hear well enough in the club monitor her.

She shifted casually against the bar, tracking the man. Flashing lights concealed his features, enough that she couldn’t be certain. Fear and rage warred inside her. There was a roaring in her ears. Her hands clenched. Darcy’s spark surged underneath her skin in response. He stepped closer, glanced to the side, and Darcy felt the building stress abruptly dissipate.

Not Blake. Just a drunk werewolf, judging by all the claws and staggering around. She let the tension slip from her shoulders, quietly embarrassed at her overreaction.

“I wasn’t sure you’d actually come,” Julian said from the side Derek was not on.

“I wasn’t doing anything else tonight,” Darcy said, grateful her spark warned her about his approach. She slid her eyes, still burning gold, towards him. “Since you derailed my other plans.”

“You’d prefer the holding cell?” Julian asked, amused. He slid his hands into the pockets of his black jeans, ignoring the fascinated stares from the club.

Darcy’s gaze fell on Not-Blake again and her stomach clenched with the onslaught of memories. “No, I really wouldn’t,” she said, serious. She’d spent the entire time pacing anxiously, wondering how much shit she’d be in if she just shadow traveled out of the tiny cell.

Julian watched her for a moment, solemn. “Then I’m happy to help.”

“Yeah, about that,” Laura butted into the conversation. “What exactly are your intentions?”

“Friends,” Julian said with a benign smile. “Partners, maybe.” Darcy’s eyebrows shot up. That was news to her. “Which I’d hoped to discuss somewhere quieter,” Julian continued, motioning towards the stairs.

Darcy watched the crowd for another moment, then nodded. She glanced at Laura and Derek. “I’ll be fine. You guys stay here, have fun. Derek, maybe try to smile a little.” Derek scowled harder.

“Alone?” He asked, watching Julian suspiciously.

“Yes, alone.” Darcy rolled her eyes. “Settle down.”

Six shots of wolfsbane-infused vodka didn’t affect the force behind Laura’s barely-contained threat. She leaned forward, letting her eyes flash in warning. “She could take this place to the ground with half a thought. Don’t get any ideas.”
Julian nodded respectfully. “Believe me, I know she’s more than capable of taking care of herself.”

“She’s standing right next to you,” Darcy reminded them. Laura tapped her wrist pointedly, only turning back to Nate when Darcy nodded in confirmation at the subtle gesture. The rune hidden under Laura’s many bracelets was small, harmless. Useful for warming cold fingers, or warming up a cup of tea. Or, in the hands of spark, sending a completely invisible warning to the werewolves who would tear the club to shreds to get to her.

“This way,” Julian told her, and slipped into the crowd. Darcy followed after one last reassuring glance to her siblings. She felt the stares on them as they progressed through the club, the eyes burning into her back. She fought the urge to turn around, to check the crowd for threats again.

Julian reached the staircase and halted, gesturing for her to go first. Darcy acquiesced, starting up the steps, and heard a surprised intake of air when she presented Julian with her nearly bare back. She looked over her shoulder at him, brow raised. “Lovely,” he murmured, eyes on the branches that swayed in a non-existent breeze.

He directed her to a thick set of double doors on the third floor. Darcy hummed to herself as she entered the office, feeling a weak kickback from wards placed around the room. “I guess you know I mean you no harm, now,” Darcy told him as he let the doors swing closed, dramatically silencing the heavy bass line of the music below.

“I had a feeling if you meant harm, I’d be harmed already.”

“I’d have to agree with that.”

“Drink?” Julian offered, extending a hand to a small bar in the office. “There’s something for everyone up here.”

Now, in the quiet of the office, no longer pressed in on all sides, Darcy wanted to say yes. “A cocktail, something fruity.” Julian immediately started mixing a drink under her watchful gaze.

“You tattoos are extraordinary,” Julian told her. “How long have you had them?”

“Couple months,” Darcy told him. She accepted the drink with thanks. “I appreciate the flowers you sent,” she said. “They’re beautiful.”

“Not the taser?” Julian asked, mixing his own drink.

“I’m stronger than a taser.” Darcy sipped her drink.

“Yes, but it’s an excellent cover, should another altercation arise,” he countered.

“You’re probably right,” Darcy sighed. “Still. Thanks, for the gifts and the fines. I guess I owe you one, now.”

“Oh, the entertainment I got from the story was payment enough,” Julian said with a laugh. “We’re still even. Though, I really wish you’d stop keeping score. Friends don’t do that.”

“I’ve known you for ten minutes,” Darcy said, exasperated. “We’re not friends.”

“I’m hurt, truly.” He quirked a smile at her droll expression. “I’ll convince you one day that my intentions are nothing but pure. Even if you are stunning.”

Flustered, trying not to show it, Darcy scowled. “What does a super rich vampire want with a spark,
anyway?”

Julian leaned against the bar, sipping his bright pink cocktail. “You’ve been across the country until now,” he reminded her. “So I haven’t had much of an opportunity to introduce myself.” She tipped her head in acknowledgment. “I’m not sure how much you know about the last thirty years or so, but werewolf packs have had somewhat of a monopoly over the sparks. Fought over them, abandoned them later, but in general, they were rather possessive of the sparks willing to work with them.”

Darcy settled into one of the plush stools and listened intently. Julian traced a finger over the rim of his glass. “Vampires feared the sparks,” he confessed to Darcy’s confusion. Noticing it, he smiled crookedly at her. “They feared them because one sip of a spark’s blood will burn us to death from the inside out.”

“What?” Darcy asked, stunned. “I’ve never heard that before.” Granted, there hadn’t been many vampires roaming around Beacon Hills trying to gnaw on her, but still.

“It’s a very well-kept secret. I’d probably be excommunicated if anyone learned I shared this information with you.”

“So why are you?” Darcy asked warily. Nothing ever came free, especially not groundbreaking information like this.

“Fear meant vampires kept almost entirely hidden from sparks. We’d go out of our way to avoid confrontation, let the werewolves have the sparks to themselves. And so many stood by and watched the Fae send their demons to kill them all. Most of the vampires celebrated it,” he said, frowning. “One of our greatest predators wiped nearly to extinction in just a few months.”

“Not you?”

“I’ve lived for a very long time,” Julian told her, gray eyes solemn. “I’ve seen my fair share of murder, of war. What happened to the sparks was neither. It was genocide, and I’m not interested in standing idly by while it continues.” He set his drink down and looked at her, intensely serious. “The last time the Fae sent their demons into our world, werewolves let the sparks die because they were too concerned with their own politics and power struggles.”

Darcy thought of Naomi’s exhausted grief, Satomi’s shame, Talia’s quiet regret. She met Julian’s gaze, history a weight between them.

“They cannot be trusted,” Julian said. “Werewolves failed in the past, and they’ll fail again. They care about power, and they’ll use you to get what they want. If it comes to war again, you cannot count on them to keep you safe.”

“And you want me to count on you instead?” Darcy asked, expression carefully neutral.

“I want you to know that my name, my power, goes a very long way. And, regardless of whether you accept my proposal or not, I will extend every protection I have at my disposal should you ever need it. No questions asked, no favors expected in return.”

“The Hales are my family,” she reminded him. “They wouldn’t betray me.”

“The Hales are an enigma,” Julian admitted. “And they’ve certainly grown over the past few years, but could they withstand attacks from multiple packs that want control over you?”

Darcy thought of her family, her friends, and tried not to wince at the thought of them under siege, broken and bleeding because of her. “I wouldn’t let that happen.”
Julian shook his head. “That loyalty is exactly what has others so concerned.”

“No one else helped when Kate Argent hunted us across the country,” Darcy said furiously. “No one reached out when everything went to shit in Beacon Hills- multiple times. They don’t get to decide this for me!” She set her drink down roughly, ignoring the splash that spilled across the counter. “They’re my family. They raised me, any one of them would die for me and I’d do the same for any one of them. I’m not giving that up just because some power-hungry dick feels threatened!”

“I understand,” Julian said quietly. “What’s more, I respect that- the lengths you’re willing to go to for your friends and family. It’s exactly why I approached you.” He shook his head, admiration in his eyes. “You’re the catalyst, Darcy, the turning of the tides. You already know the attention that you’ve drawn, from both the good and bad of our world.”

Darcy, calm again, mopped up the mess with a towel from the sink. Julian continued. “The Hales, the Ito Pack, the Prescott Pack. You’ve made some powerful allies, but they’re all ‘wolves. The Argent family, too, but there’s not many of them left. I want to offer you an external option, someone not tied up in centuries of power struggles between packs and hunters. I want to help you, Darcy. So you don’t have to look over your shoulder everywhere you go, wondering when and where someone you thought you could trust will make a move against you.”

She ran a hand through her hair, thinking hard. He was right- she couldn’t just rely on werewolf allies. Besides the packs’ questionable history, Darcy didn’t want to be seen as a pawn in werewolf political games. And Julian… he seemed honest. Earnest, even, in his offer.

“You’re the spark that gave a werewolf pack the ability to fully shift, who stopped an infamous serial killer- and maintained an alliance with the other Argents. You annihilated a pack of Alpha werewolves, and you handled an influx of extremist hunters in a matter of hours,” Julian said, leaning forward. “Not to mention surviving the Fae realm and whatever the McAllisters did to you.”

“I didn’t do it alone,” Darcy muttered, cheeks warm. She absently rubbed at the scar on her leg, an aching reminder of a demon clawing desperately for her in a dirty room.

“You’re eighteen years old,” he emphasized. “And already you’ve proven yourself as one of the most powerful sparks the world has ever seen.” Darcy met the vampire’s gaze. The moment stretched between them, fraught with tension.

Finally, Darcy spoke. “How about a trial run?”

Julian blinked. “Sorry?”

Her mouth curled up. “A trial run,” she suggested. “Because I’m not entirely convinced this isn’t some elaborate trick.” Not entirely true, but he didn’t need to know that. She’d learned her lesson since Blake. Darcy would make her own informed decisions regarding someone’s character. She’d trust her own judgement and no one else’s. It was safer this way.

“I’m a little offended, I think,” Julian said.

Darcy pressed her lips together to hold back her smile. “We have a deal, then?” She asked, holding out her hand.

“We have a deal,” Julian agreed, shaking her hand. He stopped mid-shake, head cocked, and leaned closer to her arm without releasing her hand. Darcy looked down in time to see her otter tattoo go careening down her arm, barreling through her armband of runes. The runes scattered apart, ink
rolling across her skin as the armband broke into hundreds of little pieces.

Darcy rolled her eyes. “Knock it off,” she ordered the otter. Julian watched in fascination as the ink slowly crept back into place, settling back into the intricate and very carefully designed pattern of runes. Naomi had received a very panicked phone call the first time it happened; even as she’d talked Darcy down, the band reformed into its usual design.

This time, though, Darcy’s brow furrowed in thought as she stared at the armband. Two of the runes in the band, nearly touching but not quite, could be shifted around to create a new one, one she didn’t have tattooed. Carefully, Darcy reached out with her magic and gently nudged a line over until it bumped into the rune beside it. A new rune—one designed to turn harmful intentions back on the caster. A rune Darcy didn’t have tattooed on her arm. A rune she’d just created with pieces of the others. Her eyes widened imperceptibly at the implications.

The otter tattoo swirled happily on her wrist, pleased that Darcy finally caught on.

“Incredible,” Julian said, distracting Darcy from her internal screaming. She dragged her attention back to him. “You don’t consciously control her?” He asked, watching the otter grip the line of a rune in its tiny paws and gnaw at it.

“Definitely not,” Darcy said with a long-suffering expression. “Supposedly, they’re a physical manifestation of our sparks. Or something like that. No one really knows.”

“Spark magic is not understood by most,” Julian agreed.

“Sparks included,” Darcy sighed. More than once, she’d thrown her hands up in exasperation after accidentally discovering a new ability.

Julian stepped back, finally releasing her hand. “Your ‘wolves must be getting anxious,” he said. Darcy sipped her drink and squinted at him, ignoring the statement. Laura and Derek trusted her to take care of herself. It’s part of why she’d moved to New York, to escape the concerned hovering.

“Isn’t there a huge, legendary rivalry between ‘wolves and vamps?” He laughed. “In the past, yes. Though nothing like Hollywood portrays it. Mostly we stayed out of each other’s way, until the tug-of-war over sparks started. Most vampires wanted sparks eradicated, so they were happy to sit back and watch the death toll climb.”

“But you don’t hate werewolves,” Darcy told him. “There’s like, fifty of them downstairs in your club, eating all your food and drinking your bar dry.”

“I’m more of a cat person, personally,” he said with laughing eyes. “But no, I hold no grudge against ‘wolves in general. Some Alphas, certainly. But not the race as a whole.”


“That’s me.” He quirked a grin at her. “Speaking of, I wanted to give you this.” He moved around the bar to his large desk, shuffling around for a small stack of papers. Julian slid gracefully onto the barstool beside Darcy, knees bumping against hers.

Darcy set her drink aside and accepted the papers. “What is this?” She flipped through them, recognizing the names of a few hotels and restaurants in New York— and some very much not in New York, like an extensive listing of properties all over Europe.

“A list of my personal estates, hotels, restaurants, clubs, and so on. Your name is on the access list
for all of these, should you ever wish to visit. At no charge, obviously.”

She tried not to choke on air. “What the hell?”

“You never know when you may need help,” Julian shrugged, as if giving an eighteen year old free reign of everything he owned was nothing to worry about. “I’d like for you to always have somewhere to go, should you need. Or maybe you’ll just want to eat at the restaurants. I’m told the food is excellent.”

“You’re insane,” Darcy croaked. Overwhelmed, she set the papers down and stared at him. “Certifiably insane.” She stared at his stupid, earnest face. “What the hell am I supposed to offer in return for all this, then?”

Julian shrugged. “I’d like it if you stopped by the club every now and then. A spark is an effective preventative of any fights within, or attacks against, Inferno.”

“You give me free access to any hotel, house, or five-star restaurant you own, and in return you want me to… also come clubbing?” Darcy asked incredulously.

“Like I said,” he shrugged. “Friends.”

“Insane,” she repeated. “Is this like, a mid-life crisis or something? Are you lonely? Is this a cry for help?”

“I don’t have many friends that don’t also secretly want me dead, so I suppose lonely is accurate.” He sighed at the expression on her face. “You aren’t the only friend I’ve offered this to, if that helps.”

“It does, a little.” Darcy blew out a breath and ran her fingers through her hair.

Julian sat forward. “There’s one other thing.”

‘Here we go,’ Darcy thought, bracing herself.

“The next time you’re out in the middle of the night, meeting in alleyways with shady werewolves, call me first.” Darcy blinked at him, thrown. “Too many people want the sparks to stay dead. I’d feel better if you weren’t alone, or at least that someone knows where you are.”

She’d learned all too well that, despite her power, she wasn’t invincible. All it took was one mistake, one too-slow reaction. Misplaced trust. Derek and Laura were neck-deep in school, too caught up in tests and a thesis and studying to be reliable backup. Darcy chewed on her bottom lip, thinking, weighing her options. Finally, she nodded.

“Oh.” Julian sat back. “I thought that would be much more difficult.”

Darcy shook her head. “I’m not too proud to turn down help. Not when it comes to staying alive.”

“I’m relieved to hear that.”

Darcy slid from her stool. “I should go,” she told him. “I have wards to finish building.”

“Ah. The Henderson pack, I presume?”

“Eavesdropping is rude, you know.”

“I arrived in time to hear you threatening two separate packs the other night. My curiosity was too
great to resist. And it’s always fun to watch werewolves get taken down a notch,” Julian told her cheerfully, guiding her to the door.

Darcy followed him down the stairs, back into the chaos of the club. Curious supernaturals watched them descend. Derek caught sight of her from the bar and looked relieved. He sat alone, deserted by Laura, who had apparently dragged a very willing Nate to the dance floor. Darcy sent a brief flare to the rune on Laura’s arm. Laura’s head snapped up. She ignored Nate's confusion in favor of looking for Darcy, who waved when her sister’s eyes landed on her.

Julian stopped at the foot of the stairs, turning to face Darcy, two steps above him. She looked down at him as the ‘wolves wove through the crowd towards her. Julian offered his hand, which Darcy accepted after brief deliberation. She fought a blush when he pressed her knuckles to his lips, eyes intent on hers. “Remember, what’s mine is yours, Sentinel Lewis.”

“You’re so full of shit,” Darcy said, amused, as her siblings reached them. Laura looked between them, brow raised. Julian grinned at Darcy, only releasing her hand when she’d stepped down the last two stairs.

“I’ll see you soon,” Julian told her.

“You will,” Darcy confirmed. He watched them go, hands in his pockets, eyes burning silver-gray in the dark club.

“Did you bang the vampire?” Laura demanded when they were outside. Derek blanched. Darcy growled under her breath at the amused guards.

“No, I didn’t bang the vampire. Jesus, Laura.” Darcy rolled her eyes. Her phone buzzed in her pocket. Darcy pulled it out, ignoring Laura’s grumbling. She answered the call somewhat reluctantly.

“Are you done laughing at me?”

“For the moment,” Erica told her. “Laura told me you wore the leather pants.” Darcy glared over at her sister, who pretended she couldn’t see Darcy. “And that you met a super hot rich guy who’s all over you.”

“Yeah,” Darcy said, stepping over the legs of a passed-out drunk on the sidewalk. “But he didn’t like dogs. It wasn’t going to work out.”

“Very funny, Darcy,” Derek muttered. She grinned at him, unrepentant, as Erica cackled.

“But seriously, it wasn’t like that,” Darcy told her friend. “He wanted to offer protection. A friendship. I think he’s lonely.” Laura snorted. She strode confidently down the street in her giant heels, apparently unaffected by the gallon of booze she’d consumed. She’d also seemed to have forgotten her previous declaration of walking in the heels. Derek looked grateful to be outside and not crammed into a cab.

“I called to catch up, obviously, but also to tell you that it’s your turn to answer emails,” Erica said, voice distorting when she put Darcy on speaker.

“But I’m doing all the consulting on the east coast!” Darcy protested. “I don’t have time to answer stupid emails.”

“Hey, you helped start the website, you have to do the work.”

“I am doing the work!”
“I meant the emails. I’ve been banned from answering. Apparently my responses are too mean,” Erica told her. Darcy heard someone- Boyd, probably- snort in the background. “Which means it’s your turn again.”

“No, after you it’s Jackson!” Darcy argued.

“Yeah, about that… So much drama, Darcy. Everywhere, all the time,” Erica said happily. “It’s so entertaining.”

“Well, now I’m concerned,” Darcy said. Erica thrived on other people’s drama.

“Okay, so… Boyd, where do I start?”

“Don’t start at all, I’m sick of hearing about it,” Boyd groaned. Darcy laughed.

“Ugh, you’re no help. Okay, Darcy. Listen to this. First, Scott and Allison broke up. Crazy, right? Something about Allison’s family, she wanted to focus on hunting and finding Gerard, blah blah blah. Scott was heartbroken, moped around forever, was a major downer. But then Isaac and Scott started hanging out constantly, which Stiles is super pissed about because they keep forgetting about him—” Darcy winced. She’d have to call Stiles later. “—and then Jackson and Lydia broke up, which, yeah, we all kinda saw that coming. They were a disaster together. Much better as friends. BUT!”

Laura was laughing loudly, Derek shaking his head and looking to the sky for help. “Danny and Jackson are together now?! I didn’t see that one coming at all. But Jackson is actually not the worst person in the world anymore. Mostly.”

Boyd said something Darcy couldn’t make out. Erica gasped. “Right! And there’s a new girl at the high school, a transfer student. She’s a senior like the others, her name is Kira. Maya said Kira and her parents are staying with Satomi while their house is built, which means she has to be in the know, right? Also, she smells weird.”

“Be nice,” Darcy scolded.

“No, I mean like… electric weird? It’s hard to explain. I caught her scent on Maya the other day and it threw me.” Erica said something aside to Boyd, who laughed softly. Darcy’s chest clenched. She missed her friends.

“Also, I think there’s something going on between Lydia and Allison,” Erica finished.

“Huh,” Darcy said, surprised. Derek led the way to their apartment building. They waved at the neighbors they passed, most of them supernaturals enrolled in the University. The apartment served as neutral ground, especially after the Hales bought it and slowly filtered the clueless human renters out.

Darcy trudged up the stairs, phone pressed to her ear as Erica excitedly detailed the pack’s drama. “How are your classes?” Darcy interjected when Erica paused for breath.

“Ugh, fine. Boyd actually likes all of his, the weirdo.”

“Declared a major yet?” Darcy asked her.

Erica hesitated, which was rare enough that Darcy turned all of her attention to her friend. “Yeah, I think so. I kind of… had an idea?”

“What kind of idea?” Darcy asked, encouraging. She followed Laura and Derek into the apartment.
Laura made a beeline for the fridge. Derek disappeared into his room, waving goodnight. Darcy stepped out onto the balcony, sinking into a chair and staring at the stars.

“Okay, so the whole website idea kind of took off, right? It’s almost too much for us to all handle, honestly, between school and the latest monster of the week. We get a lot of requests for help with spell ingredients, people needing help from a healing rune, and so on.”

“Oh huh,” Darcy said, eyes drifting over the city skyline. Stark tower was just visible from her seat; Darcy could make out a red-and-gold suit flying onto the landing pad. She smiled darkly as Tony Stark disappeared into his tower, recalling the news of Obadiah Stane’s death.

“I was thinking….” Erica trailed off. Boyd said something again, too soft for Darcy to hear. “I was thinking about opening a store,” Erica finished in a rush. “A front, I guess, for all this. We could sell organic stuff like herbs and books and soaps up front, and the legit stuff in the back. And set up an office for consultations, for stuff that needs more involvement.”

“It’s a good idea,” Darcy told her. “Seriously, Erica. It’s great. What’s your major, then?”

“Business and marketing,” Erica said excitedly, picking up steam with Darcy’s approval. “Boyd’s already declared accounting, so he’d keep up with all the financials. I’d start with Beacon Hills, maybe one in New York later?”

“I can pay for renting a place in Beacon Hills,” Darcy offered. “And New York…” She thought of Julian’s list. “I can probably find something here, too.”

Erica squealed in excitement. “I want to add a little bakery, too, y’know? Something cute and small, off to the side of the store. With the books, maybe.”

“We have to get our degrees first,” Boyd reminded her. “Learn what it takes before we go starting a business.”

“Oh, like you haven’t been drawing building schematics for weeks,” Erica scoffed. Boyd was suspiciously quiet. Darcy laughed, and the three of them started planning for the future.

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“Don’t use that,” Derek warned Darcy six months later. She stepped carefully away from the kitchen counter. “Laura dumped vodka into the coffee machine again,” he said darkly.

Darcy peered warily into the machine. “I take it the test didn’t go well?”

“Honestly, I can’t even tell anymore.”

She laughed, shuffling around in the box of donuts Laura brought home at some point last night. Derek went back to grading papers. “What are you doing today?” He asked absently.

“Julian and I are going shopping,” she said through a mouthful of donut. “He still dresses like a distressed hipster. There are scarves involved. It’s infuriating.” She reached for another donut.

“Uh huh.” Derek glanced at the vase of fresh flowers on the counter that Darcy smiled at every time she saw them. “You sure you two aren’t dating?”

“I don’t date guys ten times my age,” Darcy sniffed. “What do you take me for?”

Derek wrinkled his nose. “How old is he?”
“He won’t say,” Darcy said, aggravated. “Just keeps making obscure references to shit that happened a couple centuries ago.”

Derek glanced at the door. Darcy heard a knock two long minutes later. She hopped off of the counter, wiping donut crumbs from her shirt. “I can’t believe you told him where we lived,” Derek grumbled at her.

Darcy rolled her eyes. “He already knew where we lived, Derek. It’s not a secret.”

“It is from vampires.”

Darcy opened the door. Julian smiled down at her, remaining behind the threshold. “How’d you get up here?” She asked.

“A very kind old woman invited me in,” Julian told her. “After asking me some rather invasive questions. Of the sexual variety.”

“Agnes.” Darcy nodded. “She does that. We have yet to figure out what she is.”

Julian peered past her, eyeing the drawings on the wall. He looked impressed, so Darcy informed him, “They’re Derek’s. He’s in art school, getting his master’s.”

Julian eyed Derek, scowling at them from the kitchen table, taking in the muscled frame and angry eyebrows. “I never would have guessed.”

“He’s a gentle soul,” Darcy assured him. “Total marshmallow.”

“Shut up, Darcy,” Derek muttered.

She grinned, grabbing her jacket from the hanger on the wall and stepping out into the hall. “Bye, Derek!” She shouted. “Sorry you weren’t invited in,” Darcy told Julian. He smirked at her, recognizing a lie when he heard one. “Laura and Derek get twitchy about strangers in their space.”

They hurried past Agnes, still lurking by the door. “I understand. A close friend of mine was the same. Victor Hugo, maybe you know of him.”

“I can never tell when you’re kidding,” Darcy complained, shoving her hands into her jacket pockets to brace against the biting cold.

“Why would I make that up?” Julian asked, affronted.

“Because you’re full of it,” Darcy said.

He laughed. “How are the store plans coming along?”

“Erica has four binders,” she told him. “I’ve been instructed by Boyd to not ask questions because she spirals into a planning spree and doesn’t surface for days. I’m afraid to know more, at this point.”

“Not ready for investors, then?” Julian asked as they crossed the street.

“ Definitely not. And I’ve already told you, we don’t need investors. I’ve got it covered,” she insisted.

“I want to invest, stop telling me I’m not allowed.” She scowled at him. “It’s great idea. No one’s been brave enough to do it before; I’d like to be a part of it.” He rested a hand on Darcy’s back, guiding her around a crowd on the sidewalk. “It’s also a good starting point. We won’t be invisible
much longer, you know. No secret can last forever. Not even ours.”

Darcy shivered. “I don’t think I want to know what kind of world that will be.”

“Humanity fears the unknown,” Julian said. “But if we do it right, as a whole, maybe humans won’t react too poorly.”

“Oh god,” Darcy said, appalled. “You’re an optimist, aren’t you?” She fished her vibrating phone out of her bag, letting an amused Julian steer her along the sidewalk. “Get your positivity away from me,” she told the vampire, finally locating her phone. She accepted Erica’s call. “Erica, hey-”

“Darcy.” Erica’s voice was thick, shaky.

Darcy stopped dead in the street, dread pooling. Julian looked sharply down at her, also hearing Erica’s terrified tone. He herded Darcy to an alcove, away from the foot traffic. “What? What is it?” Darcy rasped. She clutched desperately at Julian’s jacket and tried not to let the panic drag her down.

“It’s Stiles.” Erica stifled a sob. “There was… some weird stuff was going on, and he was acting a little strange, we all thought it was because of Scott and Isaac, but-”


Boyd answered, voice grim. “He’s been possessed.” Darcy swayed. “Satomi and Noshiko, Kira’s mom, they say it’s a Nogitsune.”

Julian inhaled sharply. Darcy looked up at him, saw the shock on his face. “A what?”

“Ancient fox spirit,” Boyd told her. “They feed on pain and chaos, apparently. We don’t… We need you to come home.”

“Yes,” Darcy said. “I will, I’ll find a flight right now. I… Is Stiles there?” Julian pulled his own phone from his pocket.

“No. We don’t know where it took him. He stabbed Scott and disappeared.”

“Scott-”

“He’s fine,” Erica said, voice clearer. “He healed. But this thing, it’s controlling Stiles. It’s going to feed on his spark until he dies, or all of us do.” Julian paused his rapid typing and glanced down at Darcy, concerned.

“I’m coming,” Darcy promised. “I’ll text you my flight details. Be careful, okay?” She hung up and stared at her phone for a few long seconds.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea for you to go back?” Julian asked. “If this thing can feed on a spark, you could end up possessed, too.”

“I have to try.”

Julian sighed. “I thought you’d say that. Let’s go.”

“Go?”

“I have a plane at an airport just outside of town. It can be in Beacon Hills by nightfall.”
Darcy staggered after him. She called Derek and told him where to meet her with an urgency that didn’t welcome questions. She’d tell him on the plane. Laura didn’t argue when Darcy called her, just agreed to meet them at the airport.

Julian’s driver pulled up to the curb minutes later. He had them to the airport in record time. Julian guided Darcy out to the small luxury plane on the runway. “Darcy,” he said. She turned back. “I can’t come with you. There are neutrality agreements in place that I can’t breach. They explicitly mention Beacon Hills. I’m sorry.”

Darcy nodded, a little shaky. “I understand.” The Camaro screeched to a stop beside the limo. “Julian. Thank you.”

He clasped her hands. “Be careful.”

“I will.” She squeezed his hands and stepped back as the other two reached them, emergency bags in hand. Darcy accepted hers from Derek and climbed the stairs to the plane. The pilot greeted them briefly, then disappeared into the cockpit.

Derek and Laura were silent for a long time after Darcy explained. They’d reached cruising altitude by the time Laura spoke.

“Possession?” She rubbed her hands over her face. “I’ve never even heard of this thing.”

“They feed off of chaos,” Darcy said quietly. Derek stared out the window and said nothing.

“There’s been plenty of that in Beacon Hills,” Laura conceded. “How do we kill it?”

“I don’t know,” Darcy admitted. “I’m hoping Satomi will have information for us when we land. I need to call Naomi, too.”

They tried to rest, not knowing when their next break would be. The pack learned early on to sleep whenever possible. They’d spent far too many sleepless nights chasing down threats.

Maya waited for them at the airport, mouth set in a grim line. She hugged Darcy tightly, then directed them into the waiting SUV. Darcy looked over at the mercenary. “Catch us up.”

“It’s an ancient fox spirit, a dark form of a kitsune.” Maya glanced back, saw their confused faces. “Japanese fox spirit. Noshiko and Kira Yukimura are both kitsunes- the normal kind.” The SUV sped down the highway towards Beacon Hills. “Noshiko and Satomi, they’ve seen a Nogitsune before. They say the only way to get rid of it is to kill the host.”

Derek growled lowly. Maya glanced up, met his gaze in the rearview mirror. “Obviously, we’re exploring all other options.” Maya’s phone rang, startling them all. Darcy answered it for her, activating the speakerphone.

“Maya,” Chris said, sounding exhausted.

“On our way,” Maya said tightly.

“We’re following Lydia.”

“Lydia?” Darcy asked.

“Banshee,” Chris reminded her. “She’s hearing the dead. They’re driving her to the old tunnels outside of town.” Maya stepped on the gas, taking a sharp turn with ease. “The Oni are active.”
“Oni?” Laura asked.

“Demon warriors, according to Noshiko. They’re morally neutral; they follow their given orders, regardless of whether they’re good or bad. Noshiko, she has a couple. But the Nogitsune… It’s woken a lot. Too many.”

“We’re close,” Maya told him. Darcy scrolled through her contacts list, landing on Naomi. Laura called Talia in the backseat, speaking lowly.

“Naomi,” Darcy said when the older spark answered. “What do you know about the Nogitsune?”


“It has Stiles.”

Naomi was silent for so long Darcy pulled the phone away from her ear to make sure the call hadn’t been disconnected. “Naomi?”

“Are there any kitsune in Beacon Hills?” Naomi asked urgently.

“Yes, two.”

“Good. They’re the only ones that can kill this thing.”

“No. Naomi. It has Stiles.” Darcy pressed her palm to her forehead and squeezed her eyes shut. “As in it’s possessing him.”


“No kidding.” Darcy could hear Naomi pacing, the faint sound of waves crashing in the background. She ached for the tranquility of Naomi’s home.

“Okay, Darcy, listen. A lot of this is theoretical, since there’s pretty much no record of this ever happening before. But there might be a way to save Stiles and kill the Nogitsune.”

“I’m listening.” Darcy activated runes to keep the others from listening in as Naomi shared her plan. Maya screeched into the eerily quiet lot right as Darcy ended the call, the SUV’s headlights cutting through the darkness. Chris’s car sat empty a few feet away, along with two of the Hales’ cars.

Darcy scrambled out of the car and ran for the sounds of fighting. Laura and Derek flew past her seconds later, both shifted into massive wolves. Maya pulled a long, lethal dagger from her thigh sheath, a pistol in her other hand. Seconds later, they came upon the fight. Black, shadowy demons held swords that glinted dangerously in the dark. Darcy’s family fought them, some shifted to wolves and others remaining in the humanoid beta shift.

“Get me to Stiles,” Darcy told the mercenary. Maya nodded. They entered the fray.

Darcy’s spark crackled dangerously. Seconds later, a violent strike of magic struck an Oni in the back. It fell to the ground and dispersed into shadow. A dark headed girl carrying the deadliest-looking sword Darcy had ever seen spun around, eyes wide. She blinked at Darcy, grinned in thanks, and jumped back into the fight. A bright orange outline of a fox surrounded the girl, like armor.

Stiles- the Nogitsune- watched the chaos with a smug grin. Oni lined in front of him, guarding him from the others. Darcy ducked as Maya’s dagger swung over her head, meeting an Oni’s blade.
Darcy blasted another, approaching from behind Maya.

Maya shot another Oni in the creepy mask the demon warriors all wore, shattering it. She stabbed the last remaining guard in the neck. Darcy faced Stiles, ignoring the pain and chaos behind her.

Dark, manic eyes stared back at her. Darcy let it approach, knew it could see the power simmering under her skin. Recognized its hungry gaze, seeking the magic for itself.

“One spark not enough for you?” She asked, challenging.

Not-Stiles grinned back at her. “This one has lasted longer than expected. But he won’t last much longer.” Darcy snarled at the demon. “He’s screaming right now. Begging me to stop. To let his friends live.”

Darcy followed its gaze to the fight. The world seemed to tilt on its axis. Darcy saw the strike coming, saw Allison’s eyes widen as the Oni’s sword caught her by surprise. Saw the Nogitsune prepare to disappear.

Darcy shouted, throwing her power into a shield in front of Allison, deflecting the fatal strike. Chris killed the Oni an instant later, pressing close to his daughter.

At the same time the shield went up, Darcy lunged for the Nogitsune and wrapped her hands around its neck. Startled, it staggered back. Darcy fell to the ground with it, keeping her hands pressed to her friend’s neck. She slid a hand to press against Stiles’s heart and then followed Naomi’s instructions, praying it would work.

Stiles screamed, back arching. His fingers spasmed against the ground, clawing at the concrete. Darcy planted her knee in his chest and shoved every bit of her spark into her friend. Her blood burned like molten lava under her skin.

Behind them, the Oni faltered.

Darcy felt blood drip from her nose. She knew her eyes burned gold, knew the strange light around them came from her tattoos, glowing brightly through her clothes. And still she continued, burning her friend from the inside out. His own spark, weak and dim, flickered in response. Darcy gritted her teeth. She fought the darkness back, saw it slowly lose its grip on Stiles.

And could have cried in relief when Stiles’s own spark glowed a little brighter. She kept pushing, reaching out, until their sparks met in an explosion of light. Darcy was thrown backwards, landing roughly against the concrete wall. She watched the shadows detach from Stiles, battled back by his own magic.

The shadows swirled together between them, slowly taking shape. Darcy panted, out of breath. Stiles groaned weakly. Darcy drew in a breath to shout a warning when a katana flashed through the shadows. The katana flashed again, and they vanished.

Darcy looked around. “Is it gone?” Surely it wasn't that easy.

“It’s dead,” Kira said from above her. “I can feel it.”

“Good job,” Darcy told her, sagging against the wall. Allison approached, a hand pressed to her side. Darcy squinted, made sure she wasn’t actually injured, and let the hunter help her stand. “Now we’re even,” she grinned. Allison’s face was pale, her eyes dark and shocked.
“So even,” Allison agreed. They laughed in slightly hysterical relief. Allison looked at Stiles, where the others hovered over him. “What did you do?”

“I burned it out of him.” She still didn’t know how, exactly, just that the magic had known what to do.

“They didn’t think it was possible to save him,” Allison said, tipping her head at the cluster of adults. “I’ve learned that possible is a very subjective term.”

“Me, too.” Allison turned to Kira, standing quietly beside them. “Darcy, you haven’t met Kira yet.”

“Only sort of,” Darcy said. Kira smiled shyly at her, completely at odds with the fierce combatant Darcy had witnessed earlier. Darcy eyed the sword in the girl’s hands approvingly. “We’re gonna be great friends,” Darcy decided. Kira smiled, less shy.

“Darcy!” She had a split second of warning before her half-naked best friend tackled her in a hug. Boyd kept them from tumbling to the ground. Erica pulled away a second later and punched Darcy in the arm.

“Ouch!” Darcy rubbed her throbbing arm. “What was that for?!”

“It took a demon possession for you to come home, you bitch!” Darcy hopped back when Erica swung at her again. “I’m sorry!” She laughed. “I’ve been busy!”

“Oh, I bet,” Erica leered. “But that’s no reason to forget about us!”

“Not like that- why does everyone assume I’m sleeping with Julian?” Darcy complained. She froze when Peter, across the lot, slowly turned to look at her with narrowed eyes. “Dammit, Erica,” Darcy cursed as he stalked over to them.

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Darcy gave Stiles a week. A week to recover, to remember how it felt to be in control of his own body again.

She knocked on his door exactly one week after she’d expelled the Nogitsune from his body. Scott’s reports hadn’t been very positive, so Darcy came prepared.

No answer.

She shrugged to herself and reached for the doorbell. After three minutes straight of the doorbell ringing, Stiles angrily opened the door. “I told you, I’m fi-” He stopped, staring at Darcy.

Darcy took in his clammy skin and the dark, dark rings around his eyes. “You look like shit,” she told him.

“Thanks, Darcy. Good to see you, too,” Stiles sighed.

She jerked a thumb over her shoulder at the Camaro, idling in the driveway. “Get in, loser. We’re going day drinking.”

“I don’t-”

“I’m sorry, did it sound like I was asking? Let’s go.”
“But—” Stiles protested as she dragged him out of the house.

“Remember how you tracked down Naomi while I wasted away in my bed after the kidnapping?” Darcy asked, pushing him insistently towards the car. “You found a spark who’d been in hiding for ten years, drove me to her house, and convinced her to train us. You did the impossible for me, Stiles. This is the very least I can do for you.”

“Getting me drunk?” Stiles asked dryly. Darcy slammed the passenger door in his face and jogged around the front of the car.

“Naomi said it would be therapeutic,” Darcy said archly. She backed out of the driveway and headed for the preserve. “We’re gonna talk, buddy. Get all that shit festering in your head out into the open, so I can tear it apart with a well-rehearsed, logical argument.”

“I hate that word,” Stiles grumbled.

“What word?”

“I’m not gonna say it.”

“Festering?” Stiles shot her a dark look. “That’s good to know,” Darcy said thoughtfully. “I can probably use that against you someday.”

Stiles followed her mutinously into the woods, well within the wards. She’d already warned the others to steer clear. It was anyone’s guess as to whether they’d actually listen.

Darcy led him to the blankets she’d piled in a small clearing. Stiles rummaged through the alcohol lined up on a log, making a face at the bottle of whiskey before selecting a beer.

They drank in silence for an hour, slowly relaxing in the bright and lively woods. “I miss Naomi’s house,” Stiles said eventually.

“I’ve never known peace like that,” Darcy agreed. She tipped her hard lemonade back to finish it off and reached for another.

“When I… when the Nogitsune killed those people, that’s where my head went. Remembering the ocean and the forest and garden. So I didn’t have to watch.” Stiles thumbed at the mouth of his drink. “I just… I don’t understand how you guys can look at me the same anymore. After what I did.”

“When I was a kid,” Darcy started, “my mom’s spark possessed me after Kate Argent murdered her. It made me track down and kill Kate. I was twelve.”

“Jesus.” Stiles tipped his bottle back. “I don’t know if that’s better or worse than ancient fox spirit.” He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth.

“I get it,” Darcy told him. “Probably better than anyone. It'll take time. A lot of time, but eventually, you'll get better. You'll forgive yourself for something wasn't even your fault in the first place, and you'll let it go.”

Stiles met her eyes, gold-brown eyes bright. “We’re never going to have a normal life, are we?”

Darcy smiled at her friend. “No.” She tipped her head to the side, heard the werewolves crashing through the woods towards them. Howls and laughter echoed through the preserve as her family approached. “But I wouldn't want it any other way.”
Feedback is very much appreciated! I'm i-like-plan-m on tumblr if you want to come say hi

Obviously, I don't own any of these characters.

*I don't have a beta, so all mistakes are my own... On that note, please let me know if I missed something glaringly obvious grammar or plot-wise.*

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